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SAMBA YANO ARTI
The return after failure from the Central Mediterranean Route in Velingara (Senegal)

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Note on the transcription of Fulfulde

For the transcription of sounds in Fulfulde, I followed the rules of the Bamako international system, in its official Senegalese version (which uses the symbol ñ instead of ny).

The short vowel sounds were transcribed with single vowels (a, e, i, o, u). The long vowel sounds were transcribed with the doubling of the vowels (a, e, i, o, u).

I do not consider the difference between sounds "ou" [u] and "u" [y] which is typical of French. Therefore, I use the form Fuladu instead of "Fouladou".

Consonants

c– is pronounced like ch of "church" in English;

g– is always pronounced as in "gang", including in the syllables "ge" and "gi" (corresponding to the sounds "gue" and "gui" in the French transcription);

j– is pronounced like j of "jam" in English;

k– is pronounced like c of "case";

ng - is pronounced as ng of "song" in English;

ñ– is pronounced like in Spanish;

ɓ ɗ- are pronounced like b and d but adding a glottalized sound.

I prefer to leave most of the terms used by the Fulɓe Fulakunda without standardising them. For this reason, many terms may appear incorrect to linguists, but they reflect the way our interlocutors themselves have pronounced, dictated or transcribed them personally.

Words are spelt according to Bah O. (2021), *Dictionnaire Pular-Français,* available at http://www.ethnologue.com/language/fuf [last viewed 31/01/2022]

Glossary

aada= customs and traditions[1]
anngal = shortage, unavailability
arsike = individual chance[2]
baarugol = block *(baarugol laawol:* block the path)
baasal = poverty, need, indigence[3]
ɓantaare = development
bau = mystical power
ɓernde = heart, courage
ɓiɗɗo = child (*ɓiɗɗo gorko*= son; *ɓiɗɗo debbo*= daughter)
cellal = health
daara = Qu'ranic school
debbo = (pl. rewɓe) woman
daɓɓugol = go searching
diine = religion
dimo = (pl. rimɓe), a man of noble origin
dowri = rural area
ndimaaku = honour, *noblesse*[4]

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[1] There are other two words for indicating traditions: *tawaangal* (="what we have found here"), also reported in Birkledand (2007, p.121-134), and *chosan.* The expression "*aada et chosan*" is equivalent to "customs and traditions". There is a clear difference between the words amongst Fulɓe Fulakunda. Every ethnic group has its own way of enacting traditions (*aada*), but the tradition is the same (*chosan*). For instance, circumcision (*kaddule*) is *chosan*, the different way an ethnic group socially organises the ceremonies is *aada*.

[2] Camara (2008) identifies *arsike* as the contingent *"individual luck in life […] an* arsikaadho *(lucky person) is one who does not necessarily need hard work to obtain what he or she desires*" (Camara 2008, pp. 52-53)

[3] For a more in-depth analysis of the term, see Chapter 6.

[4] The name comes from *dimo* (pl. rimɓe), a free noble person who does not belong to any caste. In a society where physical aspect was historically linked to moral qualities (Sy 2016, p.13), the word *dimo* has also a racialised connotation linked to ideal physical traits like light brown skin, slim hips or a narrow nose (Azarya et al. 1993; Stenning 1959; Kirk-Greene 1986; Riesman 1998). Usually in literature we find the word *ndimaaku* (with the variants *ndimaankaaku*, *ndimu*). Locally, the term *dimoyya* is also used together with the Mandinka suffix "-*yya*" instead of "-*aaku/-aagu*", a sign of the historical Mandinka domination (De Bruijn and van Dijk 1997; Lex 2001; Ngom 2004). Definitions and transliterations vary. Studying the legacies of slavery in Fuladu, Bellagamba (2017, p.72) defines *ndimaaku* as the innate dignity and authority of the elites. In describing the *haalpulaaren* population of the Futa Toro, Boubacar Ly states that *ndimaagu* is the "*free and noble person's honour*" (Ly 2015, p.89), while Boesen (1999, p.83) translates *dimaaku* with "noblesse" and "pride". Analysing the relationship between *ndimaagu* and the consumption of food in the Senegalese region of Ferlo, Ka, Boetsch, Marcia (2019) have defined it as "*a set of norms, practices, values, social attitudes, behaviors, clothing and dietary patterns that the Peul Dimo (=the peul noble) is supposed to adopt in all circumstances*" (Ka, Boetsch, Marcia 2019, p.7). In describing the attitude of Fulɓe population in Burkina Faso, Nielsen and Reenberg (2010) define *ndimaaku* as personal integrity and worthiness, taking up the complaint of the local population who affirmed to "*have lost their* ndimaaku" and hence ''*have become like the slaves, depending upon others*'' (Nielsen and Reenberg 2010, p.149).
Eventually, *ndimaku* is also associated with the term *gorkaaku* (with the root "*gork-*", "man"), which is the quality of being a real man (see Guilhem 2013) and *deewaaku* (with the root "debb-" which means "woman") which is the ability to be a good wife and female (see Marí Sáez 2012). In Fulakunda dialect *gorkaku* is expressed with the word *ngoragu*, maintaining the root "*wor-*" which also refers to two masculine qualities, such as courage and virility. As pointed out by Dorothée Guilhem (2013), "*the formation and production of gender identity appear […] as an endlessly constructed and redefined process according to the ages, the life trajectories of individuals and according to the circumstances*". The masculinity lies in acquiring the freedom to break this set of rules: "*The notion of autonomy has a double meaning for the Fulɓe. By adhering to values and norms, self-constraining men become more independent vis-à-vis biological imperatives, emotional states but also in their relationships with others. In their acts of distancing from social rules, they display a different capacity for action and a will that seeks to be freed from the authority of standards*" (Guilhem 2013 p. 17). As

endam = uterine relationship (*jokkere endam* = solidarity amongst members of the same lineage)
Fulfulde = Pulaar language
galle = household, family unit
golle = work (*Yidɗe golle*= love of work)
gorko = (pl. *worɓe*) man
haɓɓugol = to tie, bind, tie up (also in a mystical way)
hakkil = intelligence[5]
halpulaar = *(pl. halpulaaren)* Fulfulde-speaking person
heɓtaare = independence/being free from[6]
hersa = shame/decency[7]
hoolaare = self-confidence
hourorde = circle of stones around which the head of the family gave orders for the following day
jambaar = warrior (Wolof)
jarga = head of the village
jiyaaɗo = (plur. *jiyaaɓe*) man of a serval condition
jom galle = head of the household
kamanià = portion of land of the family for individual use
Kaawu = maternal uncle, and also a title of respect to call an older man
Kilee = agricultural collective work
ladde = the bush, savannah
laawol dow = the migratory journey made with legal documents and by plane
laawol ley = the migratory journey made without legal permissions either by foot or land vehicles
luumos = weekly market
maaru = collective field for the whole family
mawɗo= (pl. *mawɓe*) the elder
musiɗɗo = relative; pl. *musiɓɓe* = the extended family
njatigi = host
ndunngu = rainy season
neɗɗo = human being, person
pulaaku = Fulɓe-ness/fulanity[8]

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pastoral practices come to be perceived as *gawa* (old-fashioned), the Fulɓe in Mopti (Mali) look for new models to define masculinity, such as "*literacy, consumption habits specific to the amenities offered by urban space and so-called "modern" behaviors*" (Guilhem 2013, p.9).

[5] *Hakkil* differs from *ganndal* (= "to be wise", to "have knowledge"), but express the capacity to understand and deal with all the situations might happen.

[6] For a more in-depth analysis of the term, see Chapter 6

[7] For a more in-depth analysis of the term, see Chapter 6

[8] In the academic literature, pulaaku/pulaagu is a term that can be found in all the Fulɓe archipelago (Botte and Schmidt 1994, p.15). It is a "social code", a name expressing the ensamble of all the norms, behaviours and moral attitude that should be embedded by a "real Peul" (Stenning, 1959, Dupire, 1962, 1970; Labatut, 1973; Kirk- Greene, 1986; Grayzel 1986,1990; Vereecke 1989; Eguchi and Azara, 1993; Ogawa 1993; Schilder 1993; VanSanten 1993; Riesman, 1988). *Pulaaku* can be translate with "something that is typical of a real Peul" and, as stated by Ciavolella (2013) *"pulaaku, or noble pastoral conduct, is a fluctuating set of knowledge, practices and ethical and behavioral codes linked to pastoralism that are considered indispensable for the survival of the Fulɓe themselves, a sort of "form of humanity" taken as a model"* (Ciavolella 2013, p.166). Already Dupire (1970) defined generically the *pulaaku* as "*la manière de se comporter en peul*" (="the way of behaving of Peul") (Dupire 1970, p.189), indicating the reserve (*semteende*, in Fulɓe Fulakunda *hersa*), intelligence (*hakkilo*), and respect (*teddungal*) as fundamental characteristics of the *pulaaku* (see also Labatut 1974). The *pulaaku* is not a cultural essence, but a concept which was built dialectically in opposition to other groups (Botte and Schmitz 1994, p.9) It was used to morally differentiate noble Fulɓe groups from the servants (*jiyaaBe*, *maccuBe*) (Ciavolella 2010, p.76), or between the Fulɓe living in the bush and the ones in the urban context (Vereecke 1989). In

pullo = (pl. *fulɓe*) a man peul
sare = village[9]
suka = young man (pl. *sukaaɓe* = young people)
sutura = protection; discretion
suusugol = to be brave
talel = educational tales
talibé = Arab word that indicates young scholar of a *daara*
tampere = fatigue[10]
teddungal = respect
tefanké = intermediary, broker
tindi = riddle, short story
yaadu = journey, adventure
yimɓe = people
weltaare = joy, pleasure, mirth
welugol = be agreeable
wondagol = living together / bearing

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some *halpulaaren* context, as in Mali, the word "*pulaagu*" indicates "*the Fulɓe society*" (Breedveld and De Brujin 1996, p.791). *"It is the multi-referential and ambiguous nature of these concepts that make them such useful tools in political strategies* (Bierschenk 1992, p.516), as in Benin (Guichard 1990;1992) and Cameroon (Burnham 1991). According to Breedveld and De Brujin (1996) "*the notion of pulaaku is manipulated or even invented in the politico-ethnic discourse that the Fulɓe hold about themselves and in the relations they maintain with the outside world"* (Breedveld and De Brujin 1996, p.799). Hence, the *pulaaku* expresses an ideal-type (de Bruijn & Breedveld 1996; Boesen 1999), the "*resource from which the Fulɓe draw to produce a plurality of behaviors of identification and distinction according to socio-historical circumstances*" (Guilhem 2013, p.1). As already underlined by Dognin (1975, p.2), *"this code is not unique but varies with the location and social organization of the groups."* Despite the term having been widely adopted in several ethnographies, it was quite pointless to ask about what the *pulaaku* was in Velingara*. People in the field knew the meaning of this term, but answers were particularly poor for the ethnographic analysis, as already reported in academic literature (Ogawa 1993, p.131; Van Santen 1993, p. 49). As reported by Breedveld and De Brujin's Malian work about Fulɓe Jalluɓe of Hayre clan (1996, p.807), other words are used to describe a particular moral code or conduct, such as *dimo* or *hersa*. Conversely, Dupire (1962, pp.309-310) also admitted that the concept of *pulaaku* didn't quite exist amongst Wodaaɓe who used the word *mbodaangaaku* to define the moral code. Therefore, the term *pulaaku* needs to be always contextualised (Breedveld and De Brujin 1996, p.797)

[9] Riesman reports *wuro* as the name used by Fulɓe Djelgoɓe for village (Riesman 1998, pp.52-94). Amongst the Fulɓe Fulakunda *wuro* is the place where the cattle are brought for the night*. The word *sare* is also used to name several villages in the department, as for example *Sare nagge* (namely "the village of the cows") at the border with Gambia.

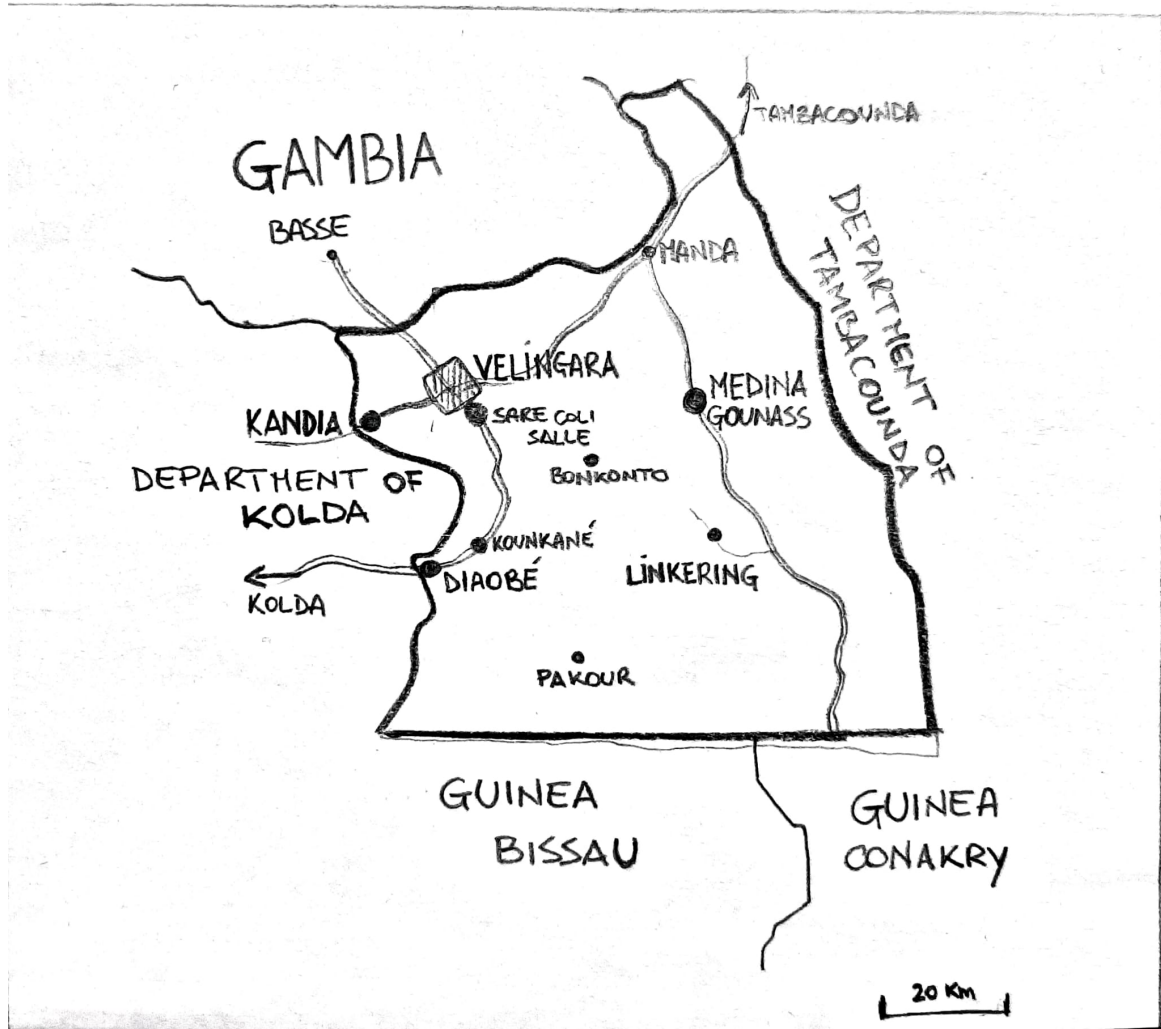[10] For a more in-depth analysis of the term, see Chapter 6.

[11] Contrarily to the other chapters, titles are listed in chronological order to propose a diachronic reading of the development of ethnographic literature.

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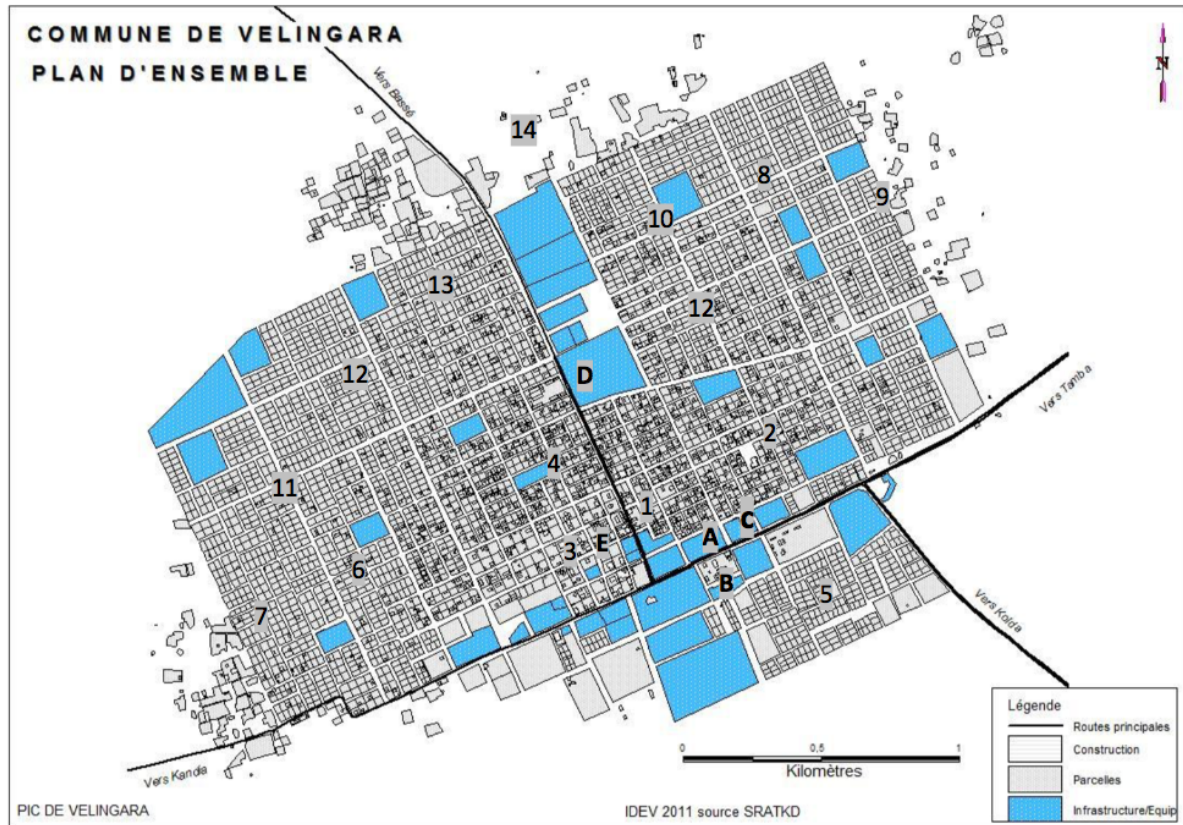**Dupire M.** (1996), *Peuls nomades. Étude descriptive des WoDaabe du Sahel nigérien*, Paris: Karthala

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Maps of the department of Velingara

Maps of Velingara

COMMUNE DE VELINGARA
PLAN D'ENSEMBLE

1. Centre 1	7. Thiankang 2	13. Sinthiang Afia	A. Town Hall
2. Velingara Fulɓe	8. Marewé	14. Parcelles des Einsegnants	B. Prefecture
3. Samba 15 ans	9. Sinthaing Wambabe		C. Main Hospital
4. Sinthiang Houlata	10. Chateau d'Eau		D. SODEFITEX
5. HLM	11. Ouest 2		E. Youth Council office
6. Thiankang 1	12. Nasurullay		

Velingara's Municipal development plan (2018), DRAFT, p.17

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Introduction

This thesis contributes to the study of one particular type of human mobility: the return after failure to the place of origin of those who were unable to complete their migratory journey crossing the land routes that lead from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe.

The Senegalese town of Velingara, in the Kolda region, is the context where I ran my fieldwork between 2019 and 2021. With a surface of 13,721 km^2 (7% of Senegal as a whole), Kolda extends all over the Upper Casamance[12]. The geographical position of the region had a major impact on its economic and demographic history. Politically speaking, it was established in 1984 *"following the emergency created by the Diola rebellion in the Lower Casamance, from which it was therefore separated for political reasons"* (Fanchette 1999, p.21). The Senegalese law 2008-14 dated 18 March 2008 divided the Kolda region into three departments (Kolda, Medina Yoro Foula and Velingara), and established 43 local communities (31 rural municipalities, 9 municipalities and 3 departments), regrouping the already existing 1,589 villages (ANSD 2017, p.14). The department of Velingara comprises three arrondissements (Velingara, Diaobé and Koukané) and 11 rural communities, among which Medina Gounass is the most important in terms of population and is recognised as a semi-independent *de facto* Tijani religious centre (see Smith 2008; 2014). Diaobé hosts one of the most important weekly markets (*luumo*) in Senegal, attracting both sellers and buyers from all neighbouring countries (Niang 2013, pp.41-43). Velingara is a border town which developed in colonial times out of the partition of the kingdom of Fuladu[13] in Gambia (England), Senegal and Guinea Conakry (France), and Guinea Bissau (Portugal).

The majority of the population in Velingara belongs to the ethnic group of Fulɓe Fulakunda (Fanchette 2011, p.21). The Mandinka term "Fulakunda" – which people adopt to differentiate themselves from the neighbouring *halpulaaren*[14] groups of Futa Toro (northern Senegal) and of Futa Jalon (in Guinea Conakry) – is used in this thesis to indicate the section of the Fulɓe "archipelago" (Boutrais 1994, p.137) that lives in the Kolda region. What constitutes the Fulakunda identity is part of an everyday debate in Velingara that reacts to the national process of Wolofisation (McLaughin 1995, p.153; Faty

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[12] The Casamance is divided into Upper Casamance (which corresponds to the Kolda region); middle Casamance (Sedhiou region) and lower Casamance (Ziguinchor region).

[13] The kingdom of Fuladu (in Mandinka "the land of Fulɓe) is the kingdom established by Alpha and her son Musa Molo from 1865 to 1903. See Chapter 3.

[14] The adjective *halpulaar* (plural *halpulaaren*) refers to the different peoples who linguistically belong to the various Peul dialects of the sub-region of Sub-Saharan West Africa.

2015, p.67), to an education that is increasingly secularised and not attentive to cultural heritage, and to the increasing influence of globalised values. Fulɓe Fulakunda have entered the circuits of international migration later than other Senegalese populations, at the end of the 1970s, when France was already curbing the possibilities of entering from its former colonies. This historical delay still shapes subjective experiences of international mobility.

Mobility practices and infrastructures have been changing since Paolo Gaibazzi (2015) studied the impact of European mobility restrictive policies on young Soninké men in the Gambian village of Sabi, less than 20 km from Velingara. This thesis – more than ten years later – illustrates a subsequent stage of the contemporary history of mobility between West Africa and Europe. The uprising and armed conflict that ended Mu'ammar Qhadafi's regime in Libya in 2011 heavily influenced Sub-Saharan human mobility. Libya has long been a *"transit and destination country for individuals fleeing conflicts and persecutions, or seeking an escape from extreme poverty, lack of access to economic, social and cultural rights"* (UN 2018, p.10). After the fall of a regime on which Europe relied *"to keep asylum seekers and other migrants away"* (Noll and Giuffré 2011, online) Libya appeared (deceptively) to be an open gate to Europe. The security, governance and humanitarian crisis –*"characterized by ongoing violence, the fragmentation of national institutions and the collapse of the rule of law"* (UN 2018, p.10) – created fertile conditions for illicit and criminal activities, including trafficking and smuggling of human beings. The rise in arrivals in Europe by sea between 2014 and 2017 brought at least 30,510 people from sub-Saharan countries to lose their lives in transit (UNDP 2019, p.13). Europe promptly reacted with the EU's *Agenda on Migration* in May 2015 and with the La Valletta Summit in November 2015. The *La Valletta Action Plan* (VAP) resolved on the creation of a new financial instrument focused on addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displacement in Africa, renamed the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) (Parshotam 2017, pp.1-2). This decision marked a new phase in the process of externalisation of European borders (Faist 2019, online), moving beyond the operations of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Coordination at the External Borders of Member States (FRONTEX) founded in 2004, and financing the EU-Africa "security cooperation" plan. This programme included the direct involvement of several international organisations, and NGOs, which were key actors in the diffusion of EU migration policies (Lavenex 2015, online). After La Valletta, programmes of Assisted Voluntary Returns and

Reintegration[15] (AVRR) have been strengthened: 118,360 nationals of West and Central African countries were repatriated from 2017 to June 2021; 43,498 of those were from Libya and 50,016 from Niger (IOM 2021, p.6). Among those, between 2017 and 2021, 30% of the 7,676 Senegalese men who received voluntary return assistance to Senegal under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration came from Kolda.

Between 2011 and 2017, several reasons pushed the Fulɓe Fulakunda in Velingara to join this massive movement towards Libya. The new economic dynamics of the Upper Casamance, the development of road infrastructure, means of transport, communication technologies, educational needs, and urban working opportunities have fostered internal mobility in Senegal and throughout the CEDEAO (Economic Community of West African States) countries. Moreover, the decade between 2011 and 2020 marked the transition from an era dominated by *cokseurs[16]* and *passeurs* (smugglers) and personal improvisation, to another characterised by bus connections, and well-established networks. The subjects represented in this thesis are still captured in a historical moment where Libyan *foyers* or "ghettos", criminal networks, arbitrary imprisonments, and inhuman violence heavily shaped their experiences, but also the diffusion of internet connections, smartphones and rapid money transfer systems were changing the role and the involvement of the families in the migratory effort. The choice of travelling the *laawol ley[17]*, or the backway[18], became more individual and less linked to a planned family strategy. This can be considered *"a rupture of the migratory pattern hitherto observed in the studies of Sahelian migration"* (Gueye and Deshingkar 2020, p.23). Last but not least, the Central Mediterranean Route gained momentum because other paths towards Europe had proven to be disadvantageous. The reduction of employment and income opportunities in Southern West African countries, such Ivory Coast and Nigeria, had lowered the number of people who followed the footsteps of the first 1980s international migrants from Velingara. While the attempt of young Senegalese to reach the Canary Islands by pirogue in 2005-2006 had ended up in a tragic loss of hundreds of lives (Carling and Carretero-Hernández 2008; Melli 2011; Degli Uberti 2014), the Western Mediterranean

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[15] IOM defines Assisted Voluntary Return as "*Administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin*" (IOM 2019, p.12)

[16] This French term, mainly used in Francophone West Africa, is used to indicate those who attract customers and organise the departure of taxis and coaches from bus stations. In the migratory context, *cokseurs* are those who organise vehicles that connect the different places along the Central Mediterranean Route.

[17] The term, which can be translated as "the route that passes from below", is used in the Kolda region to indicate irregular routes to Europe (Bellagamba and Toro 2017, p.2).

[18] The term "backway" is mainly used in the Gambia to indicate irregular routes to Europe (Uggla 2015, p.5; Gaibazzi 2018, p.245)

Route, which passes through Mauritania to reach Morocco, was full of dangers as well. The transit town of Nouadhibou has been described as a place of unreliable *passeurs*, thieves and dangerous smugglers (Choplin and Lombard 2008; Streiff-Fénard and Poutigant 2008; Counhil and Dumortier 2009), and the tragic assaults on the fences of the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla from 2005 have become an icon of the insurmountable "Fortress Europe" (Pinos 2009, p.1; Anderson 2015, p.9). The desire to travel the Central Mediterranean Route was also fostered by the growing economic differences between families with migrants abroad and those without, in a context where getting a visa in the regular way is considered almost impossible in most cases (Gueye and Deshingkar 2020, p.16). [19]

In this thesis, the traveller's desire for *"full membership in a wider society"* (Ferguson 2006, p.161) interweaves with the cultural heritage of the ancient history of pastoral mobility, as well as contemporary infrastructural and socio-economic dimensions. At a cultural level, the dangers of the Central Mediterranean Route are re-interpreted through the cultural lens of the oral myths shared among the various Fulɓe groups and through the songs of local rappers, who depict travellers as "adventurers" (Bredeloup 2013, p.170) or use the Wolof term *jambaar* (warrior/heroes in Wolof). The purpose is to move beyond the idea of a historically embedded "culture of migration" (Hahn and Klute 2007, p.13) which anthropological literature often attribute to Fulɓe populations as a *"stereotypic counterpoint to sedentary societies"* (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1999, p.41). The thesis focuses on the use return migrants make of their cultural heritage to interpret their unsuccessful experiences of mobility. As modern *bricoleurs* (Levi Strauss 1962, pp.16-22), they navigate neoliberal self-entrepreneurship concepts along with the warriors' ethical code learnt from oral traditions. If culture is the organisation of the current situation in terms of the past (Sahlins 1985, p.155), every departure (with individual and collective hopes) and every return after failure from the *lawol ley* (imbued with exactly the opposite) is a moment of crisis that is gateway to understanding cultural change in adaptation to history. The collective experience of return is part of the human attempt to constantly give meaning to one's own life, according to the historical possibilities and interpretative insights provided by culture as changeable and reconfigurable sets of human, material and intangible components that the people involved contest on a daily basis.

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[19] After 2017 and 2018, also due to the Italian refoulement policies, the number of people crossing the Central Mediterranean Route reduced. The Covid-19 pandemic also had an impact. A UNHCR report highlights "*the rise of Mediterranean crossings from North Africa and a relative decline from Sub-Saharan Africa*", while there is an "*increasing movement along the West African route to the Canary Islands emerged during 2020, with data collected by Spanish authorities and IOM indicating 17,337 individuals reached the Canary Islands between January and mid-November 2020 compared to 2,698 individuals in 2019*". (Mixed Migration Centre 2021, p.6)

A paradox that characterises contemporary regimes of global mobility (Kleist and Thorsen 2017, p.1) is the increased accessibility of communication technologies and means of transport which kindle people's thoughts about a different way of living, while restrictive mobility regimes feed growing inequalities at all levels. It is impossible to talk about mobilities without "*thinking infrastructurally*" (Melly 2013, p.387; 2016, p.11). Nowadays, a bus leaves from Velingara to Bamako every Sunday. There, passengers could easily find a connection to Niamey, where the crossing of the Sahara Desert can be easily arranged. As several return migrants told me, it takes less than a week to get to Tripoli "if you know the route". Road infrastructure has not only made the *laawol ley* a daily opportunity within everyone's reach but has also encouraged the opening of Velingara to the rest of Senegal, turning mobility into a modern way to seize opportunities and initiate new life trajectories.

Empty-handed return is a life-changing event in the lives of an entire network, capable of modifying a whole set of life trajectories and hopes for the future, defined as the *"sustenance of the possibility of a (desired) alternative to a (currently lived) reality"* (Kleist and Thorsen 2017, p.2). Furthermore, from an economic point of view, it is essential to consider also how the higher purchasing power of the diaspora has raised average prices for land, houses, and dowries, making it harder for young people relying only on local resources to escape from social marginalisation (Vigh 2010, p.149) .

Mystical and religious dimensions are also crucial to understanding how returns after failure are locally conceived. An Islamic kinetic notion of destiny lies behind the way people *hustle* along the road (Gaibazzi 2015, p.106) and then *knuckle down* when they are back (see Chapter 7). Individuals are expected "*to play an active role in fulfilling their destiny by scouting out the routes to what has been allotted to them* [by God] *in this world*" (Gaibazzi 2015b, p.2). In the meantime, accepting God's will is part of demonstrating publicly one's own *ndimaaku*. Mystical attacks, on the other hand, represent "*the dark side of kinship*" (Geschiere 2003, p. 43), friendship or and are often indicated by return migrants as a relevant cause of their migratory failure (see Chapter 6).

From a theoretical point of view, the contribution of this thesis consists in demonstrating how returns after failure should be read from several angles, intertwining the cultural geography of values (Newell 2012, p.207) with local, regional and global historical, economic and social changes. Focusing on the experience of travelers through Libya and on the those of people who have been turned back for various reasons, the imagination and stratification of meanings that revolve around the migratory experience come to light. The thesis accounts also for the political and economic reasons that limit the possibilities of migration and the violence suffered by migrants during their trajectory, as well as it offers a perspective on the changes that have occurred in a region often overlooked by scientific

literature about Senegalese migration .Return migrants' lives keep on been intimately structured by migration (Elliot 2021, p.7).

From a local rap artist, the lyrics "Samba has gone and came back" (*Samba Yano arti*) sums up the existential plight of the return migrants I met in Velingara. The way and the condition of the homecoming have an impact on one's economic conditions and social prestige. If Samba brings back wealth, he is considered as a hero. Samba empty-handed is left apart. Still, return is a process, and must be studied in the unfolding of the return migrants' life. The meaning and the impact of unsuccessful attempts to reach Europe on their lives change as they try to carve out other existential paths. The *laawol ley* is not a rite of passage to adulthood (Bardem 1993; Timera, 2001; Bredeloup 2014; 2016) but a attempt to try one's own luck in order to disclose the destiny God has set for an individual. Most of Velingara return migrants are busy in trying to rebuild their life using the new competences and attitudes they have learnt along the journey. The *laawol ley* thus becomes as a "school of life", an experience that thought the travelers how life really is, giving them the moral strength to succeed in the agonistic society in which they live. This thesis meets the challenge of bringing together the analysis of individual and collective experiences with that of the socio-economic context, of the history and the cultural heritage through which the people of Vélingara interpret their lives and construct themselves as subjects. As the analysis will show, returns after failure are an experience of an entire family and social network, as well as of an entire social context that has to deal with the increase in the number of people who come back after having tried to travel the *laawol ley*.

Obstacles, Positioning and Methodology

When I stumbled upon the rural city of Velingara, I was faced with a completely new field of inquiry at all levels, including language. Despite having already started to learn Fulfulde with an older, fellow PhD student, Ismailou Balde, my linguistic skills never advanced enough to carry out a full interview. The learning of the Fulakunda dialect was also made difficult by the absence of either a specific written grammar or a textbook. Nevertheless, during the fieldwork, I kept on studying it with my *njatigi* (host) Ibou, as well as through the translation of songs, riddles, stories, and pamphlets. The learning of Fulfulde was made more difficult by the fact that my fieldwork lasted overall only eight months, divided into three journeys. This was due to a family loss that caused me to return to Italy at the end of November 2019 and the spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led me to leave

Velingara at the end of May 2020. This latter global event kept me away from Senegal for more than a year, due to the block on international mobility of students and faculty imposed by Milan Bicocca University. During this time, I had the chance to continue my research meeting migrants from the Velingara department in Italy, specifically in Terni, Genova and Milan. Even though the material was not enough for a proper study, these people helped to reconceptualise some of the topics I was investigating in Velingara.

Thanks to MESAO[20], I was put in contact with a native researcher of the Milan Bicocca University, El Hadji Cheickou Balde, who was carrying out research in the Kolda region on similar topics. El Hadji set up the best conditions for my fieldwork, by identifying a family who could host me and by introducing me Mama Samba Diao, my very skilled research assistant. Living with a native family not only allowed me to better understand local daily life but was also a source of contacts in the whole department. Evening conversations with my host, Ibou, and his wife provided me with the opportunity to strengthen my understanding of the local context.

Mama Samba – or "Mamadou" as he wanted to be called – was a teacher employed as vice-president of the Velingara Youth Council, as well as a respected and authoritative local contact person for several development projects, having already collaborated with several organisations, such as IOM and CinemArena[21], and other initiatives carried out by the Spanish and German (GIZ) international cooperation (see Chapter 4). His role in the local development arena, his large family and social network, and his political commitment helped me access local authorities that would have been otherwise very difficult to reach, and meet dozens of return migrants, their relatives, and the social actors involved in their reintegration. Mama Samba let me use his office in the building of the Youth Council even when he was not there. As this space was a point of reference for those looking for information on possible financing projects, several people came looking for him and ended up having

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[20] MESAO "is a network of Italian West African specialists involved in the study, preservation and enhancement of tangible, intangible and documentary cultural heritage. It prepares young Italians and Africans for historical and ethnological research" and "spreads the knowledge of the cultural heritage of West Africa". The mission, active since 2000, is directed by Prof. Alice Bellagamba (from https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/sedi/mesao-missione-etnologica-in-senegal-e-africa-occidentale-ex-mebao/)

[21] CinemArena is a travelling programme of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) which has brought cinema to various villages on the African continent since 2002. From 2016 to 2018, CinemArena was used to inform populations about the risks and dangers associated with irregular migration and about job opportunities. The programme was implemented thanks to the collaboration with IOM and crossed several states such as Ivory Coast, Gambia, Guinea, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Senegal. An interesting research report on the reality and social representation of migratory flows to Europe in sub-Saharan Africa was also published in 2020 and it is available on the internet page: https://italiana.esteri.it/italiana/sedi/mesao-missione-etnologica -in-senegal-e-africa-occidentale-ex-mebao/ [last viewed 31/01/2021]

a conversation with me. Close collaboration with Mama Samba made possible the development of a shared research method grounded on an important discursive dimension. Mama Samba helped me rephrase my questions and to read between the lines of the interviewees' answers, but he also had the patience to sometimes listen again and again to the most important passages of my recordings. Even though we often simultaneously translated during the conversation, I always required more detailed work for the sections of the interview that I believed most interesting.

Mamadou was also precious for real ethnological lessons. I remember one evening when we were returning from an interview on my scooter (as it was for the almost 3,200 km we travelled together from October 2019 to May 2020) how he explained to me how senseless a question was that I had just posed in the previous interview: "Do you feel *dimo* after the *laawol ley*?". The two to three-days journeys we used to spend outside Velingara on some weekends were always an occasion to collect from him interesting stories about kinship relationships amongst local families, historical materials, and other remarkable cultural and social features.

I was also aware how Mama Samba was sometimes reluctant to ask certain questions. The reason was expressed to me pretty clearly: *"You come and then you go, but I have to stay here, and I want to build my future here, so me my reputation is important to me".* Being conscious that basing my research only on his translations, interpretations, intermediation and networks could have been methodologically problematic, I then decided to run several interviews using other people's help, too. One of them was Bala. When I met him in October 2019, he introduced himself as the self-appointed president of the informal association of repatriated migrants[22]. He helped me to meet several return migrants who used to hang out at his mechanic workshop. Moreover, Gano, the president of the local Red Cross, and the volunteer, Samba Lala, introduced me to families of missing migrants, and Ibou's family network helped me to find useful connections in Kounkané, Diaobé and Suturé.

Eventually, this thesis relies on several informal conversations I ran by myself, with a less structured approach. This happened especially during the months of the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (March-May 2020), when the prefect of Velingara asked me to stop my activities in town. I started then to spend more time at Bala's workshop and Mama Samba's office, and to go to the central hotel La Payotte as well as to the house of local music artists in Thiankang 1, where several rap singers and their friends used to meet, their concert activities being interrupted. Despite the large number of interviews that basis this work (more than 250 people between individual and small group interviews),

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[22] At the time when this thesis was written, Bala was vice-president of the official association set up in Spring 2021

I always tried not to run an ethnography based exclusively on a discursive dimension. Structured interviews were mainly used during the first months of fieldwork, following two different questionnaires with open questions: one for the district delegates and the village chief (*jarga*) and one for return migrants.

As regards the village chief and district delegates, I usually preferred long individual interviews (from 40 minutes up to an hour). The questionnaire was divided into three parts: the first set of questions concerned demography (number of inhabitants and young people between 20-35, female/male ratio, main economic activities); the second was about mobility in general (concerning seasonal migration and mobility linked to attending public or religious school); the third was entirely dedicated to international migration, i.e. the history of international migration from the village/neighbourhood, the number of migrants in different periods (before 2011; 2011-2017; and the last years) and the number of casualties and repatriations; the contemporary situation of departures; the presence and the efficacy of awareness programmes; the countries where migrants mainly live; and whether there is any relevant economic/social relationship with any diasporic organisation; the number of return migrants and the problems affecting them, their actual social and economic situation. Despite their role, most of the neighbourhood delegates were often unaware of situations occurring in their district, as it appeared more clearly after counter-checking interviews with other people from the same district. Following Olivier de Sardan's suggestions, I always tried to meet standards of empirical rigour (De Sardan 2012, p.8) by triangulating interviews (De Sardan 1995, p.14), comparing the points of view of different categories of subjects (such as agents of the municipality, old people, female leaders, economic operators, journalists, return migrants), as well as by counter-checking with the written evidence at my disposal (such as the various town plans of Velingara, governmental reports and official documents I found in public and private archives).

I used a questionnaire for return migrants in the first two months of my research in order to connect the individual experiences with those already described in academic literature. I outlined 30 open questions (which were selected according to how the conversation unfolded) and divided them into three parts: pre-departure, the story of the journey and the homecoming. When I felt I had collected enough information about pre-departure and the journey, I started to concentrate more on the experience of the return. I often used either individual forty-minute interviews or one-hour sessions of discussion with groups of 6 or 7 people. While this last solution allowed me to stimulate a debate, it also made it more difficult to investigate migrants' stories in depth, partly due to moral issues raised by the fact of talking in front of other people about intimate and private experiences. For this reason,

I preferred individual interviews or those with a maximum of two or three people. At all times, I tried to conduct my fieldwork in the most serious and professional way, honouring the public funding that financed my work. *"Choosing to do fieldwork overseas, particularly in the Global South, is a challenge in itself"* especially during a global pandemic, when complying with general guidelines on ethical research must be balanced with the need to *"negotiate one's* own *path"* (Lunn 2014, p.XIX). I preferred to integrate the ethics of my research with the *"everyday anthropological practise"* rather than *"being focus*[ed] *on the instruments of professionalism"*, such as codes or committees (Spiegel 2005, p.136). As remembered by Clifford Geertz, *"anthropologists do not study villages, but they study in villages"* (Geertz 1973, p.22). Senegalese laws and international regulations on mobility, as well as by the gradual growing understanding local people's ways of living, concerns, problems and aspirations helped me address the ethical issues raising from a focus on return from the *lawol ley*. By doing so, I learnt progressively about what people thought as "private" and the information which in their perspective could be used more openly.

All three times that I went to Senegal to do my fieldwork, I complied with all legal requirements. As it is customary in Senegal, I introduced myself to the local prefect and the chief of police in Velingara before starting my research, openly declaring my intentions[23]. When I was asked to interrupt my interviews in the field in April 2020, I reshaped my activity according to the requests from the local authorities. Accessing the IOM training sessions, I always asked for permission to participate and observe. The information I collected was freely given to me by return migrants. I ensured the protection of participants in the research following the principle of the American Anthropological Association's ethical code: "*do no harm*"[24]. I was always open and honest about my work, declaring who I was, where I came from, on behalf of which organisation I was working, and the purposes of my research. I never promised future aid or money and I always respected the will of those who refused to meet me for an interview. I was always very careful to state my academic affiliation and I never used possible misunderstandings as a way to collect more information or data, or to gain any other kind of advantage. Before each interview, I always asked for permission to record and I always allowed respondents to stop recording when they wanted to. I anonymised and eliminated the

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[23] "*Anthropologists undertake the commitment of honesty and sincerity in relations with their own government and with the host one, without compromising their role in obtaining access to research*" (SIAC, article 6.1)

[24] "*A key principle of ethical research with human subjects. Researchers should consider whether any of their actions have the potential to harm the lives of the research participants, their communities, or their environments either in the present or in the future and seek to minimize any such risks. Respecting the right to privacy through confidentiality and anonymity is one way of doing this*" (Lunn, 2014, p. 270)

references that can lead back to specific people right from the preliminary transcriptions, respecting the right to confidentiality and anonymity[25], and most of the names here reported are fictional. I never referred either to specific people's opinions or private situations when conversing with others and I respected the will of migrants who live in Italy to not let the people in Vélingara know where they live and in what conditions.

For what concerns confidentiality, in Velingara there were no such concepts as "sensitive data" or "privacy" as we conceive them: phone numbers were written on the doors of people's houses, there were no issues in accessing archives, or obtaining people's addresses and other contact details. It was more relevant for local people not to reveal private or intimate life issues, such as economic conditions, family situations or shameful facts and misadventures they had lived through. I was more careful in respecting people's *hersa* (decency) than following the Western notion of "privacy", especially during the participatory observation of everyday life[26]. Regarding informed consent, I agree with the claim that "*formalising consent to a piece of paper or a formulaic recitation destroys what it is intended to protect*", since it would remove "*the right of local people to consent to the research in the way in which they believe their consent ought to be given: by their intimacy and their participation with the anthropologist's work*" (Silverman 2003, p.117). As this practice "*is not congruent with a sociological or anthropological imagination*" and "*can radically transform emergent social relation*" (Delamont and Atkinson 2018, p.125), I preferred unwritten and non-formalised verbal consent[27] "*which best typifies participant observation in anthropology*". Also, in my case, "*people's consent was therefore renewed each day — through their continuing interaction with the researcher and the project, through their help, co-operation and assent*" (Silverman 2003, p.117).

Ultimately, I always behaved in a way that will allow future research to take place[28]. Keeping in mind that "*the research itself is dependent on the general conduct of the researcher*" (Delamont and

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[25] "*Consent should be gained in the most convenient, least disturbing manner for both researcher and researched. If confidentiality and/or anonymity have been promised, then the steps taken to ensure this should be outlined*" (Iphonen AcSS 2013, p.3)

[26] "*Anthropologists should ensure that their research does not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research on, or with whom they perform other professional activities*" (Iphonen AcSS 2013, p.3)

[27] "*In anthropological studies participants' consent may have to be treated as ongoing throughout the research engagement. Consent should be gained in the most convenient, least disturbing manner for both researcher and researched*" (Iphonen AcSS 2013, p.3).

[28] "*Anthropologists conducting research abroad are aware that inadequately thought-out actions can risk compromising access to the field for themselves and for others*" (SIAC, article 6.3). "*Researchers have a responsibility to each other and to prevent doing harm that will undermine future research work*" (Iphonen AcSS 2013, p.3)

Atkinson, p. 124), I always tried to build a clear impression of what the ethnographic work is about, respecting local practices and believes.

The structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into three parts: the first is dedicated to the existing academic literature, the second to the historical and economic analysis of the context, and the third to the experiences of returns from the *lawol ley*.

The first chapter deals with the necessary and challenging confrontation with the existing literature on human migration and mobility, with particular attention to West Africa and Senegal. Retracing the different theoretical frameworks from the economic studies of the 1960s to the *transnationalism* and *mobility turn*, the chapter highlights useful tools for reading a particular ethnographic situation and the multifaceted aspects of the complex phenomenon of international mobility through the Central Mediterranean route and returns after failure. Starting from the perspective that departure and return are part of the same life trajectory, I took into consideration the existing literature on departures (which constitutes the majority of the theoretical production); the literature on the land migratory journey (to frame the return migrants' narratives I collected during the fieldwork); and the literature on returns (which questions the political agendas focused on successful return migrants as possible agents of development while picturing returns after failure as a problem of migration management).

The history and the economy of Velingara are the topics of the second and third chapters. The story of Velingara is reconstructed using written documents from the dusty archives of Sodagri, town plans, officials' and civil servants' computers, oral memories collected through conversations with old people, district delegates, and local radio broadcastings. Velingara, whose name means ″it is nice to have come here″, is the result of all the constant human movements which built it over the years: the relatives of the actual[29] mayor of Velingara come from the Futa Jalon; the speculative investments of the Sarakulleɓe from the Gambian border dominate the real estate market; there are important communities of Diola people, who escaped from the civil conflict in the lower Casamance; there are Malian and Wolof merchants, dozens of foreign *talibés*, who arrived after having illegally crossed the borders with the two Guineas, studying the Qur'an in the *daaras* (qur'anic schools) and walking around begging for alms.

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[29] January 2021

The third part of this work, dedicated to the analysis of the return, is divided into four chapters. The first one analyses travel narratives as a migrant's tool to claim and restore the honour put into question by his homecoming after failure. The second one tries to grasp the cultural experience of the return using local concepts of honour (*ndimaaku*), shame (*hersa*), fatigue (*tampere*), extreme poverty (*baasal*) and independence (*heɓtaare*).

The third and the fourth chapters offer a diachronic analysis of the realities of reintegration, focusing on the local implementation of the IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration programme (AVRR), targeting people who have returned from the Central Mediterranean Route since 2017. Return is described as a process that unfolds from a first period characterised by social isolation to the following *knuckling down* to rebuilding a viable future. This process can lead either to a new migratory attempt or to a definitive acceptance of one's own destiny, sometimes sustaining or financing the migratory journey of someone else in the family network.

The experience of return is also very much shaped on a cultural level. Return migrants are an example of how culture is also an ambiguous set of historically transmitted and shared symbols and meanings that are continuously readable, contestable and usable according to historical and everyday life experiences. The same cultural concepts are the basis for social exclusion and rehabilitation, for blame and exaltation, for marking failure and for moving past it, reconstructing the possibility of a still gratifying future.

Theories about migration and the concept of return

Human mobility is a very complex phenomenon in which macro-level institutional frames and local social dynamics, as well as individual experiences, all play a non-negligible role (Castles, Miller and de Haas 2014; Gmelch 1980; Riccio 2014; Soda Lo 2015). In particular, international migration appears as a process triggered by a wide spectrum of causes, from natural disasters to global imaginaries, individual dreams and ideas of a better life, and intertwines with global political-economic regimes and local social and cultural contexts where groups and individuals "*play multiple, shifting and competing statements with practical effect*" (Abu-Lughod 1991, p.148). Quitting a place is a way of acting in the world that individuals choose or are encouraged/forced to choose for several reasons: minimising the perceptible natural or economic risks (Adger et al. 2018, p.30); responding to (what they perceive as) a life-threatening situation; extending and diversifying the sources of income for the family (Black et al. 2006, p.43); acquiring resources for one's transition to adulthood (Bredeloup 2013, p.178); trying to make reality coincide with the unceasing work of imagination (Appadurai 1996, p.5). As far as Velingara is concerned, mobility gives individuals the possibility of acquiring a more valuable economic, cultural, social and mobile capital[30] for social navigation (Vigh 2010, pp.154-156) in a situation with scarce resources and unpredictable environmental, economic and cultural changes.

In this chapter I try to unravel the ensemble of theories and the main academic literature concerning migration and mobility, selecting the contributions that most provided interesting insights for reading the particular ethnographic situation in Velingara.

Push and pull factors, risk aversion and luck

Even though several studies had been dedicated to human mobility before (see Bovenkerk 1974), a crucial incentive for migration studies was given by the economic neoclassical paradigm of *push-pull*

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[30] Mobile capital is defined as "*a set of abilities, predispositions, social relations and often based on* [a person's] *history or their family and social group's one*" (Alexander at al. 2016, p.12). Judith Moret has recently given another definition of "mobility capital" in studying Somali migrants who have been living in Europe for at least a decade: "*the ability to engage in cross-border mobility practices at particular times but also to remain immobile by choice*" (Moret 2020, p.235). "*This capital is what allows some people to cross borders rather easily, to feel comfortable and carry out activities in different places, and to come back again. Having the ability to decide not to move is also part of mobility capital. It is thus constituted by, on the one hand, the accumulation of past experiences of movement and, on the other, the potential for future movements, or the unequally shared ability to be mobile again when it appears worthwhile to be so*" (Moret 2020, p.236)

factors in the mid-20th century (Castles, Miller and de Haas 2014, pp.27-30). According to this descriptive framework, migration is determined both by objective economic, political and social factors that "push away" people from their homeland (for example, conflicts, natural disasters, high unemployment rates, low-quality education, political or moral repression) and by factors that "pull" the people towards the host countries (such as freedom of political or sexual orientation, better education systems or labour market dynamics). The push and pull model defined migrants as rational agents who embark on regional and transnational movements being aware of the differences in economic conditions, such as employment opportunities, wage levels, values of national currencies and purchasing power. However, as was observed at the time, *"it is not so much the actual factors at origin and destination"* but *"the perception of these factors which results in migration"* (Lee 1966, p.51): push and pull factors must be considered as a combination of objective conditions and subjective representations. Theoretical contributions such as Amartya Sen's work on poverty can be seen as a crucial theoretical step towards the understanding of the role of subjective factors. For instance, the difference between "*feelings of deprivation*" and "*conditions of deprivation*" (Sen 1981, pp.15-16) helped to highlight how "*people are more likely to turn towards migration if they think of themselves as poor and see their poverty as a result of the place in which they live"* (Carling and Talleraas 2016, p.18).

The application of the financial concept of "risk aversion" (Sahota 1968) – namely the attitude that an individual has in facing a decision with unknown outcomes – in order to identify potential migrants is a typical example of the rational approach to human mobility. The concept of "risk" has been further developed in other directions. Several studies have demonstrated that migrants choose to leave, despite being aware of the journey's dangers (Fall 2007; Jonsson 2008; Collyer 2010; Lucht 2012; UNDP 2019), especially in a constraining context of poverty, environmental degradation and underemployment (Tîmera 2001; Carling 2002; Lado 2005; Vigh 2009; Vium 2014). Indeed, *"even when it is risky, migration can hold greater promise of a better future than the alternatives"* (Carling and Talleraas 2016, p.7). As sustained by Maybritt Jill Alpes in describing young migrants' aspirations in Anglophone Cameroon, for those at the social margins, mobility appears as a good investment capable of paying off and changing a family's social status (Alpes 2017, p.65). Alpes does not speak of aversion or propensity to risk but suggests investigating the "*belief system*" which lies behind migratory decisions. For most of the Sub-Saharan migrants, luck appears to be the main tool for interpreting their migratory project, even when dealing with legal bureaucracy. As noted by Paolo Gaibazzi, *"the 'quest for luck' [...] provides a framework for actively engaging with the*

indeterminacy of life" which does not mean *"to merely control and minimize uncertainty, but also to unleash it and even maximize it"*, when people recognise *"the signs that might catalyse a radical change of circumstances in their lives"* (Gaibazzi 2015b, p.13). The hardships of the land migratory routes are not conceptualised by the social actors as a demotivating factor, but as a challenge to prove their ability to tame the risk. For those who succeed, to survive gives a sense of moral or divine election, creating a real *"moral hierarchy of worthiness"* (Alpes 2017, p.189). Hence, risk ends up making international mobility more attractive in many Sub-Saharan contexts, demonstrating how honour *"is still an important motive for African behaviour"* (Iliffe 2004, p.367).

A change in a theoretical paradigm: migration is a social fact, not just an economic fact

A change in the theoretical paradigm already started as early as during the 1970s with the development of a historical approach which was more interested in how migratory pathways are deeply influenced by the unequal economic, political, social powers and hierarchised labour systems (Castles et al. 2014, pp.31-36). This shift culminated in the rise of the *migration network theory* at the end of the 1980s: human mobility was no longer seen as an individual choice, but as a decision informed by local interpersonal relations in a global context of *"transnational flows of people, ideas, money, goods, and media"* (Kvietock 2018, p.5). These studies had the merit of highlighting the complex interconnection between contexts of departure and contexts of arrival, leading to a new theoretical paradigm, *transnationalism* (Glick Schiller et al. 1992). This theoretical framework was more apt for describing how different places and individuals had become entangled with multiple *"ties and interactions, linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states"* (Vertovec 1999, p.447) creating transnational arenas (Rogers 1986; Anderson 1992; Vertovec 2006) and *multi-situated villages* (Hamidou Dia 2015, p.43). Transnational ties are perceived by people through the flow of goods, remittances, and communication technologies, such as phone calls or social network profiles, at a larger distance with a much greater speed, frequency and regularity. However, as noted by James Ferguson, "flow" is sometimes a *"peculiarly poor metaphor for the point-to-point connectivity"* (Ferguson 2006, p.49) which describes globalisation better. Studies on migratory chains (see Massey et al. 2002; Lahlou 2003, p.113), migration/remittance corridors (Mata Codesal et al. 2011), diasporas (Safran 1991; Vertovec 1997), and global systems of production revealed how flows are directed by meso- and macro-structural linkages (Bakewell 2013, p.301; see also Portes and Walton 1981; Zolberg and Smith 1996) that take place in a space which is *"hierarchically connected"* (Gupta and

Ferguson 1992, p.8) and reconnected by actors in both sending and receiving contexts. Moreover, transnationalism suggested looking more closely at *"the spaces that migrants not only cross but also actively build during their experience"* (Riccio 2019, p.3), as well as constant new cross-border social configurations through which *"transmigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlements"* (Basch et al. 1994, p.6).

With transnationalism, it became clear how human mobility is not just about the physical movement of people, but a form of wider socio-cultural construction, which must be related to discursive dimensions and imaginaries informing the local process of meaning-making (Frello 2008, pp.45-47). Individual aspirations became *"an analytical lens, or perspective"* to highlight how people *"make sense of their lifeworlds, their individual lives, their pasts, presents and futures"* (Bal and Willems 2014, p.254). Migratory movements and transnational connections frame intimate and affective circuits in which migrants *"honour, resist, or redefine inherited notions of social obligation as they reproduce, contest, and transform their social relations and cultural norms"* (Cole and Groes 2016, p.7).

The shift in the analysis of migration as a social phenomenon was well expressed by the definition of "*culture of migration*" given by Kandel and Masay (2002) in their work about Mexican mobility. For these two scholars, the essence of this culture lies in the fact that non-migrants see migrants as symbols of the new desirable lifestyle they crave. The combination of *"the exposure of rural youth to the relative wealth and success of migrants"* and *"the changing tastes and material aspiration"* – as the global world increasingly enters local lives – "*makes rural ways of life less appealing, discourage local people from working in traditional sectors, and encourage even more out-migration*" (Kandel and Masay, p.982). This leads local youth to "*imagine a future through migrating, decreasing their willingness to work and build a future locally*" (De Haas 2010, pp.237–238). The definition of *culture of migration* came to identify all those practices, myths, beliefs, ideas, desires and cultural artefacts which are part of everyday life (Åkesson 2004; Ali 2007). The migration journey started to be studied in terms of its local symbolic function, such as a new form of rite of passage from youth to adulthood (Bardem 1993; Timera, 2001; Bredeloup 2014; 2016). Migrants were described positively as "*icons of becoming*" (Vium 2014, p.226) in contrast with the media "*apocalyptic representations*" that broadcast images of hordes from a poor and lost continent (de Haas 2008, pp.1305-1307).

Mobility, immobility and imagination

Another important theoretical tool from the 1990s' academic literature is the concept of imagination. Arjun Appadurai put the concept of imagination at the centre of the analysis of the relationship between locality and the global world (Appadurai 1996, pp.5-11). Imagination is a collective "*stage for the action*" (Appadurai 1996, p.7). It does not imply only *"the symbolic construction of the elsewhere"* (Riccio 2019, p.7) but also the understanding of the conflict between aspiration and the ability to move. Imagery often collides with a migrant's "capability", that is, the ability to acquire well-being from having the freedom to move or to stay, regardless of whether he/she acts on this freedom (De Haas 2014, p.4). The "aspiration-capability" framework led to the "*two-step approach*" (Carling and Schewel 2018, p.3) focused on the distinction between migration as a *potential course of action* – analysed in terms of desire, dream, plan, and need – and the *actual realisation of mobility or immobility* in a given moment. To understand the connection between potentiality and realisation, Xiang Biao and Johan Lindquist (2014, p.124) investigated the "*migration infrastructure*" as the constellation of migrants, non-migrants, human and non-human actors in five dimensions: social (migrant networks), commercial (brokers, smugglers and other informal actors), regulatory (state apparatus and international policies), humanitarian (international organisations and NGOs), and technological (communication and means of transport). Human mobility came to be understood as a complex intertwining of movement, representations and practices, of objects and subjects where *"migrants' everyday life and trajectories"* become embedded *"in the geopolitical and economic transformations, intergenerational conflicts and the powerful energy of imagination"* (Riccio 2019, p.10).

A different perspective was proposed by the "mobility turn" at the beginning of the 2000s claiming the necessity of rejecting the "sedentary metaphysics" – which had characterised the sociological and anthropological literature until then – in favour of a new "*nomadic metaphysics*" (Cresswell 2006, p.55; see also Sheller and Urry 2006; Salazar 2018). The "mobility turn" conceived international migration just as other kinds of mobilities that characterise the contemporary global world. Ethnographies following the mobility turn not only challenge methodological nationalism and "*migratory exceptionalism*" but also question whether migrants are the only meaningful subjects to study in the migration process (Riccio 2019, p.12-13). The migratory journey started to be conceived as a non-linear process (Mainwaring and Brigden 2016), shaped by mobility regimes in relation to

which migrants change trajectories, decisions, identities, and directions (Schapendonk et al. 2021, pp.3243-3256). This "trajectory approach" invited ethnographers to follow travellers during the different phases of their migration path, to enhance the multiple places of transit, temporary networks, obstacles and facilitations that have an impact on migrants' aspirations and identities (Schapendonk 2020; Schapendonk et al. 2021). Scholars started to be interested in *hybrid systems of materialities and mobilities* of people, objects, machines and technologies *"contingently brought together to produce certain performances in certain places at certain times"* (Sheller and Urry 2006, p.214). This materiality of mobility has been well analysed in the case of the use of technology in Trans-Saharan migrations. Current mobility patterns unfold through a historically travelled space, showing the tension between new technologies, which allow migrants to extend their social networks and to open up new transit spaces, and migration control policies, which simultaneously attempt to extinguish these same new possibilities (Bredeloup and Pliez 2006; Collyer 2007).

Indeed, communication technology has changed human mobility. At home, it plays an important role in encouraging departures, through programmes on satellite television, images on social networks, and virtual chats; during the route, it offers individuals the possibility to organise their journey more independently and flexibly, always being informed and remaining in contact with family members, who can provide economic support; in the case of success, it allows migrants to keep on playing an active role in their context of origin, often exerting the weight of their new positioning; finally, for those who have returned after having failed, it is a constant reminder of their previous dreams, the pain of the journey and the comparison with those who have succeeded. On the other side, "*the practical effect of immigration lawmaking*" (De Genova and Pliez 2018, p.1) has made "*increasingly difficult to speak about migration flows"* many migrants remain stuck and have to deal danger and risks which define their mobility experience more as "bumpy" (Schapendonk 2021, pp-42-44).

Another line of studies has been developed as a reaction to the "mobility turn", denouncing how scholars ended up substituting a sedentary bias for a mobility bias, completely overlooking the opposing forces that restrict or resist mobilities (Schewel 2019). For these scholars, globalisation should be analysed as processes of closure, entrapment, and containment that normalise the movement of some, and enforce the immobility of others (Carlin 2002; Shamir 2005; Turner 2007; Gaibazzi 2015). They focused on involuntary immobility, namely the aspiration but not the ability to migrate (Carling 2002, pp.5-6), as well as on voluntary immobility determined by "*retain* and *repel* factors". Retain factors refer to the way people develop context-specific knowledge, skills and relationships that constitute a geographically restricted capital that could be lost in departing, and they might

"explain why people may come to see 'home' as a better place to be than 'elsewhere'" (Schewel 2019, p.13). On the other hand, repel factors contribute to a negative perception about the migration process, imagined destinations, and the prospect of unemployment, moral issues or physical dangers or risks.

An example of these studies is Paolo Gaibazzi's (2012; 2015) analysis of the local meaning of "sitting" amongst the Soninké communities in the Upper Gambia[31]. For many young people, "sitting" is the experience of struggling to make the social transition to recognised adulthood, remaining stuck in a *"socio-temporal space characterised by economic, social and political marginalisation"* from which international mobility represents a valid way out (Vigh 2010, p.149; see also De Boeck and Honwana 2005; Vigh 2009; Hernandez-Carretero and Carling 2012; Honwana 2012).

Theoretical concepts such as *desire* and *hope* came to be used to underline how not only poverty and hardships but also desire to see the world (de Haas, 2014), and a sense of adventure (Bredeloup and Pliez, 2005; Schapendonk et al. 2014) encourage mobility from low-income countries Hope can be a powerful tool for dealing with the contemporary mobility paradox[32], as well as with the increasing uncertainty and precariousness of people's living context (see Kleist and Thorsen 2017). Finally, migration studies has been confronted with manifold reflections on its conceptual vocabulary (Amelina 2021, p.1). The "reflexivity turn" (Dahinden 2016; Amelina 2021; Shapendonk et al. 2021) allowed us to reflect on *"how the social practice of moving from one locality to another becomes socially transformed into 'migration', and how mobile (and some immobile) individuals become turned into 'migrants'"* (Amelina 2021, p.2). This approach has the merit of highlighting migrants' social positioning in terms of the intersectionality of gender, class, ethnicity and other axes of inequality, promoting a "*de-migranticization*" of research on migration and reintegration (Dahinden 2016, pp.12-14).

What is the return in migration?

In 2000, Robert King stated that return migrations were still the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration (King 2000, p.7), even though the same claim had already been made in 1974: *"it is*

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[31] Saba, the Gambian rural place where Gaibazzi ran his research, is only 20 km away from Velingara

[32] In the introduction of *Hope and Uncertainty in contemporary African migration*, Nuaja Kleist defines "mobility paradox" as the intersection between an increasing accessibility of communication, media and transport technologies that expose people to visions of "a good life elsewhere", while the vast majority of people in the Global South are more and more excluded from the circuits of legal mobility by restrictive mobility regimes (Kleist 2017, p.1).

customary for the author on return migration to complain about the lack of theoretical and empirical knowledge on his subject" (Bonvenkerk 1974, p.1)[33]. In his bibliographic exploration of the literature existing at the time, this Dutch scholar exposed the need to pay attention both to individual factors, recognising *"the clear difference between the publicly stated emigration intention and the actual behaviour"* (Bonvenkerk 1974, p.10), and external forces that have an impact on "*whether migrants decide to stay or plan to return"* (Bonvenkerk 1974, p.11). Bovenkerk's pioneering work made a clear distinction between *intended permanent emigration with a return*, *intended temporary migration with a return* (as labour circulation in Sub-Saharan Africa), and *temporary intended migration without return*, recognising how the desire for return shapes the behaviour of individuals, including in confronting the difficulties and the alienation of the process of readaptation. Drawing on different ethnographic works about Tallensi, Xhosa, Mossi and South African communities, Bovenker designed an ideal trajectory of return as a process, starting with "*a short period of idleness and display of new clothes and affectations in speech and behaviour"* that *"after a short while"* reverts to *"normal routine as if nothing had happened"* (Bonvenker 1974, p.27). Regarding the economic impact on their community of origin, he underlined a certain "conservatorism" in the majority of return migrants who often "*did not aspire towards industrial employment"* but *"try to ascend socially and economically within the traditional unproductive means"* (Bonvenkerk 1974, p.37).

In 1980 Gmelch defined return migration more simply as "*the movement of emigrants back to their homelands to resettle*" (Gmelch 1980, p. 136), allowing the field of inquiry to broaden. Return was still considered the end of a cycle and described through a descriptive-analytical approach based on categorisation. Gmelch's (1980) typologies of return were categorised according to the will of migrants to return (voluntary or forced return); their intentions (intended temporary migration with return; intended temporary migration without return; intended permanent migration with return; intended permanent migration without return); the time spent in the home country (from an occasional short-term visit to a permanent return); and the relationship between the countries of origin and return

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[33] The small bibliographic essay by Bovenker defined return mostly relying on studies about labour migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: *"When people return after emigration for the first time to their country (or region) of origin, then and only then we will use the term* return migration*; when people move on to a second destination we will use the term* transilient migration*; when people emigrate once again to the same destination after having returned for the first time we will call this* re-emigration*; when people emigrate to a new destination after having returned, we will call this* second time emigration*; when the movement between two places includes more than one return we will call this* circulation*. A terminological difficulty arises when defining the term* repatriation *[...] We shall use the word repatriation in those cases where the return is not the initiative of the migrants themselves, but of the political authorities* (Bonvenker 1974, p.6-7). Following this definition, most of the unsuccessful migrants we deal with in this study can be considered repatriated, as they are also called locally with the French term "*rapatriés*". Bovenker's list misses one of the most common cases in Velingara, that is people who return after their second or third migratory attempt.

(returning from a less developed country to a highly developed one; from a more developed country to a less developed one; between countries of broadly equal economic conditions). The same approach was adopted by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in 1998[34], setting a limit of three months away from the home country, which was considered a long enough exposure to another culture to affect individual values and behaviours (Kushminder 2017, p.5). The UN also considered return migrants to be only those who had the intention of staying for at least one year in the home country. However, categorisation soon showed its limits. Gmelch himself admitted the blurred line which separates migrants "*returning home for a short visit or seasonally from those who have returned permanently*" (Gmelch 1980, p.136). Transnationalism underlined how return should not be considered the end of the migratory cycle but "*one of the multiple steps of a continued movement*" (Amassari and Black 2001, p.12), recognising the difficulties in setting clear separations, such as between "*mobile transmigrants and unsettled returnees*" (Sinatti 2011, p.153). Analysing the Senegalese situation in the first decade of the new millennium – where "*return becomes increasingly less permanent and assumes a variety of forms of commuting more or less frequently between home and host countries*" (Sinatti 2011, p.163) – Giulia Sinatti underlined how the duration of stay, the migrant's intention at the time of departure, economic accomplishment, self-perception of successful return and the "*option of re-emigrating to the receiving country in the case of failure of the return experience*" shape return migrants' will to come back to their country (Sinatti 2011, pp.156-163).

Categories such as "voluntary return" continued to appear problematic, especially when they started to be used by policymakers for launching repatriation programmes from Europe and North Africa (IOM 2016). The not-so-straightforward answer to the question: "*how voluntary are voluntary returns?*" (Webber 2011, p.99) led to several criticisms of the "*management of international migration*" (Geigerd and Pécoud 2010, p.1), highlighting how non-governmental/civil society organisations played an important role in the European Union-externalisation of migration management (Cutitta 2020, p.1). Despite the "*recent years have seen increased attention paid to return migration, so that we can detect a return turn in literature and policy*" (King and Kuschminder (2022, p.16), the definition of return still remains problematic (Pauli 2021), also because "*return is a category that people themselves use, embellish, and understand*" (Oxfeld and Long 2004, p.3).

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[34] "*Persons returning to their country of citizenship after having been international migrants (whether short term or long term) in another country and who are intending to stay in the country for at least one year*" (UN DESA 1998, p.94)

The early 2000s saw the migratory return as the centre of a series of studies which concentrated on investigating the *development-migration nexus*. They dealt with two questions: "*How does development affect migration?*" and "*How does migration affect development?*" (Carling and Talleraas 2016, p.13). The migration transition model demonstrated that development promotes migration in the short and middle term by allowing people to access more information and resources that make it *"easier to overcome the obstacles to migration"* (Carling and Talleraas 2016, pp.15). The answers to the second question all highlighted how "*governmental and institutional actors craft diasporic return policies that encourage predominantly high-skilled, male migrants to come back, invest, and advance the country*" (Sinatti 2015, p.87). This ideal type of return migrant – *"resourceful, experienced, and eager to initiate innovative and profitable enterprises* (Sinatti 2015, p.90) – emerged as potential new agents in development discourse (Faist et al. 2003, p.77). A series of critical studies (De Haas 2010; Sinatti 2011; Ceschi and Mezzetti 2014; Randazzo and Piracha 2014; Riccio 2014; Åkesson and Eriksson Baaz 2015) demonstrated the failure of this "neoliberal trope" (Kvieotk 2018, p.14). In order to understand the not-so-clear-cut relationship between return migration and development (Sinatti 2011, p.155), these studies developed several useful theoretical concepts. One of these is the "*dark side of social capital*", expressing the difficulties in dealing with a large social network that implies a high level of economic demands (Field 2003; Whitehouse 2011; Åkesson and Eriksson Baaz 2015).

Starting from the 2000s, the rising number of "*deportees, rejected asylum seekers, and other non-admitted migrants forced home by states of arrival and settlement*" (Hagan and Wassink 2020, p.72) led to a more political approach to return. Highlighting these kinds of return experiences, several studies focused on how the policy shifting of receiving countries created a new class of unwanted non-citizens (Andersson et al. 2011). For example, return after *"deportation, as a coerced and involuntary mode of return migration"*, was seen as a visible contradiction to *"the common assumptions and understandings of transnational livelihoods"* (Drotbohm 2014, p.653). Academic literature started to critically investigate refugees and refugee camps (see, for example, Agamben 1998; 2005; Owens 2010; Bulley 2014; Turner 2015), the way borders were created and sensationalised (see Cutitta 2012), the different ways and trajectories of involuntary returns and deportation (Kleist 2020), and repatriated post-return life and "reintegration" (OIM 2018, p.1). Migrants coming back home empty-handed were often pictured as victims of social stigma, labelled as losers, criminals, and rascals, including by family members who were forced to deal with the consequences of the failure of collective hope and investment (see Cassarino 2004; Kleist 2016). Other

studies focused on the resilience and adaptability of this type of return migrant, highlighting how unpreparedness for return can be faced through the accumulation of tangible or intangible resources such as financial capital, new skills, ideas or social capital (Cassarino 2004; David 2017; Hagan et al. 2019). Moreover, new studies have started to focus on the impact of return after failure on the society of departure. For instance, Kandilige and Adiku showed how *"involuntary return of failure' is impacted by as well as impacts the existing social hierarchies in Ghana"* (Kandilige L. & Adiku 2019, p.77).

A strong contribution also came from the psychological sciences, which studied the impact on the well-being of the person and the experience of trauma (see for example Veronese et al. 2019). As summarised by Nauja Kleist, "*post-return life is characterized by uncertainty and social and economic marginalization, resembling pre-migration life. [...] Involuntary return disrupts, slows and hampers migration projects, constituting a rupture and a disturbance, but it does not necessarily end them*" (Kleist 2020, p.280).

Mobility and migration in Senegal: a literature review

Mobility has long been part of Senegambian history (Callaway and Creevey 1994; Barry 1998; Iliffe 2007; Gilbert and Reynolds 2008; Lovejoy 2016). The colonial time was not an exception. The administrative, labour, economic and military structure modelled human mobility through new political borders, production centres and urban areas. *"Borders generated a vast variety of personal and collective strategies"* (Castagnone 2010, p.14) to elude taxation and military recruitment, while the development of the groundnut basin in the regions of Sine Saloum, Ndiambour, Thies and Baol set a regime of circular seasonal mobility. During the rainy season, agricultural workers – the *navetanes*[35] –came to work in the fields; meanwhile a countermovement in the dry season – called *noranes* (Mondain 2004, p.28) – towards urban areas developed. Those who enjoyed French nationality – the *commis* – enrolled in schools and universities in France (Perrone 2001), while the Senegalese *tirailleurs* (African soldiers in the French colonial army) contributed to the military expansion, maintenance, and defence of France and its empire between 1857 and 1960 (Echenberg 2018). In the meantime, the *laptots*[36] – African sailors sent to France at the beginning of the 20th century – set a new pattern in the Soninké (or *Sarakulleeɓe*) mobile history (see Manchuelle 1997), establishing one of the first and largest communities in Marseilles, and indeed the whole of France (see Bertoncello and Bredelup 1999, Quiminal 1991; Timera 1996; Quiminal and Timera 2002).

After the independence, the French and West African labour markets shaped patterns of mobility: the French demand for labour led to departures towards Europe (Lessault and Flahaux 2013), while the diamond rush "excited" the populations of the river Senegal (Bredeloup 2007, pp.65-105) attracting the Soninké *diamanteurs* (diamond hunters) to the mining sites of Sierra Leone and the whole region. Three other poles regulated regional movements: the Nigerian oil fields, the cocoa and coffee cultivation in Ghana and Ivory Coast, and the Senegalese groundnut basin in the regions of Kaolack, Kaffrine and Diourbel (O'Brien 1975; David 1980; Delaunay et al. 2016; Mercandalli and Losch 2017). This regional labour mobility was favoured by the foundation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975 and by the *Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment* in 1979 (Castagnone 2010, p.18). Since then, regional mobility

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[35] The term *navetanes* comes from the Wolof *naweté* (rainy season)

[36] The term "Laptot" is a contraction of *matelots* - the sailors recruited amongst the Soninke aristocracy - and *lab* (from Wolof "to drown") and means "*the one who often drowns but who succeeds in getting by*" (Bertoncello and Bredelup 1999, p.178)

had always been a structural pattern in Senegalese mobility (Christiansen and Manente 2014, p.80). The "*savoir circuler*" (knowing how to circulate) (Bredeloup 2007, p.143) became the main mean for obtaining resources. Internal and international mobilities became complementary and interchangeable depending on the political and economic circumstances (King et al. 2008, p.10).

However, between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, we witnessed a shift in migratory circulation, slowly turning Senegal from a predominantly receiving country into a predominantly sending country. This was due to several reasons: the elevated population growth rate which could not be absorbed by the local economy; the decline in the groundnut economy caused by the long droughts of the 1970s and the globalisation of the agricultural market (Gaye 2003, pp.113-114); the contemporaneous closure of French borders from 1974 to 1988, when France made the visa compulsory for Senegalese migrants (Tall 2001; Quiminal and Timer 2002); the endemic political and economic crises of traditional labour importing countries (Ivory Coast, Ghana) and other attractive regional destinations (Castiglioni 2010, p.20).

Furthermore, the structural adjustment plans imposed by the FMI and the World Bank in the 1980s caused a progressive withdrawal of the State and a reduction in public welfare, resulting in a decrease in public investment, generating further difficulties for rural family farms *"that no longer had access to credit and no longer benefited from the price guarantee for their products"* (Fall and Cissé 2007, p.7) and impelling them "*to seek a bricolage of activities other than agriculture*" (Batterbury 2007, p.21).

In those years we witnessed a shift in the international movements towards Spain and Italy due to *"more flexible laws and* [...] *campaigns of regularization of the foreign population"* (Castagnone 2010, p.23), as well as a process of chaotic urbanisation, mainly headed to Dakar (see Melly 2011, pp.45-82; Piga 2000; Sall 2008), which was especially visible in the history of the *banlieues* Dagoudane Pikine and Grand Yoff (Vernier 1973, pp. 107-120; Piga 2005, p.146).

Finally, the rise of the "*culture of getting by*" (*culture de la débrouille* in French or *Goorgóorlu* in Wolof) certified *"the failure of the development ambitions of the postcolonial state"* (Diop 2008, p.364). For young people, "getting by" meant being ready to do anything to survive: find a place in the informal sector, beg or steal, switch to forms of open or clandestine prostitution and also "*to leave at all costs"* (Diop 2008, pp. 363-364; see also (Diop 2002; 2008; Degli Uberti and Riccio 2017; Seck 2018). This "survival logic" (Diop 2008, p.19) came to characterise daily life and led to a profound change in the perception of international mobilities; *Tukki ngir Tekki* (travel to succeed) is the Wolof

expression which indicates "going abroad" as an opportunity for opening new horizons and opportunities for individuals and their households (Bredeloup 2018, p.99; see also Lambert 2002).

Those were also the years of the development of Muride international migratory circuits[37], created mostly by the religious *talibés*, unskilled workers who were able to access the labour market and to set up formal and informal trade circuits in countries such as the U.S., France or Italy (Ebin 1992; 1993; Schmidt di Freidberg 1995; Bava, 2003; Castagnone 2007; Riccio 2008). The growth of the Muride capital, Touba, is a still-visible sign of their success (Buggenhagen 2008, p.198).

Remittances from abroad became even more important after the devaluation of the CFA (Central African Franc) in 1994 (see Cisse 2011; Randazzo e Piracha 2014), which doubled the purchasing power of migrants' earnings compared to that of Senegalese workers. The growing importance of remittances is shown by the World Bank's survey data[38]: after having quadrupled in less than a decade (from US $305 million in 2001 to $1,288 million in 2008), they reached $2,522 million in 2019. Despite it being difficult to quantify the exact amount of money due to the widespread use of smugglers and unofficial channels (46% in 2007, according to the African Development Bank's report) (Cisse 2011), the 2013 survey of the Central Bank of West African Economic and Monetary Union (BCEAO 2013) ranked Senegal first for receipt of remittances in the Sub-Saharan West-African region, with 47.7% of the total. The same study showed that only 5.5% of that money is used for investment, while the most part is destined for daily needs (70%), religious events (8.2%), real estate investments (7.6%), and health and education support (7.4%). Several households had developed a real economic dependency on those who were abroad, compromising the future sustainability of the migrant's return. Remittances were also conceived as a way of reinforcing and renewing social boundaries, *"a fundamental symbol of the emigrant's loyalty to his non-migrant family"* (Riccio 2008, p.225) and a way to affirm the migrant's economic superiority within the family. The role of Senegal transnational migrants proved to be fundamental in all the fields where

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[37] The most striking example of the link between religion and mobility is offered by the most widespread *ṭarīqa* (religious brotherhood) of contemporary Senegal, the *Muridiyya*: the voluntary exile of the founder, Cheick Ahmadou Bamba M'Backé, as a form of opposition to the colonial regime (Coulon 1985; Robinson 1991; Babou 2011), still represents a paradigm of the religious meaning of travelling (Bava and Guèye 2013)
The Muride ethos of the *marabouts* of the groundnut (Copans 1970, pp.259-274) is strictly linked to the mobility of the disciples that also constituted the basis of the agricultural development of the groundnut basin (Rocheteau 1975; Villalón 1995). Moreover, the progressive internationalisation of the Muride economic network (Salem 1981; Ebin 1993; Riccio 2007) contributes to create a transnational dimension of the brotherhood (Kane 2002; Diop 2002; Bava 2003; Buggenhagen 2009; Dia 2015) that facilitates transnational mobility

[38] Data are available on the webpage of the World Bank:
https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/migrationremittancesdiasporaissues/brief/migration-remittances-data (last viewed 15/12/2020)

the *"adjusted state has bowed out: they pay for the school fees, medical care, and day-to-day expenses of an extended network of kin; they finance public services and infrastructure, build houses and apartment complexes, and construct mosques; and they invest in small businesses and development projects"* (Melli 2011, p. 366-367).

During the 1990s, the field of Senegalese migration appeared multipolar and fluctuating (Robin et al., 1999, pp. XV-XIX). Those who had the means to broaden their horizons beyond the traditional host countries of Africa and Europe oriented themselves towards the United States, Asia (Robin et al. 2019) and, later, South America (Vammen 2019). The others joined the *"increasing complexity and fluidity of migration flows and routes towards Europe"* (Castagnone 2011, p.4), facing the consequences of restrictive border controls by EU countries after the establishment of the Schengen area of free internal movement. The intensification of control at airports and other official ports of entry pushed Senegalese citizens – as well as other African migrants – to cross the Sahara Desert and to try to reach the Northern African countries and cross the Mediterranean Sea. Libya's political situation, in particular, shaped the mobility choice of the Sub-Saharan population. In the 1990s and the 2000s, Libya was a desirable destination as people were attracted by a progressive change in Libya's foreign policy which tried to cope with the 1992-2000 UN embargo welcoming sub-Saharan African workers (de Haas 2008b, p.9). The fall of Gaddafi's regime in October 2011 caused the arrival or flight of a huge number of migrants towards the Mediterranean Sea and Europe (De Guttry et al. 2018, p.44). As noted by Sylla, the externalization of EU borders, expulsions, instrumentalization of migration and subalternization of jobs, "*have always existed in the contemporary migrations of sub-Saharan migrants in Libya*", however, "*over time, there has been a strong change in Libyan foreign management policy, from a rather neutral economic reception, towards a highly politicized opportunist reception, with rather violent positions*" (Sylla 2020, p.150).

The emergence of these land *migrations par étapes* (step-by-step migrations) followed different routes (see van Moppes 2006; de Haas 2006; Nyberg Sørensen 2006; Brachet 2009), that transit through several cities and hubs such as Nouakchott in Mauritania, Agadez in Niger, Tamanrasset in Algeria, and Sebha and Koufra in Libya (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005, pp.11-17; see also Bensaad 2002; Ba and Choplin 2006). These new migratory trajectories became known worldwide for the dramatic images of African migrants *"massively scaling the tall border fences separating the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla on Morocco's Mediterranean coast in the autumn of 2005*" (de Haas 2008b, p.15), and for the deaths of the young Senegalese boys in the shipwrecks of the pirogues that were trying to reach the Canary Islands in Spring 2006 (see Willems 2008; Tandian and Tall 2010; Degli Uberti

2019). Around 33,000 migrants headed to the Spanish islands yelling the famous motto "*Barça walla Barzakh!*" ("Either we get to Barcelona or to Paradise!"). *Barça* stood as a metonym for all of Europe, referring to Barcelona's successful football team[39], *Barzakh* is the paradise awaiting the people who die in the "*Jihad against poverty*" (Degli Uberti and Riccio 2017, p. 354). This motto – as well as the "*titanic tales of* [the] *missing men*" (Melly 2011, p.361) who died in the sea – was still well known amongst the travellers of the Central Mediterranean route, ten or fifteen years later.

This situation gave also input to a broad research project named "Migration between Africa and Europe" (MAFE), with the ambition of going "*beyond a one-sided approach to international migration, to study not only migration from Africa to Europe but, above all, migration between Africa and Europe*" (Beauchemin 2015, p.2). The project was set in three different countries (Senegal, Ghana, Democratic Republic of Congo) with the purpose of investigating migration actors, determinants of departures, return and onward migration, and the social and economic impact of migration on migrants and their families[40].

The novelty of the events of 2006 highlighted the increasing individualisation of migratory projects, challenging the vision of the migration as always being embedded in the economic strategy of the family: "*migration by pirogue became a more secret affair accomplished though individual investment and less frequently accompanied by public rituals*" (Melly 2011, p.369).

However, Senegalese international mobility preserves an important collective dimension: adventurers "*embody (and are embedded in) multi-scalar familial and household relations*", as their "*individual and collective identities are still inextricably linked to the idea of reciprocity and solidarity to one's social network*" (Kvietok 2018, p.35). Migrants are still linked to a moral economy of migration where "*expectations of reciprocation of support*" (Kleist 2017, p.331) are still frequently claimed. Through overseas work migrants often aim "*to accumulate resources that will improve the livelihoods of their families in the short term, and in the longer term allow them to return to better living conditions*", as

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[39] Over the years, football has become a widely followed and widely practised sport in Senegal. Despite the low level of the national championship, due to the lack of infrastructure and investment, the spread of satellite television allowed people to become more and more passionate about European football leagues. During my field research in Velingara, real silences and roars accompanied the matches and goals of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester City and Liverpool, where Sadio Mané (a football player born in the Sédhiou region in 1992) plays today

The passion for football is also evidenced by the great social participation in the funeral of Pape Bouba Diop (who died on November 28, 2020), famous for having scored the winning goal against France in the first match that Senegal ever played in the final phase of the World Cup championship. The hope for a (very difficult) success in the world of international football as a source of great economic gain and fame is shared all over the nation, as is demonstrated by the opening of football academies and by the phenomenon of migration linked to African football labour (Poli 2006; 2010; Schokkaert 2014)

[40] Research data are available on MAFE's website: https://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/ [last viewed on 31/01/2021]

return *"occupies an important position in the migratory projects of most Senegalese"* (Sinatti 2014, p.282). Moreover, even when departures are chosen individually, this decision is always made in relation to a social context: international mobility is a way of distancing oneself from the family to be able to filter or delay socio-financial commitments (Hernández-Carretero 2015, p.2022) or to acquire the necessary means to access socially constructed ways of achieving adulthood or marriageability (Prothmann 2017, pp.96-97).

Another mistake would be to associate Senegalese mobility only with poor economic conditions, neglecting the role of positive imagery created by globalization processes and new information and communication technologies (see Mondain et al. 2012; Nyamnjoh 2013), as well as by the desire to see the world combined with the myth of the contemporary adventurer migrant (Bredeloup 2018, p.104). Travellers of the Central Mediterranean route try to go beyond the *góor-góorlu* (hustler), i.e. the stereotype of the man living at the time of post-structural adjustment plans. They are ready to accept the dangers of the Central Mediterranean Route as a way to become a modern hero (*jambaar* in Wolof) who affirms his presence in a more globalised social arena. As *"migrants have been celebrated for their practical knowledge, their humble beginnings, and their ability to get by in a harsh economic context"* (Melly 2011, p.367), since the early 1990s the epic of the *modou-modou* (the Senegalese transnational migrant) (Degli Uberti 2014, pp.95; Turco 2018, pp.96-97) has started to challenge the social prestige of a diploma and employment in public administration (Riccio 2005; 2007; Bredeloup 2008; Willems 2014). The economic potential of those living abroad started to challenge the authority of the head of the family, creating the figure of the "*humiliated father*" (Diop 2008, p.18), constantly undermined by his economic impotence. In polygamous families, international departures also trigger elements of jealousy and imitation, encouraging mothers to finance the migratory journey "*often through their tontines, and provide the mystical protection necessary for the smooth running of the trip by using the services of marabouts*" (Bouilly 2008, pp.20-21).

Senegalese mobility has always presented gender differences. Despite the 2017 United Nation's data reporting that 46.9% of Senegalese migrants were women (UN DESA 2017), recent studies confirm that women seldom join the international migration independently: marriage and family motives are the primary reasons for Senegalese women's mobility, and the spreading of education increases the likelihood of migrating to urban areas (Chort et al. 2020, pp.302-303). Women's aspirations to transnational lives also had an impact on marriage choices (Venables 2008; Kringelbach 2016),

leading *"many Senegalese women to look outside of Senegal for potential husbands"*[41] (Hannaford and Foley 2015, p.216) or preferring successful migrants, even though they live far away, with the hope, often frustrated (Baizan et al. 2011), of being able to join them abroad one day. Waiting for their husbands, these women have to *muñ,* i.e. *"to remain patient, stoic, self-composed, and uncomplaining in the face of challenges"* (Hannaford and Foley 2015, p.209). In exchange, they expect the husband to stick with his duty to *"shelter, feed and satisfy his wife"* (*jëkkër, dëkkal, dundal, dékku* in Wolof) as *"material provision and emotional attachment"* remains *"mutually constitutive"* (Cole and Thomas 2009, p.20). However, women often suffer the double *"frustration of insufficient remittances and the loneliness and isolation of long-distance marriage"* as men *"find it harder to provide for their wives and children"* (Hannaford and Foley 2015, p.222), even when they live abroad. The peculiar dynamics of today's transnational families (see, for example, Kane 2002) fed a widespread concern about female infidelity, populating the common imaginary of *"stories of wives conceiving babies in their husbands' absence"* (Hannaford 2014, p.49). The practice of *mbaraan* (a woman's ability to juggle many sexual relationships to receive material benefits from different lovers) became more common, especially in urban contexts (Hannaford 2014, p.30). As I observed in Velingara, this new feeling of "moral panic" has also affected female international mobility in a negative way, as family reunification has started to be considered an inconvenient option for men, due to the difficulties in controlling women once they arrive in Europe. International female mobility is still dependent on the presence of a family network that can guarantee hospitality and protection, as well as control of the female subject on the move. In this regard, internet and mobile technologies play an important role, allowing husbands to remotely monitor their wives' behaviour.

Technology has often been seen by academic literature as a facilitator of transnational migration (Vertovec 2004; Collyer 2010; Portes and DeWind 2007; Baldassar 2008), as cybercafes (and now smartphones) became places where it was *"possible to travel with Google Earth"* (Degli Uberti 2019, pp.38-46) or to find an international sugar daddy or husband (see Venables 2008).

Ultimately, the often-ambiguous ways the government of Senegal adopted to deal with its citizens' international mobility must be taken into account. By signing a series of international treaties to combat irregular migration, the Senegalese government continues to obtain fundamental economic aid from international programmes and agencies. This is possible mainly because irregular

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[41] The decision to marry a European man is not a new phenomenon, indeed its history goes back to the beginning of French trade in Senegambia, at the end of the 17th century. During the colonial period, marrying a European woman became a mark of social status for a Senegalese man. However, it was only in the 1970s that Senegalese women started to marry European men more frequently thanks to wider access to schooling and travelling (Kringelbach 2016, p.162)

international migration continues. Several "mobility partnerships" (Ikuteyijo 2014, p.32) have been signed between Senegal and the EU to grant increased regular access to the European labour market in exchange for cooperation on controlling irregular migration, a phenomenon recently defined as "migration-development-security nexus" (see Deridder et al. 2020).

Relying on the custom of Senegalese migrants of maintaining social and emotional bonds with the home country (see Piga 2000; Ceschi 2001; Riccio 2002), Senegal and European countries have tried to make the international diaspora the centre of development policies. The diaspora inevitably became central in the homeland political arena. The creation of the Ministry of External Affairs and Senegalese Resident Abroad (MAESE) in 1993 shifted the government's approach from facilitating migrants' return to fostering the "*active involvement in the national effort to promote economic and social development*" (Diatta and Mbow 1999, p.274). The political relationship between the diaspora (which claims political representation as well as the extension of social protection) and governmental institutions (which try to attract investments and entrepreneurial competencies from abroad) had an important role in the campaign for the 2007 election with the creation of the movement *Alliance Internationale des Émigrés Sénégalais pour la Réélection du Président Wade* (Ceschi and Mezzetti 2014) and was also fostered by several international cooperation projects: PAISD and PAISD II with France (Datola 2014); PLASEPRI and the Foundation 4 Africa's Initiatives with Italy (Ceschi 2012); and the Plan REVA, in collaboration with Spain, which aimed to promote the youth's "return to agriculture". This project exemplifies the failure of the limits of the co-development projects: despite an investment of 20 million Euro in 2006 and 50 million Euro in 2013 by the Spanish government, REVA was challenged by the refusal of the repatriated migrants from Spain to join the programme, or by the absence of product diversification (Diedhiou 2014, p.56). Initiatives such as the creation of the FAISE (Investment and Project Support Fund) in 2008 tried to redirect remittances from private uses to development initiatives, but the poor results proved migrants' mistrust and showed that they were keener to follow their personal plans, highlighting "*the simplistic and optimistic assumptions about diaspora engagement in* [development] *policies"* (Turner and Kleist 2013, p.202).

Conclusions

The Central Mediterranean Route is only one of the mobility trajectories that have constantly characterised this part of the world. To describe the experience of individuals who come back to Velingara after having attempted this journey, I chose the words "irregular", "clandestine" and

"adventurers" concerning the journey; "failing", "unsuccessful" and "repatriated" in regard to the coming back process.

The word "adventurer" comes from the local description of the *laawol ley* as the adventure for the modern *jambaar* (warriors). The terms "irregular" and "clandestine" summarise the legal condition and power asymmetries that frame the mobility of these individuals. Indeed, it is the fact of being conceived as "irregular" that creates the experience of "failing" which is here analysed. The adjective "clandestine" recalls the discursive definition international policies use to shape individuals' efforts, both when they are on the move, forcing them to be invisible (Vium 2014, p.235), and when they are repatriated or forced to come back. These definitions better express the condition of the vulnerability of marginal subjects in contemporary global political order. The use of these categories does not intend to validate a political discourse but more to highlight the structures of power that hierarchically shape the possibility of moving in the global arena. The same goes for the term *rapatrié* (repatriated), which is the definition given either to those who were rejected by arrival countries or who joined voluntary repatriation programmes. It is also the way some returnees define themselves, in the hope of accessing aid programmes and their economic resources.

The definitions of "failing" and "unsuccessful" return express the non-fulfilment of individual and collective economic expectations. Returns after failure are a pivotal point in one's life trajectory and moments of crisis in which individuals (as well as other members of their networks) must reposition themselves in relation to their aspirations. The return migrant can be seen with a gaze of reprobation, but subjects can have the will and the possibility to be socially rehabilitated over time.

Return is a process that unfolds over time. Return migrants have to deal with the same push and pull factors that led them to depart, socially navigating the contemporary Senegalese society of "getting by". They have to reconfigure their social networks as well as their desires, hope and imagination. The traumatic legacies of the desert, prisons and shipwrecks shape their reinsertion, while they go back to a marginal and subordinate position within their family network.

While Senegal faces a growing number of empty-handed returns from the main routes that lead to Europe, it appears clear that history still shapes the possibilities of today: those who left before the EU's border-tightening policies were able to activate migratory chains and to acquire economic capital, social connections and documents allowing their family network to be an active part of a global arena and to ameliorate their condition. Acquiring this mobile capital is no longer easy. While the policymakers talked about diaspora and development, the ethnographic reality gives back blocks, controls, immobility and repatriation. Against the shock of the sinking of the pirogues, we have

witnessed the silent "normality" of torture in Libyan prisons and shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. The Senegalese, as well as many other African peoples, have always been on the move. Looking at the changes in migratory trajectories of the last hundred years, one can legitimately ask whether the returns from the Central Mediterranean route represent a new turning point in this long history.

Velingara: a history of mobilities

The returns after failure from the laawol ley *(as land migration is locally called in Fulfulde) are just one of the many movements characterising Velingara and its department. A historical analysis starting from European colonisation is essential to understand the roots of a phenomenon that began in the late 1970s, and which has taken on different shapes and sizes over time. The conditions in which transnational mobility has developed have led to the construction of an imagery of the "elsewhere", in relation to which the rural town of Velingara has developed. This "elsewhere", embedded in everyday life, has become part of the strategy to build strong geographic connections in order to deal with the monetisation of the economy, lack of access to development projects and arenas, and environmental and social insecurity.*

Migration in Casamance, as well as in the whole West Africa, is a phenomenon which is far from new. Although nowadays new issues arise, mobility is at the core of a variety of different forms of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversities (Tilmann 2014, pp.101-103). Human mobility in Casamance has never really stopped since the 11th century when people from the Mali Empire settled in the lands inhabited by the Bainouks. Over time this land witnessed the arrival of Jola and the Fula population, respectively in the Lower and Upper Casamance (Linares 1992; Roche 1985; Quinn 1971; Quinn 1972); the proselytism of the Muslim marabouts and their Mandinka followers (Learey 1971); the movement of merchants, traders, and workers looking for employment in rubber, cotton, palm oil, and groundnut fields (Mark 1976; David 1980; Foucher 2002); the Mandinka domination (16th to 19th century); the uprising of Fulɓe, the fall of the Kaabu Empire, and the rise and fall of the kingdom of Alfa and Muusa Moolo[42].

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[42] Fulɓe came in the region looking for new grazing and following the Mandinkas' conquest. They *"bred the animals of the Mandingos, aided them in their warlike adventures and in reducing many populations to captivity"* (Fanchette 2011, p.26). This historical cohabitation (Quinn 1971, p.428) is still visible in the Fulfulde language where several Mandinka words are used. The name of the region Fuladu (Fula = Fulɓe dùu = land) is an example (Baldé 1994). The relationship between these two ethnic groups favoured the beginning of the sedentarisation process of the nomad *haalpularen* shepherds. This situation changed in the 19th century when Alpha Molo guided the Fulɓe rebellion against the Mandinka between 1865-1870 (Girard 1964, p.304; Roche 1985, pp.128-130; Barry 1998, pp.330-332; Fanchette 2011, p.29; N'Gaïde 2012, p.15). The war was caused mainly by the unsustainable economic pressure that the Kaabu empire was exercising over the Fulɓe after the abolition of the slave trade, and the Islamic reformism (Bellagamba 2017, p.76).
Alfa Moolo established a new kingdom that had its centre in the Firdu (north of Kolda), and in particular in the city of Hamdallaye. When Alfa Molo died in 1881, his son, Musa Molo Balde, established himself as Fuladu's legitimate leader. He tried to protect and increase the possessions bequeathed by his father, as well as to contrast the suzerainty of Futa Jalon and his leader Alpha Yaya, by making an alliance with the French army. Eventually, this turned out to be the beginning

Finally, the region saw the French colonial power (1910-1960), and the contemporary period of Independent Senegal.

The colonial domination led to new ways of perceiving the territory: borders became part of everyday life and encouraged the mobility of a population which constantly tried to escape different legislations, tax regimes, and military conscription (Sow 2011). For the first time, local mobility became "transnational": in order to be able to cross the borders as soon as the conditions became harsher, the local population tended to settle in the villages at the border between the Portuguese, French and English territories. Indeed, the colonial period was also characterised by a fluctuation in the number of inhabitants[43]. The border between British and French Fuladu was fixed in 1901, a year after Velingara's foundation[44], but the constant movement of the population across the frontiers forced the

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of the end for his kingdom. After having signed an agreement that made the Fuladu tributary to France in 1896, the rising French colonial power forced Musa Molo into exile in 1903.

[43] As stated by Fanchette (2011, pp.80-97), if seldom three successive generations of families have lived in the same place, for the canton of Patim-Kandiaye alone, at least ten villages disappeared and thirty-four were created during the year of 1958 alone.

[44] The foundation of Velingara is well summed up by the small hand-written notebook that was given to me by Alassane Diao, the director of the primary school Moulaye Siranding Balde: *"The history of the Moulaye Siranding Balde school is closely linked to that of our town [...] Velingara, founded in 1900, by two brothers, Aly Niana Balde and Demba Niana Balde who fled the wars and the raids which decimated the herds, was therefore the host of these two. The environment of the place, with pasture and backwaters, facilitated their settlement. This is how they set up and gave it the name of* "wely ngara" which *means "*come, if it's good" or "it's good, come". *Twenty years later, the colonial authority created the first school at the current site of the gendarmerie by building classes in mud. [...]*

While in the document the position of the school is said to be "outside the city", nowadays, the building is located in a very central area, facing the customs and the dismissed building which once was the headquarters of the Youth Council. This shows the impressive growth of Velingara: a village that used to host about 200 people divided into 37 parcels in 1937 (Cissoko, 2018), has nowadays reached almost 30 thousand people, exhausting the land administratively available for new lotting.

The testimony of the current Velingara Fulbe District Delegate and the old Suma Balde agree in dating the birth of Velingara Fulbe already between 1886 and 1888, still at the time of Musa Molo, while the notes of the old departmental secretary Madou Ba date the foundation in 1870 by Aly Niana Baldé, better known as Aly Nianayel. In any case, the foundation of Velingara corresponds to a period of great mobility and shifting sedentarism (Donnay 2016, pp.453-465) when new village foundations were extremely common (Fanchette 1999c)

The old Suma Balde told me about the founding of the village with these words: *"In general, all the inhabitants of the village were hunters. They hunted elephants or gazelles. Velingara Post was created by Ali Nyana Balde, he came from Cantora, he was a great hunter, who was always in the bush. It should be noted that the village did not take the name after a person: we say Velingara, not "Sare...". It is the* djinns*, the devils, that gave the name, and in general this is valid for all the most important villages: Velingara, Kounkane, Paroumba, Pakour, Nemataba, Linkering... there is no "Sare..." and some names. Often for the hunters it was necessary that the* djinns *tell them a name for the village, often in dream, while they were sleeping. This is the deep story of Velingara"* (Suma Balde, Velingara, 20/11/2019). Mobility, therefore, was also the characteristic of Velingara's "founding fathers". This is also proven by the fact that the first recognised *jarga* (village chief) was not a Balde, but a Boiro. According to Madou Ba, general departmental secretary: *"Here, we talk a lot about Toumani Boiro, but we do not speak about the founder himself, Ali Ñana Balde. If you ask the children, they will tell you that the founder is Toumani Boiro. Ali Ñana was the one who firstly came to settle here and Toumani Boiro, who came from the actual Guinea Bissau, was his host. That was a collaboration between farmers and hunters. Toumani stayed for a while with him, but then he needed to return to Guinea Bissau for a while. Later on, also Ali Ñana decided to move away, towards Gambia. So, when Toumani came back, he saw that his tutor* (njatigi) *was gone, but he decided to stay. So Toumani Buaro - to whom the second school of Velingara is dedicated - was most important for the foundation of Velingara. So, the passage from the Balde family to Boiro happened this way, and Toumani passed the leadership to his*

French to establish two customs checkpoints and to tighten control. While British Fuladu became the commercial centre of gravity, the Upper Casamance remained isolated from the economic and political centres of the French colony. Furthermore, diseases dangerous to both men and cattle, such as malaria and trypanosomiasis, contributed to the further marginalisation of the region. However, Velingara acquired administrative relevance due to its geographical border position[45]. The growing importance of Velingara was also due to the will of the French government to keep an eye on the possible ambitions to return of Musa Molo, who had taken refuge in Gambia. Although always very improbable, the return of the ancient leader was one of the elements that contributed to the local population's feelings of confusion and instability at that time (Sow 2011, pp.121-122). An important mobility pattern was that set by the seasonal migration of the *navetanes*[46], seasonal workers employed for the groundnut harvest in Senegal, also in the Upper Casamance. Over time, many *navetanes* settled permanently in Senegalese Fuladu (Fanchette 2011, p.49), founding new villages and making a living through economic activities which were considered socially degrading by the local population, such as exploiting the local forest for the production of charcoal.

As a modern fiscal regime was created during French domination, agriculture became not only essential for meeting consumption needs, but also for paying taxes. The colonial administration also started the construction of roads – the work for the Hamdallaye-Velingara axis started in 1902 – and the installation of the telegraph line. It also did not oppose the spreading of Islam, which became the most widespread religion thanks to the preaching of *Gabounké*[47] marabouts. While the conversion to Islam contributed to fostering a more sedentary way of living (Fanchette 2011, pp.124-125), it also

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offspring. That is the reason why, despite the law stating that the district delegates must be chosen by majority, in Velingara Fulbe, we have always had delegates who come from that family, out of respect for history" (Madou Ba, Velingara, 28/11/2019)

[45] At the beginning Velingara was not a single village, but it is the result of the merging of two separate settlements: Velingara Post and Velingara Fulbe. Furthermore, with the expansion of the city, Velingara also incorporated the village Thiankang Coli, on the western outskirts of the city, in the 1950s. Today Thiankang Coli is divided into two districts: Thiankang 1 and Thiankang 2. The traces of this division are still recognisable today: Velingara Post has become the Centre district, with all the administrative buildings, a dynamic market in the paved central street and a wealthier population of merchants, vendors, artisans and administrative personnel. On the other hand, Velingara Fulbe (as well as the districts of Marewé and Sinthiang Wambabe which originated from it) appears to be the poorest part of the city, with a majority of Peul population, employed in agriculture and with a high rate of illegal emigration

[46] The term "navetanes" comes from the Wolof *nawete*, meaning according to the rain

[47] The spreading of the Islamic religion started to be more successful after the arrival of Al Hajj Ali Caam and his disciples in 1916. This was due to the permissive French politics that was looking for an instrument for anchoring the local population, but also to the charisma of the marabouts, who appeared as the personification of justice, peacefulness and wisdom, in opposition to the traditional political leaders who were detested for their brutality. The conversion to Islam was also an act of moral opposition to the colonial regime. Even though in 1930 only 11 marabouts were registered in the subdivisions of Velingara and Kolda, the second generation of disciples created very important religious settlements, such as Medina Gounass, today the most important religious centre of the whole department of Velingara (see the dedicated chapter in Fanchette 2011, pp.250-343)

created new types of mobilities.[48] Between 1945 and 1964, Velingara doubled its population[49]. However, in the 1950s, there started a widespread movement of young people from Upper Casamance towards the northern regions and the groundnuts basin. This was the beginning of a more individualistic and temporary kind of mobility, very different from the historical *shifting sedentarism* (Donay 2016, pp.453-455) of the region. These seasonal migrants were the forerunners of the future adventurers of transnational migration. The *dabobé*, meaning "those who go looking for something", were described as courageous people, who were capable of living in a thrifty way to feed the collective hope of social redistribution of earnings. *"Thanks to their courage and their sobriety, spending almost nothing for their daily existence",* these migrants were able to earn "*a net profit of between 10 and*

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[48]Islam and mobility have an ambivalent connection. The life of the prophet Muhammad shows that mobility is a valid choice when it comes to make a living out of a difficult situation. Pilgrimage is a key feature of the Islamic religion, as the *Hajj* is considered one of the five pillars of the Muslim religion. The story of Islam in the *Bilal el-Soudan* (the country of black people) is strictly linked with the merchants' caravan's mobility through the Sahara Desert (Triaud, 2008; Lovejoy, 2016), sufi orders, as in the widespread Tijaniyya, recommend visiting living saints, marabouts or their graves, and organise annual religious events - as the *zyara* in the Moroccan town Fes (Lanza 2013) and the annual *gamou* in Tivaouane - which requires people to move. The importance of the Islam in mobility process can be see also in the hosting of migrants in the urban context (Fall 2003), and in religious education (Diallo, 2011)

Moreover, handing over one or two children to a marabout for their religious studies was, and still is, a widespread tradition (Piga 2000; Ware 2014; Human Rights Watch 2019). Several people I interviewed remember that sending young *talibés* (religious students) to the Futa Toro was a common thing to do in the past, as the region was considered to host the best Islamic scholars. Nowadays, despite the departure of young *talibés* from the town of Velingara is lessened, due to the success of the secular school and to the better perceptions of local marabouts, a report made by Enda Jeunesse Action and Caritas (2017) confirms that at least 19 and 27 households, respectively in the municipality of Kandia and Nemataba, have decided to send one or more children to a marabout living somewhere else. Conversely, the Fuladu has become a centre of attraction for *talibés*, mostly coming from the two Guineas, who keep on crossing the borders illegally. This situation is well exposed by Diaobé 2 district delegate: *"There are* talibés *who come from the two Guineas. The problem is that teachers seek a lot of* talibés *just in order to gain a lot of money. Instead of teaching them the Quran, they make them their economic sources. In the morning, the teacher sends them to the neighbourhood to look for money and rice, and they ask them not to come back till they have collected at least CFA 250. If the child does not succeed, he does not dare to come back because his master would hit him. This causes the* talibés *to flee, to hide somewhere or to go elsewhere by themselves. If the teacher comes from elsewhere, Guinea for example, the teacher arrives in the neighbourhood and looks for a building that is not finished yet. There he settles his* madrasa*. Then he looks for the owner, making him believe that he will be leaving shortly to seek a better place elsewhere. He does not pay rent because he claims that the building is not finished yet. However, he takes advantage of his* talibés*. You can imagine what it means having no expenses and 60 children who bring home CFA 250 per day. It is a business. None of the children came legally. They do not have any identity document"* (Diaobé 2 District Delegate, Diaobé, November 2019)

[49] From the words of the eldest people, the mobility at the time of colonization appears as a long and often unclear lists of names, as in the memories of Sidi, the former president of the state property commission: *"So, the Murid Mandinkas came to sell the cola. At the time, here was Velingara Post and there was Velingara Fulɓe, which was a small village. When the deputy Salif Diao came to buy a house here in Velingara, he bought it from the Murid Mandinkas. The Kunda family came from Guinea. They were three brothers: one stayed in Wassadou, the others came here, where today there is the prefecture. There was also the old Sidi Bari, a Peul Futa who left the Waalo. After he came, others from that region came to settle here. Then, the Kante family came to sell powdered tobacco but we asked them to settle a little far away, towards the bush, where today there is Samba 15 ans. There was also an old man named Wali Mbalo who installed the telegraph line to Tamba on foot. It was sometime later, when Salif Diao settled in, that they went to find a guy in the Pachana, Gu Mbalo, to come and help him, and they gave him a bicycle.* (Sidi, Velingara, 24/01/2020). However, his words are a testimony of the creation of a multiethnic milieu which has always been the peculiarity of Velingara

20,000 francs they use for exceptional expenses (such as purchases of clothes, bicycle, or cattle)" (Ba, 2015, p. 46).

Over time the settlement of these families slowly attracted their relatives and other people from the same villages or ethnic groups. "*The uncertainties and the changes of the rural world*" and in particular the "*extension of the cotton basin, the exploitation of the forest, and also the migration due to the political situation in Guinea during the 1970s*" led to a stable population growth rate of 3% between 1964 and 1976 (Sakho 2001, p.16). However, Velingara was still one of the less urbanised departments in the Upper Casamance and Eastern Senegal in 1998 (Sakho 2001, p.9), characterised by a multi-ethnic *milieu* (Sakho 2001, p.25). At the end of the 1990s, Velingara was classified as a town with a majority of immigrants (70%), most of whom (55%) settled between the 1980s and the 1990s (Sakho 2001, pp.37-40). Besides Fulɓe Fulakunda, nowadays the main ethnic groups are the *Sarakulleeɓe*, leading figures in the growing real estate market; the Diola, who arrived especially after the outbreak of the civil war in the Lower Casamance; and, most of all, the Fulɓe Futa, originally from the Futa Jalon. In Velingara, they mainly settled north of Velingara Post and Samba 15 Ans, alongside the airfield, in what would later become the Sinthiang Houlata district, nowadays the largest district in the city. The memory of these events remains in the name of the Velingara Sinthiang Houlata district, which means "the new city where there is no fear":

> *"Foreigners are more than 80% here: all the Camara, Konté, Sidibe, they are not from here. Here is the Fuladu, but in Velingara there are more Fulɓe from the Futa Jalon than in Guinea itself. They came in Sekou Touré's time, but also because Guinea is too poor: for Guineans, Senegal is like what Spain is for us. The real Fulɓe of the departments are Diao, Balde, Mbalo, Sabaly and Gano."[50]*

In Velingara, names are an immediate sign of one's origin. Family names such as Balde and Diallo, for example, come from the Futa Jalon, and Dia or Ba are typical of people from the Futa Toro. Other names such as Diao are typical of the Fulɓe rimɓe, as well as Balde, Boiro and Mbalo, while Ñabali and Sabali (including the diminutive, Sane) are typical of the Mandinka. Moreover, even today, family names describe a preferential marriage bond: for instance, a Diao would often marry a Balde.

The best example of Velingara's multi-ethnic context is the fact that out of four mayors in the history of Velingara, only the third, Hamadou Bey Balde (1996-2002), has a local origin, while Ansou

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[50] Omar Diao, Velingara, 18/03/2020

Mandiang (1957-1963) and Ousmane Seydi (1963-1996) came from Zuiguinchor and Goudomp[51], and Oury Diallo was born in Coumbadiouma[52] in a family from Futa Jalon. This is a peculiar fact in a regional context where ethnic, religious, territorial belonging have a strong impact on the election of a candidate (Bellagamba 2017, pp.90-95). The general department secretary, Madou Ba, is considered one of the greatest experts in local history. He explained to me the appeal of Velingara with these words:

> "The advantage of Velingara is that our hospitality is extraordinary. So much so that no matter which village you were from, if you did not have money, even the district delegate would have said to you: "Come, you can stay here in my house!" You see the evolution of the city: apart from the Boiro family, the centre is occupied by people who came from elsewhere, as Fulɓe were not interested in certain activities, such as trade, which was the prerogative of the Wolofs and Fulɓe Futa (Jalon). There were also Fulɓe Futa (Toro), like the old Kalidou Gaido: they came, and they traded fish and meat. Sarakulleeɓe control the real estate market in the city nowadays. There were also the Baillants, such as Ibrahima Dia. They were very influential politically, like Abdou Fall, Yaga Fall, the family of old Mama Samba Niang… So that is why the first deputy, as well as the first and the second mayors, were not from here. The only indigenous was Hamadou Bei Balde, but he did only one term".[53]

Mobility between Senegal and Guinea characterised all the post-colonial years. As also Madou Ba recalled:

> "In Sinthiang Houlata there used to be almost only Fulɓe Futa coming from Guinea Conakry, working in commercial activities or as shepherds for someone else's sheep. At the time, with the regime of Sekou Touré, the Fulɓe ethnic group was looked down upon, they feared for their lives, and they came here. However, they have maintained family and economic connections: every time they earn money, they make a lot of investments in Guinea."[54]

While during the colonial period the border was used by local populations to escape compulsory military service or taxation, it became a creative space to exploit the different legislations and prices between Senegal and Guinea Conakry after independence:

> "We are a crossroads area where trade is flourishing. Sometimes cross-border movements are driven purely by tax issues because the tax is at times less for the same product that comes from Guinea and enters Senegal. So, the movement is simple: they source the product in Guinea, pay the taxes there, and then they bring it to Senegal – often by smuggling – where

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[51] A small rural city of more than 13,000 inhabitants at the border between the department of Sedhiou and Ziguinchor
[52] Village in the Sinthiang Koundara municipality (department of Velingara)
[53] Madou Ba, Velingara, 28/11/2019
[54] Madou Ba, Velingara, 28/11/2019

the purchasing power is higher. It is in this economic space that you can trace the movement of people.''[55]

The porosity of the border structures the local economy and trade. For example, during the rise in the prices of sugar, oil and other products in the summer of 2021, local shops managed to maintain lower prices through the informal transit of goods from Gambia. On the other hand, the alternation of periods of the borders with Guinea Conakry being closed and open in 2020 and 2021, in addition to having had major consequences on the Diaobé market, also caused a local increase in motorcycle prices, causing the locals to have to turn exclusively to the trade between Basse[56] and Velingara. Bala, the vice-president of the Velingara return migrant association, has a mechanical workshop and imports motorbikes as a way to supplement his income. When I met him, when I went back in August 2021, he was really upset about this situation:

> *"Before, I could turn to my acquaintances in Guinea and I could bring the motorbikes here for CFA 300,000 with all the papers. Now I have to go to Gambia and it costs me at least CFA 50,000 more. So in the end I earn less ... Hopefully that will reopen soon."[57]*

The beginning of the *laawol ley*

> *"I remember very well, I was 12 years old.[58] There was an old man, he was a diamond hunter; he found diamonds and he brought them back, and he built houses, and he had a nice car. The diamond hunter was a Sarakulleeɓe from Jidda Moudo, Gambia, and he came to settle here, in the Centre. This was his house, up to Balanta Diallo's house where the Grandma Project is.*
> *And there was also the old El Hadji Sissoko: they were all Sarakulleeɓe, who had worked in the gold mines in Sierra Leone. The first migrants from here left around 1975, to go to Sierra Leone, Angola, Mali, Upper Volta, with their wives. These women came back with adornments and jewellery, and we all went to see them because they had everything we could want. Old Hamadou Kunkara even built a house for his brother, Suraka Kunkara, the house where Sonatel is today. In those times, I was in school and they only told me about Bambaras who left Mali to go to St. Louis and Thiès, but we had no news about people from here going elsewhere."[59]*

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[55] Madou Ba, Velingara, 28/11/2019
[56] Small Gambian town in the administrative division of the Upper River, situated 24 km from Velingara
[57] Bala, Velingara, 09/09/2021
[58] Aye Karidjatu Balde, the woman who speaks here claims to be born in 1961. Hence, we are talking about the years around 1973
[59] Aye Karidjatu Balde, Velingara, 4/02/2020

Aye Karidjatu Balde is an old lady who married one of those diamond hunters who came back from Sierra Leone. Her words are a personal account of the beginning of a process which was to profoundly change Velingara: transnational migration.

It was the beginning of the Sarakulleeɓe settlement in Velingara that created the imaginary "*stage for the action*" (Appadurai 1996, pp.5-11). Until then, the development of international migratory movements had remained totally alien to the Fulɓe Fulakunda. They started to join the circuits already walked by the Soninké, Wolof, Serer, Toucouleur population only when they compared their economic possibilities with those of their transnational neighbours in the new and more expensive context of economic development and the modern state. However, only "*some of the earliest migrants could still go to France, but when migration really started in the 1980s, it was easier to find work in Spain*" (Smith 2014, p.51). As Omar Balde, the president of the department's association of breeders, told me:

> "*We did not know about this kind of migration at the time and we did not think about migration, and we even forbade youngsters to leave the house. Droughts and famines never triggered migration. Migration was about the imitation of others. Our Sarakulleeɓe parents left, and when they came back, they showed that, by leaving, you can have many things, and you can build houses, and have a good life. And people were looking at them and thinking that they were not stronger than them, and that they lived in a better condition only because they had the courage to leave. Our parents did not know about migration: we had to stay in the village and breed [livestock]. But our children and our young brothers saw the changes, and they changed their opinion. Now, when you find a nice house, you know that the owner did not build it through breeding or farming, but it was "the elsewhere". Migration, then, has become popular. Previously, among 30 villages you found five migrants in total, but now each village has at least five or six migrants.*"[60]

The crisis in the agricultural sector and the return of the first *diamanteurs* (diamond hunters) changed the perception of international mobility amongst the Fulɓe Fulakunda. The idea that real success was in "the elsewhere" began to take shape. Hence, transnational mobility emerged as a historically determined possibility, and it has always been determined by the historical contingencies.

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[60] Omar Balde, 19/03/2020. Hamadou's words are confirmed by those of the Marewé district delegate and of the journalist Hamadou Kande *"Migration started 40 years ago here. Before, young people did not want to leave. It was even rare that they thought about leaving. But now, with all the problems that we have, every young person who drops out of school and who does not work wants to leave. Previously, it was rare to see a migrant, but now in every 2-3 families that you tell, there is one"* (Marewé District Delegate, Velingara, October 2019)
"I remember that in 1982 there was a group of young people who followed Dylan in Sare Bourang. He left in 1981, he was the first, and when he got to Spain he called from there, and he sent a nice radio. So, young people started to say: "Yes, it is better than here!" And then after Dylan we had others: Sali, Mamadou Ali, Amadou Boiro, Alim, Younusa..." (Hamadou Kande, Velingara, 02/02/2020)

Fulɓe Fulakundas describe two alternative ways for international mobility: the *laawol ley*[61] (the route which "passes from below", through the desert, the sea, illegally crossing the frontiers of contemporary Africa), and the *laawol dow* ("the way which goes from above", by aeroplane, with legal documents, such as a passport or a visa). The *laawol ley* implies movement outside the Senegalese borders by land or sea, in a situation of insecurity and of need to provide for oneself, due to a status of illegality and/or the absence of a family support network. From the beginning of the 2000s, it became a synonym for the Central Mediterranean Route. Travellers have to "*hustle in order to find money*" (Gaibazzi 2015, p.90). In this sense, many speak of *laawol ley* even when they are in nearby Gambia, and the same word is used both for journeys through the desert to the Mediterranean routes, for the pirogues towards the Canary Islands, and for those who seek their fortune in other African countries.

Experiences of *laawol ley* and *laawol dow* are often interconnected, as demonstrated by the re-use of the same passports to allow several family members to arrive in Europe, or by the several people who reached Morocco by aeroplane and then tried to enter the Spanish enclaves irregularly.

In the 1980s the main transnational migratory route followed the footsteps of the *diamanteurs* and traders towards the African countries of the Guinea Gulf. Once there, people used to look for visas to go to Europe by plane, as in the old Cissé story:

> *"When I migrated in 1983, I went to Nigeria where with CFA 75,000 you could get a plane ticket to go to Spain. No visa was required before October 1983. I had lived in Spain for a year and then I started to trade between Spain and Nigeria. For two years I had brought shoes to Nigeria, then I started buying watches in Hong Kong to bring them to Nigeria. I spent two years there, but then there was the* coup d'état *in Nigeria. Overnight they changed the value of the currency. My savings turned to leaves. I lost CFA 18 million in one night ... I did not know what to do, but I had the luck to meet a young* Sarakulleeɓe, *Baba Jallana, who told me: "This is nothing. You are young and you will forget that." He gave me CFA 6 million and I returned to Spain. It was 1986."*[62]

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[61] A parallel expression is used also by Mandinkas: *koma siloo*, which means "the side street" (Bellagamba and Toro 2017, p.3)

[62] Cissé, Velingara, 18/11/2021. Cissé's words are confirmed by several other migrants of that time:*"There are more than 25 people who have migrated in my family and we are all in Spain. We brought the sons of our brothers and later the children of our big brothers. When you had a relative there, it was easier because they did not ask you for a* pre-contrato de trabajo (pre-arranged contract of employment)*. We did everything through family reunification. Now I have 14 children, 8 in Europe, 6 of which are in Spain. Now I am in the process of naturalising my children who live here in the village, trying to get them passports"* (Sare Sukande Jarga, Sare Sukande, 23/01/2020)
"I left in the 80s: I did the laawol ley *and the* laawol dow*: the* laawol ley *all the way to Nigeria and there I found a passport and a visa and then I took the plane. It was easier to leave Nigeria to get to Spain. Afterwards, I was in Figueres, I had been there for 3 years"* (Samba, Sinthiang Houlata, 22/11/2019)
"I did migration in 1980. I cannot tell whether I was the first, but I almost left with the first wave. I went to Belgium by flight: there were possibilities to work there. Then I went to France, and I got papers. I did 10 years there. I came back

The largest community of the diaspora of Velingara department was settled between the 1980s and 1990s in Spanish Catalonia (Sow 2007, p.206). The first migratory routes to the south are still walked by many travellers nowadays, taking advantage of some long- or permanently-settled relatives, as Kante, a father of a current migrant told me:

> *"I have a son who has just left; he is in Ivory Coast with my brother. He wants to get to Europe, if he can afford it. Work in Ivory Coast has diminished now, and both of them have a hard time coming back. However, we are ready to support financially one person who will support the whole family in the future."*[63]

> *"I financed my son's migration. His first attempt lasted one month, and then he was repatriated by plane to Dakar. I gave him money, but he came back again. I gave him money again, but finally, I sent him to Ivory Coast to rest a little with my brother. He trades, he is a boss there."*[64]

During the 1990s, the internal migration from the department to the regions of Dakar[65] and St. Louis, and the crisis of the groundnut basin, combined with the increasingly difficult working conditions in the Gold Coast countries, led the young Fulakunda adventurers to follow the already-travelled routes to the Sahara Desert. Short or long-term internal migration, which in the literature also takes the name of *exode rural,* includes different experiences, mostly during the dry season, where local work opportunities become rare. This is still a typical experience in Velingara, as explained to me by several district delegates:

> *"More than a thousand young people leave this neighbourhood to go to Dakar, St. Louis, Touba or Kaolack. It is there that they have the idea to go to Europe. Some people return after the dry season, but most of them continue to Europe."*[66]

> *"There are a lot of young people who leave to go looking for a job. They go for a certain period, two, three, even five years. Then, when they come back, they stay here for a while, maybe going back and forth from Dakar, St. Louis or Thiès. Nowadays, many women leave, especially towards Dakar, where they do housework. Sometimes they come back as the rainy*

because I was sick, but I had all my papers. [...] In the '80s there was still the possibility of getting a visa. I was also in London, and in Hamburg [...] However, the chances of getting a visa started to decrease around the years 1980-1981 because France started to be very hard on migrants: the police started to visit the houses of the migrants to see if they could find illegal ones. So, I fled Paris and I went to Le Havre, in Normandy: it was there that I went to hide." (Mamadou, Sinthiang Houlata, 21/11/2019)

[63] Kante, Sinthiang Houlata, 21/11/2019
[64] El Islam Jarga, El Islam, 24/11/2019
[65] Papa Sakho reports that at the end of the 1990s 22% of the migratory flow was towards Dakar (Sakho 2001, p.43)
[66] Centre 1 District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019

season approaches; it depends. It is difficult to say the exact number because too many young people (men and women) are leaving here to look for work, to go to college or university."[67]

"There is a very close connection between internal and external migration. When you go to M'bour, for example, if you get what you want, then you stay. But if you do not, you have to continue. You see the others leaving, and you go. There are not too many girls who leave the countryside, but those who do, they mostly go to Dakar to do housework or to study. Some young people go to Thies region or to the North, to Richard Toll, where they can find all the tools for cultivating or gardening during the dry season."[68]

"The majority of people are peasants here. Young people leave to go to Dakar and look for work, but a large portion go to Richard-Toll, in the region of Saint-Louis, where there is intensive market gardening. They are almost half of the population and they go at the end of the rainy season. Those who manage to find a good job stay there. If not, they come back to work during the rainy season, and they leave again. Young girls leave here to do housework (bindan). They go to Dakar, but also to Kolda or Tambacounda."[69]

At the end of the 1990s, the route that led to the South and the one to the North were already closely interconnected, as demonstrated by the story of Samba Lala, a 46-year-old man from Velingara, whose journey lasted almost eight years, from 1996 to 2004:

"I have been to a lot of countries. I had been working for one year in Ivory Coast, but it did not work out, so I moved to Burkina Faso. I did eight months there, and then I went to Benin, but I could not find a job. So, I left for Nigeria and then Gabon, but I had problems and I was repatriated to Niger. As I did not want to go back, I found some people and I took the road to Libya, and then I tried the sea twice. They took us near Malta, and once we were repatriated to Libya, we served six months in prison. At that time, Gaddafi was alive. I was released, and I went to Algeria to try to get to Morocco: Tamanrasset, Ghardaïa, Oujda.[70] Finally, I went back to Libya again because it was easier to make money there. In 2003, there was a problem between the Africans and the Libyans. That was when they repatriated us to Senegal.
My dream was always to reach Europe, but if you leave here, and you do not have a lot of money, you go to Ivory Coast and there you do an itinerant business selling Nescafe. In Burkina, I did masonry, the same in Benin and in Nigeria. If you are in Nigeria, you go to Equatorial Guinea, and then you try to go to Gabon, but if they catch you, they repatriate you to Nigeria, and from there to Niger. Niger is the jail ("c'est la galère"): there is no work, and it is difficult to survive. At that time, Gabon was paying better: there you can get 500 mil-700 mil per month with itinerant trade, and with a contact, you can have 2 million-3 million per month, you can go to the embassy and you can get a visa. At the time, there was the possibility of getting a European visa in Gabon. Throughout the coast, there are contacts with people who come from the department of Velingara, and when you meet them, they are like brothers of the same father and same mother. The day that I got there, I asked directly where I could

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[67] Nasurullay District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019
[68] Sinthiang Aidara District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019
[69] Velingara Fulɓe District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019
[70] These towns describe the route migrants use to go from the south of Algeria, to the North, and then to the West, where they cross the border close to Maghnia to the nearby Moroccan town Oujda

find people from Senegal. They hosted me in their home for a week, and they gave me food and a place to sleep. It was very useful to save some money before I started earning something.''[71]

Several ethnographic interviews demonstrated how, mostly during the 2000s, the northward routes started to include not only the land route passing through Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, but also a second route passing through the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, and the port of Nouadhibou, where the pirogues leave for the Canary Islands or for Morocco (Ba and Choplin 2005; Bredeloup and Pliez 2005; Streiff-Fénart and Poutignat 2008; Counilh and Dumortier 2009). The choice of migration route has always depended on several factors. On a subjective level, local networks of acquaintances have a great influence, as well as the presence of friends or relatives abroad, as travellers tend to go where it is possible to have a *njatigi* (a host/tutor). At the macro level, historical events and changes of policies (interpreted through informal word of mouth or media) have always had an important influence. A clear example is the peak of departures towards Libya in the years after 2012, following the fall of Gaddafi's regime which made people perceive Libya as an easy passage to Europe. Different routes were also proposed by smugglers*,* i.e. informal travel agents who use their international experience or contacts to organise the journey in exchange of a large sum of money, as the experience of Mama Samba in 2007 demonstrates:

> *"I went directly from Ziguinchor to Spain[72] by boat. They told me about this opportunity, and I heard that going through the desert was too harsh. So, I bought the ticket for 600,000 CFA, selling four of my cows. We did 11 days at sea, and then we arrived in Las Palmas, where we stayed 39 days before the consulate brought us back. There were almost 180 people. There was someone who managed to stay in Spain. Before we left, they did not ask us for any papers, only for money."*[73]

The lack of opportunity to choose a legal way to reach Europe is largely due to historical reasons. Migrants who first succeeded in settling in Europe in the 1980s and 1990s were able to build mobility capital, regularising their staying in Europe. This would have been a great difference between their families and those who did not follow the first wave. According to the concept of the "*rank effect*", formulated by the anthropologist Jean Schmitz in the study of mobility in Futa Toro, and also used by Gaibazzi (2012) to analyse transnational migration in Sabi, the time when a family network enters the migration circuit is crucial to determine the possibility of descendants' mobility in the future.

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[71] Samba Lala, Velingara 19/11/2020
[72] The Canary Islands
[73] Mama Samba, Linkering, 23/11/2020

This is clear if the situations of the Marewé and HLM (*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*) districts in Velingara are compared. Both once part of Velingara Fulɓe, Marewé was created in the 2000s to better manage the chaotic settling both of peasants coming from the villages and of the poorer *Velingaroises* who started to sell their houses in the central districts, whereas HLM was born, in 2004, as a consequence of the economic power of the people who started living in the district, mostly due to their access to circuits of transnational migration[74]. This emerged from the words of the two district delegates:

Marewe delegate: *"It is hard to say the number of people in the neighbourhood because there are movements that I cannot control. Almost every day, there is a newcomer who settles here. Most of the elderly people have died. In the houses, sometimes it is difficult to find an adult: young people are almost 70%. Agriculture is rare. This is a big problem because young people do not accept to work the land, also due to the lack of tools to make the land profitable [...]. It is very rare to do the* laawol dow *here. I do not remember seeing one in the neighbourhood. In fact, there are two possibilities for doing the* laawol dow*: either you are from a wealthy family, with a lot of money, or you have a relative in Europe who finances your trip. Most of the young people who do the* laawol ley *have dropped out of school. Migration here is financed by families selling their oxen. You know, normally in Casamance the whole family comes together behind a single person. Because if he has success, the whole family can get money. However, a guy can even cultivate on his own, and save the money until he has enough to go."[75]*

HLM delegate: "*People from this neighbourhood go abroad legally. I do not remember anyone doing the* laawol ley *from here. When I was young, no one used to migrate. We were not so curious. But now, with social networks, young people are curious, and they go everywhere, mainly to Spain, France (Bordeaux), but also to China, North Africa and Saudi Arabia.*
Now many people are regularised in Europe to the point that there are four families here (Conté, Sow, Demba, Balde) that travel back and forth to Europe whenever they want. The first ones who left were looking for papers for the others. My four children all have legal documents and they come back whenever they want. Some women migrate today, too, but it is mostly related to marriage. I personally went to France for three months once. Today women travel like men. Even though I had never been to school, I was in France, in Belgium and even in Italy."[76]

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[74] *"This side of the paved road was once part of the Fulɓe district, but when the delegate received goods or money from the government, he did not share it with the people of this neighbourhood. I knew about it, and so I told him that it wasn't normal. So, I went to meet the mayor, saying: "Now we are going to create a new district!" I met all the heads of the house, and they supported me. I had not thought about being a neighbourhood delegate before. There was a more suitable man for the role. But, when the President of the Republic came to Kolda for "Livestock Day", it was that night that they told me I was nominated neighbourhood delegate. They said: "People have confidence in you because you have fought for the neighbourhood." Now I am also the president of both the agricultural women and the youth association. They said I am the best example of a modern woman.* (HLM District delegate, Velingara, Novembre 2019)
[75] Marewé District Delegate, Velingara, October 2019
[76] HLM District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019

Even in the small villages around Velingara, such as Sare Nagge, less than 10 km from Velingara, at the border with Gambia, the consequences of transnational mobility are evident. Arriving at the village, a visitor is struck by the clear division between a northern part, towards the Gambia, occupied by the Sarakulleɓe compounds, where tractors and modern agricultural materials stand out, and a poorer southern part, occupied by the Fulɓe, with traditional fences and wooden poles enclosing the herd. This visible economic difference stems from a different story of migration, as reported by the Sare Nagge's *jarga* (head of the village):

> *"Yesterday one of my children returned from the United States. In my family there are five or six people who live there, and in my brother's house there are three. Each Soninké compound here has at least one migrant, while in the Fulɓe houses there are none. It is a question of courage: Fulɓe here do not have the dignity to be independent, even to do agriculture. I own two tractors, my brother two. They are all materials that come from migration, while Fulɓe have nothing. It was my brother who created the village in 1957, when Velingara was still ruled by the French. I myself did the migration to Sierra Leone: we did not leave for Europe, as is common today, but for the mines. I came back when an uprising broke out there. I was not married yet; it must have been the end of the 1960s."[77]*

Local history is fundamental to fully understand how transnational mobility has become a viable option for the local population. As international mobility entered the local imagination through the *diamanteurs*, the development of cash crops and of a modern kind of economy provided not only the means, but also the social inequalities that prompted the desire to leave. The entry into the market economy brought new goods and values that required new and greater economic means: successful migrants – as well as the *evolués*, those who reached the key positions in the public administration through French schooling (Ly 2009, pp.9-24; see also Foucher 2002) – became the paradigm of these new possibilities, setting new standards to live up to. The rise of transnational migration happened in a context deeply influenced by three important economic events: the intervention of the SODEFITEX and the development of cotton cultivation, the establishment of the weekly market in Diaobé, and the rice cultivation project in the Anambé Basin.

The arrival of cotton: the SODEFITEX and the beginning of the development

> *"Cotton became the most widespread crop. At that time, you could see a family cultivating 100 cords of cotton, 8-10 cords of corn and red millet (*baeri), a little bit of groundnut, but only

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[77] Sare Nagge jarga, Sare Nagge, 27/01/2020

in the maaru[78]. *In 1969-1970 we saw the cultivation of cotton: in our area of Kounkané, the people of Sare Bourang went to cultivate in Sare Duloso and Thianfara Mawde. At that time, there was Omar Balde and Samba Balde, Djeme Sabaly, Mali Boiro, (his family is in Diaocounda today, in Pachana). The two, Djeme and Mali, went to cultivate cotton in Thianfara, Balde and Samba went to Sare Duloso. SODEFITEX's agents[79] came down looking for many people who wanted to grow cotton, and they installed a centre in Koulinto (including the people of Sare Pate, Sare Yero Sudi, Goumbou, Sare Madia, Sare Yelo Gullel), and one in Kounkané (including Sare Bourang, Sare Nianto, Sare Bounda, to Lengewal ... almost all of Bissabor)."[80]*

The memories of Hamadou Kande, a journalist originally from Kounkané, describe the beginning of cotton cultivation in the Upper Casamance.

SODEFITEX (*Société de Développement des Fibres Textiles*) was created in 1974 to take over from the CFDT (*Compagnie Française pour le Développement des fibres Textiles*) that had operated in the Eastern-Senegal since 1961[81]. Immediately, an increase of 113% in the production of cotton between 1966 and 1977 was reported by the Etudes Seneriz[82]: in the whole Eastern Senegal 385 hectares of cotton were cultivated in the season 1965/1966, producing 270 tonnes of cotton; 37,500 hectares for 30,700 tons of cotton in the season 1975/1976; 48,000 hectares in the season 1979/80, as also reported by the SODEFITEX ex-officer Omar:

> "*At a certain point cotton became more popular because the peasants analysed the incomes and there were indeed many advantages: we gave the agricultural equipment that they did not have for cultivating groundnuts, and also fertilizers that they could use for other cultivation.*

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[78] The *maaru* is the collective field of the household, where the members of the family work for the common production and consumption under the authority of the *jom galle*, the "head of the house".

[79] In reality, as we have seen, they were still the agents of the CFDT

[80] Hamadou Kande, Velingara, 2/02/2020

[81] It is possible to reconstruct the history that led to the creation of the SODEFITEX using the documents of the Sodagri Archive in Suturé. The first state agency operating in the Fuladu was ONCAD which had the task of including the Upper Casamance in the national strategy of groundnut crops development, providing farmers with the necessary materials, seeds and credit for it. However, the project failed due to high operating costs, corruption and the serious impact on state finances, linked to non-repayment of debts by farmers, as well as to price fluctuations on the international market. The cyclical indebtedness of small producers became more severe due to the repetitive and unpredictable droughts, such as the one of 1972-1973. Although ONCAD was closed for good in 1981, it provided a model for all those regional agencies successively created to fuel the Senegalese green revolution, such as SODEVA, SAED, and SODEFITEX. It was the first research conducted by the CFDT (70% state-owned company), between 1961 and 1965 that chose eastern Senegal as a suitable place to achieve the goal of replacing cotton imports with local production. It was the arrival of SODEFITEX and the cultivation of cotton that constituted a limiting factor for the development of the groundnut cultivation in the Velingara department. In fact, although the initial project was not to encourage the competition among groundnuts, cotton and other cereals which the rural economy of Fuladu is based on, the results were completely the opposite. Not only did the development of cash crops lead to a crisis in the production of food for local consumption, but the cultivation of cotton and peanuts have always had opposite trends (as we will also see with regard to the current situation).

[82] The text was available in two old paper copies (French and English versions) kept in the Sodagri's archives in Souturé (Diaobé-Kabendou)

It was necessary to be with SODEFITEX to have agricultural tools. It was on credit: large equipment was payable over 4 years, while for light equipment one year was enough.[83]

SODEFITEX's task was to follow the entire production process of cotton. At the beginning of the campaign, SODEFITEX's employees toured the villages offering individual contracts to all the peasants who wished to become "*paysans encadrés*" (a farmer guided and supervised by the company): the agency had to supply the peasants with essential production tools, such as seeds, equipment, phytosanitary products and fertilizers. In return, the peasants sold all the harvest to the company at a fixed price, as a repayment.

The peculiarity of this system was the fact that the entrepreneurial risk was assumed collectively by a grouping of farmers. Despite a minimum income being granted to all the producers, the harvest was sold collectively. Those who had cultivated successfully needed to use part of their revenue to pay for other insolvent peasants. Despite the attempt to encourage the creation of groups of producers and cooperatives, one of the effects of cotton cultivation was the individualisation of peasants. Hence, the SODEFITEX's approach ended up favouring a more individualistic mentality amongst the local peasants. Not only did that kind of unrewarding collective organisation lead people to see working in group as a possible way of losing money but also the written contractual form – totally unknown to the local agricultural system – allowed male family members to bypass the authority of the elder head of the household by acquiring their own means of production, provided directly by development agencies. Cash crops opened rural Fuladu to a modern economic system that valued the effort of the individual, outside the family, as confirmed by the interpretation given by Hamadou Kande:

> *Cotton cultivation changed the way we used to live for the better. Before, we did not have a lot of money or comfort. It was with cotton that we saw that a peasant can be compared to a civil servant: he can make money with his field, he can have nice clothes, if you go to his room you can find a good bed with a mattress, when previously there were only traditional beds with bamboo. You know, at that time, there were* kilés *(community work practices): you told people: "Tomorrow, I am going to do* kilé*!" and they came to cultivate for you, and you were going to prepare the meal for them by killing a goat, a sheep, or a hen to feed them. But with the arrival of cotton, there was no more* wampagne *or* kilés *(collective work). At the time, there were also violins and drums to give people the strength to work, and women went to get water to bring it to the people who were working. But all that is lost. Even the* hourorde [the circle of stones where the adult men of the family met in the evening to receive orders from the jom gallé for the next day]. *With cotton, the power of the* jom galle *over the land was also diminished. Once, there was the* maaru *(the collective field) and everyone had to go there in the morning to work for the household. In addition, everyone had his own* kamanià*, but a small*

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[83] Omar Diao, Velingara, 18/03/2020

one, 1-2 cords, to cultivate something for himself. Everyone had his own kamanià*: if I had a* maaru*, I had to do a little* kamanià *for my wives (where they grew rice) and for the other men in the family. However, the cotton almost made the* maaru *disappear. Today everyone is for himself. Even though there are still* maaru*, they are way smaller in comparison to the past."[84]*

However, the transformative effect of SODEFITEX went much further. The construction of laterite roads made several villages less isolated especially during the rainy season, favouring a more constant mobility throughout the department. Furthermore, the statal company had also an important role both in alphabetizing people and in trying to turn breeding into an entrepreneurial activity[85]:

> *"There were no routes; it was SODEFITEX that made them. So, we started to move throughout the region, also to go selling our products. Previously, this was not possible, especially during the rainy season when there was water all over and it was impossible to move around. It was SODEFITEX that gave us new possibilities, also alphabetizing the rural population."[86]*

The decision to install the main cotton collection centre in Velingara turned the rural town into the regional heart of a vast production network. At the time, the factory was built far from the town hall, further north than the airfield, on the road leading to Basse, in Gambia. The function of the collection centre was to store the seed, to separate the seeds from the cotton, and to prepare the cotton bales to send to spinning centres in northern Senegal or to sell on the international market. No processing or textile industries have ever been set up locally. Today, the factory is completely absorbed into the urban context, surrounded by Chateau d'Eau and Sinthian Houlata districts. The construction of houses near the factory demonstrates the "parcelling fever" (rush to divide up and alloted land for political

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[84] Hamadou Kande, Velingara, 02/02/2020
[85] For Fulani population, cows have never been just an economic asset (Hopen, 1958; Riesman, 1998; Dupire, 2000; Stenning, 2006). As explained by the current departmental vice president of the Youth Council, breeding is still linked to important values such as honour and freedom: "*Even if young people migrate, one day they think of having cattle. They feel proud to think that one day they will be able to sit down and watch their herd. It is not an immediate dream, but always the end is to have cows.*" (Mané, Velingara, 15/03/2020). Furthermore, cattle are also a private insurance for Fulɓe families, an *"épargne sur pied"* (savings on foot) to cope with adverse events, such as droughts, and social ceremonies, such as marriages and baptisms. As Ba (1982) already noted in his study of the conditions of the Fulɓe herders in the whole of Senegal, state development policies, with their many "operational concepts" (option, priority, over-priority, diversification, intensification, objectives, harmonious development, etc.) completely overlooked the traditional strategies that were the foundation of the pastoral system, such as a socio-cultural (and not economic) valorisation of the cattle, and mobility characterised by seasonal rhythms. This was true also for the Fuladu, where as a result land conflict between breeders and peasants became more common (Fanchette 2011, pp.265-307). Cow breeding is probably one of the aspects of Fulakunda society which is changing more slowly, even though the president of the departmental association of breeders saw some advantages: "*In the years after colonisation, breeding began to be modernised, with more attention to animal health, and drugs. We started to have vaccinations, preventers, deworming: it was in 1964-65 that we started to apply medicines. Before, there was the* monde*, the traditional way of caring for animals. At that time there was the* thiaro*, the diarrhoea of animals: if there was a herd of 100 head and the virus came, it would take it all. We have been fighting the disease for 30 years, and today most of the breeders can prevent it through deworming and vaccinations.*" (Omar Balde, Velingara, 19/03/2020)
[86] Hamadou Kande, Velingara, February 2020

reasons) which characterised the last twenty years, but also a certain ignorance regarding the toxic effects on people's health of the products used for cotton treatment. This ignorance was also common amongst peasants who used to spread fertilizers and pesticides without adequate precautions. Even though no study has been run to prove the impact of cotton cultivation, nowadays, several people accuse SODEFITEX of having poisoned the fields and the people, as the ex-officer Omar Diao concludes:

> *"There was a problem. I personally had a friend; he was a supervisor like me. When he felt sick, they took him to Dakar, and when they tested his blood, they found out that there was a high level of toxicity. So, we suddenly realised that it could have been the products we were using. I am sure that there were also many peasants who died from the same problems, as we used to bring the product in bags without any protection, and the product ended up on the body, and also in the dust that you breathed. People have not really protested, but by now, everyone knows that cotton is not good for you and your health."[87]*

The cultivation of cotton made an important contribution to the transformation of local agriculture from a collective effort to a more individual one. The economic loss due to the collective repayment for agricultural materials favoured those more competitive cultural aspects, giving new means to free oneself from the constraints of life in common, and to young people to emancipate themselves from the control of the older generation. Moreover, the complicated experiences of the programmes for promoting both groundnut and cotton cultivation had made peasants aware of the risk of wholly depending on the agricultural sector, *"a mistrust that increased after the start of the Nouvelle Politique Agricole, and was reinforced by the drastic fall in cotton in the early 2000s"* (Bellagamba and Toro 2017, p.32). Despite this, several interviews testify that the heads of the households still maintained a fundamental role in the organisation of the family in the 1980s and 1990s, deciding the work and fate of family members. Cotton became part of a family's economic diversification strategy, as well as the schooling and employment opportunities created by SODEFITEX[88]. It also helped to provide the necessary means for longer-range migration. Eventually, the construction of roads for the transport of

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[87] Omar Diao, Velingara, 18/03/2020

[88] *"In order to encourage producers, SODEFITEX, the cotton company, provided seeds, fertilizer, pesticides on credit, and the training needed to farm. It also created employment opportunities ranging from supervising peasants to laboring at the large decortication workshops in Velingara and Kolda. The large producers, in addition to using this temporary prosperity to improve the material living conditions of the households, encouraged the schooling of their children, being clear that access to education guaranteed, in addition to emancipation from the land, also a form of social mobility with employment in the civil service."* (Bellagmba and Toro 2017, p.32)

the harvest made the mobility a part of everyday life throughout the department, giving people the possibility of meeting and exchanging stories.

The birth of Diaobé market and other *luumos*[89]

If, nowadays, someone sat down at the tailor's shop, where the N6 (the road connecting Tambacounda to Ziguinchor) makes a sharp bend without entering Velingara, he would see an incredible series of trucks passing by from Monday to Thursday. And if he asked where they went to or where they came from, the answer would be: "*They come from (or they go to) Diaobé,*" – the place where one of the most important weekly markets in all Senegal takes place.

Diaobé, whose name means "the house of the Diao" (a widespread rimɓe family name) was founded long before Velingara. The village, in fact, was founded in 1847 by Colyel Diao, a Peul originally from Polel Diaobé, a Fulɓe village in Macina (Sane 2010, p.28; Bamba 2012, p.29)[90.]

The recent development of the village is firmly linked to the establishment of the *luumo* (as the weekly markets are locally called), which took place on 24th December 1974, thanks to the support given by Salif Diao, the deputy of Velingara at the time. As told to me by the journalist Hamadou Kande:

> *"The Diaobé luumo started in 1974. Before, the only* luumo *was in Sare Boiro, in Guinea Conakry. When Salif Diao saw it, he decided to bring it here. At first, he wanted to do it in Kounkané, saying: 'I am bringing here what is called* luumo*, and I would like to do it here,' but the merchants protested because they were afraid of it spoiling their trade. They were totally wrong.*
> *Therefore, Salif Diao told them: 'So, I'll bring it to my place, in Diaobé'. And that is how it happened. He went to Diaobé, he made a committee, and he inaugurated the* luumo *in 1974. I still have the invitation from Malacounta Sane: he was among the founding members of* luumo*. They also invited Jean Colin, the minister of the interior, to inaugurate the* luumo*. When the laterite and paved road arrived in 1978[91], they opened Fuladu up to the country, and the volume of the* luumo *increased: then, everyone could go to the* luumo *with carts, bikes and, afterwards, with motorcycles, cars, and trucks."[92]*

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[89] Weekly market

[90] The migratory movement from Futa Toro and Macina towards the Upper-Gambia and Upper Casamance,= constitutes a pattern in regional mobility that can be traced back to the 12th century. See Diallo, T. "*Origine et migration des Peuls avant le XIXe siècle*", Ann. Fac. Lettres Dakar, available at https://bibnum.ucad.sn/viewer.php?c=articles&d=diallo%5fthierno, last viewed on 20/02/2022

[91] The N6 was created in 1970 and remains to this day the only paved road in Diaobé. Today, the road has been extended, including the section RN6-Medina Gounass, as a part of the international Tambacounda-Labé road axis, which makes possible a faster connection between Senegal and Guinea Conakry

[92] Hamadou Kande, Velingara, February 2020

Despite the success of the *luumo,* Diaobé remained a part of the Kounkané community until 2008, when it was merged with the nearby village of Kabendou, creating the present-day municipality of Diobé-Kabendou.

Nowadays, Diaobé constitutes a centre which polarises all the surrounding villages, and it is the core of a network of weekly markets which take place in the subregion: Manda Douane, Nianao, Linkering, Pacour, Saré Yoba Diéga, Dabo, Mapatim, Moundé, Saré Sandio, Pata, Mémanto Djidé, Sare koubé, Fafacouru, Saré Ndiaye, Salikénié (Sane 2014, p.33). At the end of the 20th century, the market attracted nearly 15,000 people on busy days (Fanchette 2011, p.343), and, despite the Ebola pandemic, 124,400 litres of palm oil, 102,030 kg of black pepper, and 12,188 kg of nénétou[93] were were expected to be traded in 2015 (Sane 2014, p.36). The development of the market has led to a rapid growth in population: from 3,000 inhabitants in 2002 (although just in Diaobé), the municipality of Diaobé-Kabendou had more than 13,000 people in 2013 (Diop 2013, p.798), and nowadays it has more or less the same population as Velingara. The growth was also due to Wolof merchants who decided to settle there permanently.[94]

Moreover, weekly markets have been one of the main stages where women have been able to enter the monetary economy. Today, dozens of women from all over the department, including Velingara, go to Diaobé from Monday to Wednesday to sell fruit and vegetables, peanut paste, dried fish, or small bags of *bissap* (refreshing Senegalese drink based on dried Hibiscus flowers), encouraging the creation of informal financial support groups, such as *tontines,* while men increasingly are unable to respond to the family monetary needs.

Ultimately, the experience of Dioabé's *luumo* is a striking example of the "bottom-up" dynamism of the Kolda region. Despite living in a region that has always been considered isolated, the local population has often been capable of going beyond structural and political difficulties, generating a real *désenclavement par bas* ("opening up from below"). The beginning of the *laawol ley* must be framed within the same dynamism: the complex mobility around the weekly market offers young people the chance to "*engage in motorcycle-taxi activities, which in the majority of cases are aimed*

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[93] The term designates in Senegal the fermented seeds of néré (Parkia biglobos) but also the condiment that is made by crushing them after fermentation, and cooking them with salt and pepper.

[94] The establishment of the Wolof population (nowadays 19% of the total) took place in several waves, a few years after the beginning of the weekly market, mostly from the department of Kaffrine and the central region of Senegal. Some of them were *baobaols*, big traders with several stores and warehouses at their disposal (Bamba 2012, pp.29-32). Another important ethnic group is the Fulɓe of Guinea Conakry who benefitted from the proximity of the border by easily selling the products coming from the Futa Jalon, buying other products that could easily be resold in Guinea through their informal networks.

at financing international migration projects", while the income which the market allows them to accumulate is used by young men *"as financing for international migration, even if a certain number have preferred to stay, carving a niche in the activities of the market and earning a position of respect in the community"* (Bellagamba and Toro 2017, p.16). Moreover, weekly markets, as well as religious events such as the ones in Medina Gounass, provided an opportunity either to meet with smugglers or to listen to the stories of other people who had left or were about to do so. The community of Diaobé-Kabendou became an important local social and economic platform for those who planned to travel the Central Mediterranean Route.

A below-expectation project: commercial rice growing and the Anambé basin[95]

The rice cultivation development project in the Anambé basin -– the most important development arena in the Kolda region – began in 1976 with the Seneriz project, with the objective *"of enabling Senegal's self-sufficiency"* (Droy 1985, p.244) [96], when rice shifted from a luxury good to an everyday family foodstuff (Guéye 2014, pp.1-3). Rice cultivation has been practised in the region for a long time (Birie-Haba 1965; Pélissier 1966), and it was part of the traditional local strategy of food diversification, along with groundnuts, millet, sorghum, maize, and cassava (Birie-Haba 1965), as local populations used to settle *"in such a way that they* [could] *take advantage of the existence of rice-growing areas"* (Pelissier 1966, p.506). Nevertheless, several technical studies have underlined

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[95] The Anambé basin can be considered the most important agricultural zone in the region of Kolda. The river Anambé is a tributary of the Kayanga river, with an area of some 110,000 ha, of which nearly 55,000 ha are suitable for supporting irrigated crops (Dacosta et al. 2002). Nowadays, it touches seven local communities, six in the department of Velingara (Kandia, Sare Coly Salle, Bonconto, Sinthiang Koundara, Ouassadou, Kounkané and Diaobe-Kabendou) and Medina Chérif in the department of Kolda

[96] The national development of rice cultivation has been one of the main goals of Senegalese government since the late 1960s, as the August 1973 Ministry of economy's report kept on the Sodagri archive shows: "*Rice is the second most important food item. In 1971, consumption of white rice represented more than 40% of millet/sorghum consumption. Rice consumption increased at a rate of 4.8% during 1963-1971 to a level of 440,000 tons, while rice production, adversely, fluctuated between 90,000 and 156,000 tons, as it was affected by climatic conditions in 1968-1970. An important rice programme was launched in the Third Plan with the objective of producing 220,.000 tons of rice by 1972-1973. The original investment programme CFA 10.7 billion was reduced to CFA 5.3 billion, and the objective for 1972-3 was brought back to 165,000 tons. [...] In Casamance three methods are being used: cultivation in tidal swamps, with yield of about 1.2 t/ha, rainfed upland cultivation (up to 1.2 t/ha but strongly dependent on good rainfall) and traditional irrigation in rainfed swamp. With the fresh-water irrigation, the results are even more spectacular: productivity reached up to 9t/ha with double cropping, as proved by the experiments conducted by the Taiwan technical assistance mission. Rice production is expected to grow at an average rate of 17.5% between 1971-1977, with a growth consumption of 4%, which will be largely insufficient to permit a* gross *decrease in rice imports.*"

insufficiencies in managing the "*apparently simple*" (Dacosta et al. 2002, p.400) relationship between man and water (Pelissier 1966, p.506) in the region, which is crucial for rice cultivation.

The Anambé project was entrusted to the Senegalese Agricultural and Industrial Development Company (Sodagri), a company with a majority state-owned company created in 1974 under the technical supervision of the Senegalese Ministry of Agriculture.

All the studies and reports I came across[97] agreed that the objectives of the project immediately turned out to be too ambitious, considering the expenditure of CFA 56 billion (81 billion at 2008 prices) between 1982-2013[98]. Several causes have been found to explain this failure: the technocratic and rigid organisation of producer groups; the enormous economic losses farmers had to face in years of low rainfall, as happened several times during the 1980s; the difficulty of integrating rice cultivation with processing and selling (Hathie 2015, p.45); the organisation of access to land and equipment; the difficulties of securing producers' investment and guaranteeing satisfactory development (Bazin 2017, p.6); the dependence of peasants on technical equipment that they could not afford, as well as on the often inefficient services offered by Sodagri[99], preventing peasants from meeting the needs of a very tight agricultural calendar, as experienced by Boubacar, the president of the informal local

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[97] Dacosta, H., Coly A., Soumare, P.O. (2002), *Adéquation de l'offre et de la demande en eau. Dynamique hydrologique de l'Anambé (Sénégal)*, en Orange D., Arfi R., Kuper M., *Gestion intégrée des ressources naturelles en zones inondables tropicales*, IRD Éditions, available at https://books.openedition.org/irdeditions/8571; Hathie, I, Diouf M.L., Diouf M.M., Kama, M.M. (2013), *The challenges for small producers in the areas irrigated by large dams - the case of the Niandouba and Confluent (Anambé) dam in Senegal,* Global Water Initiative, available at https://www.gwiwestafrica.org/en/challenges-small-producers-areas-irrigated-large-dams-case-niandouba-and-confluent-anambé-dam-0; Guéye, B. (2014), *Spécialisation ou diversification ? Perspectives divergentes sur la riziculture irriguée par trois grands barrages dans le Sahel*, Global Water Initiative; Bazin, F. (2017), *Analyse des systèmes de production du périmètre irrigué de l'Anambé (Barrages de Niandouba et Confluent, Sénégal*, Global Water Initiative – Ouest Africa, available at https://www.gwiwestafrica.org/en/analysis-productive-systems-anambe-irrigation-scheme-niandouba-and-confluent-dams-senegal

[98] Sodagri's intervention started between the years 1978-1982 with a progressive increase in supervised areas from 75 ha in 1978 to 2,000 ha in 1982. The initial successes prompted Sodagri to develop a step-by-step programme based on phased investments. The first phase (1982-1991) began with many difficulties, despite the construction of the Confluent dam (1983), of the first pumping station and supply channel. As a result, a consolidation phase (1992-1996) had to be organised to complete 1,320 ha out of the 1,365 ha planned. Phase II (1996-1998) can be considered the most successful, having benefited from the construction of the Niandouba dam and the development of 2815 ha of irrigated land, while phase III (2003-2009) presented new difficulties. However, Sodagri reached only the objective of 5,000 ha developed, which is a poor result compared to the expected 16,265 ha (see Hatie 2015)

[99] The inefficient maintenance and management of irrigation infrastructure and the lack of mastery of technical facilities by the local producers are well expressed by the chief of the Sodagri hydrological technical department: *"The real challenge is to have water when we want, without depending on the weather. However, there are two main problems linked to water management. The first is the maintenance of the pumps and channels, which should be the responsibility of the state. The second concerns the discipline of the producers who do not respect the water quota assigned to them. This has a strong impact on the more distant plots of land."* Another problem linked to the water management during the contre-saison (off-season, which corresponds to the dry season) is that *"the condition of the basin does not allow us to cultivate all the plots in the dry season. Moreover, the heavy rains create damage that we have no time to repair. For example, this off-season (2019) we could not do more than 300 ha out of 1,200 ha in Sector 5. The same happened in Sector 4, where we have 1,140 ha."* (M., Velingara, 07/03/2020)

association of return migrant in the village of Yiri Koy, a small village at the edge of the irrigated sectors of the Anambé basin:

> *"My father and I, we had two parcels and we also used to do the* contre-saison*. In 2006, I gained 8 tons of rice. We worked for four or five years in sector G, but it was not easy to get a good income because there were a lot of expenses. The main problem was with the* laverda*, the machine for collecting the rice: there was only one machine in the whole of sector G, and in waiting for our turn, we lost all the harvest because of the birds. That discouraged me: I had already paid CFA 40,000 to rent the machine in advance, plus all the other expenses. In the end, we had a debt of CFA 400,000 with PADERBA[100]. They took us to court, and the judge told us that we had to pay it, but we did not have the money to do it. Since then, we have not cultivated rice any more."[101]*

The Anambé development project changed the cultural relationship with rice cultivation. The developmental process increasingly excluded women[102], as their employment was considered one of the reasons for the underdevelopment of the cultivation.[103]

Furthermore, the Anambé basin always presented two closely linked problems from the peasants' perspective: the difficulties of having been assigned one or more parcels and the need for the technical means to make the land productive. Not having the means for properly cultivating the land made the parcel less productive and, therefore, the farmer was less likely to have a plot reassigned during the re-allocation of parcels, which happens every two years. This system of parcelling was made to favour the creation of GIEs (*groupements d'intérêt économique*) and Unions ("co-operatives"). However, while this new model allowed farmers to access bank loans, the whole business remained concentrated in the hands of a few people. Indeed, the GIEs and the Unions almost immediately turned into power groups which decided whom assign the land to, as the journalist Hamadou Kande told me:

> *Previously the rice had a problem of financing: a parcel of rice required CFA 300,000 to be cultivated. You know, the soil is hard, you need to have a tractor, not just an ox, and*

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[100] The Anambé Basin Rural Development Support Project (PADERBA) was a project financed by the African Development Bank and by the Senegalese government between 2002 and 2008. The main goals of the project were to increase the capacity of farmers' organisations, their training, and a decentralised and appropriate credit system.

[101] Boubacar, Yiri Koy, 8/03/2020

[102] "*The majority of farmers are beneficiaries of a plot of either 1.35 ha or 1.25 ha. Women generally receive one plot per group of 5, i.e 0.27 ha per woman*" (Hathie et al. 2013, p.16). Also training programmes provided by Sodagri show the exclusion of women from the rice cultivation process: while programmes for men were about breeding, market gardening and agriculture, for women they included only hygiene and home economics (Droy 1985, p.265)

[103] *"The technical mediocrity of rice growing in Fuladu, the weakness of its footprint in the landscape, its confinement to small perimeters and, by contrast, the abandonment of the valleys to wild nature, are therefore not only the result of the weak general density of population and insalubrity in the proximity of permanent rivers. They are also the consequence of a human choice, the attribution to women of the care of the rice fields. The geographic efficiency of rice cultivation would certainly be much greater if men, even with the limited numbers here, participated in it"* (Pellissier 1966, p.535).

furthermore you need CFA 20,000 for seeds, herbicide, and all the other things. The GIEs and Unions were the ones going to the bank to ask for credit, being guaranteed by Sodagri. It was only around 1990 that the wealthier smallholders started going to the bank individually. You know, rice cultivation developed not long ago: it was only when we saw Isa Diallo having enough money to buy a vehicle and a house in Velingara... and now everyone wants to cultivate rice. However, there are always problems getting a plot because it is Dylan who decides. He is the president of the GIE of Sare Bourang that belongs to the Union of Sector G. Now if the Union gives 50 plots to the GIE, firstly he takes 3-4 plots for himself, then he distributes them to the others, but in the GIE there are more than 200 people.
You know, normally the concessions should be made by the town hall on the advice of Sodagri and of the Unions because land management is a competence of the town hall. Nevertheless, it is the Union which decides how and whom the plots should be given to. Procedures say one thing, reality does another thing."[104]

Today, it is possible to generally classify four different types of farmers involved in the Anambé basin, according to their capacity to mobilise resources, and to their choices regarding crop diversification (Hathie et al. 2013): farmers who diversify and are able to promote several crops on the plateau, by mobilising tractors and harvesters, and who generally have a herd to manure their fields; farmers with low self-financing capacity who diversify but are not well equipped; farmers who only grow rice (but without having herds and with low self-financing capacity they are the most exposed to production shocks); specialised producers, especially non-natives, who, with the means at their disposal, can farm up to 100 ha[105]. In the last 20 years, the arrival of the great Mouride producers has created problems in the peasant population. While the intention was to install a large producer for each sector as an engine for all the other small producers, local people tended to see this new presence as an intrusion

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[104] Hamadou Kande, Velingara, 02/02/2020. His words are confirmed by the Sodagri manager of the basin's facilities, Sidy: *"Every two years they make the allocation of land, it is not the law, but it is a consensus. The responsibility is given to the municipality, we are the technicians, we have the only responsibility that the basin is profitable. For example, if we see that someone has 10 ha, but he only cultivates 8 ha, we note it on our file and when there is the new assignment, we hand it to the municipality, proposing to take away 2 hectares from this guy, in order to give them to someone else. However, the municipality for its own reasons can decide differently. For example, we saw women who had not cultivated in Sare Coli Salle, and each of them had a parcel. However, when the mayor saw the file, he said: 'I agree on everything, but all women must have their parcels back because they do not have any land elsewhere and we will help them to solve their problems by letting them cultivate'. On the other hand, we have another responsibility: if you have land, when the rain starts to fall, the agents we have on the ground come to control that you have actually started to seed. Between June 15th and July 15th is a good time. If at the beginning of July, you have not started yet, and you do not intend to do so, we can suspend the allocation, and can look for someone else who needs the plots of land. We inform the Union, and the tenant does not even have to pay the rental"* (Sidy, Suturé, 05/03/2020).

[105] On the other hand, Bazin (2017) proposed another division based on the availability of means of production such as the quantity and quality of land, labour, and resources to be spent on the production unit: "traditional" producers who do not practice rice growing in the developed area (29% of producers); "traditional" producers who cultivate areas limited to at least 2.5 hours in the developed perimeter (33% of producers occupying 25% of cultivated areas in the developed perimeter); specialized producers (32% occupy 74% of cultivated areas. This group includes the 2% big specialized producers that occupy the 21% of developed area); and a 30% of peasants in "the process of specialization" (52% of developed area), who also continue to grow corn and peanuts on the plateau to meet the nutritional needs of the family.

in an already difficult-to-access context, especially after the nearby example of the case of the Pata forest[106], as expressed both by Dylan, a return migrant in Yiri Koy and by Nova, employed in the Sogadri's monitoring service:

> *"The basin does not help young people. If you want to cultivate, they tell you that you have to make an association, but in general they do not give you the right plot of land to earn some money. Young people have never earned anything here. You know, only 4-5 guys in all Kounkane could say they have gained something."[107]*

> *"Since the 2000s, we have not increased the number of* [land] *parcels, while the population is increasing. Therefore, it is a problem for the youth to get land in irrigated perimeter. The plateau and the lowlands are already occupied by the ancient owners, and now some foreigners come to cultivate. Where can young people farm?"[108]*

The experiences of inequality in accessing the development arenas, difficulties with debt repayment and health problems due to the use of chemical products contributed to shaping the desire to seek social success in the "elsewhere".

The case of Velingara and its department can be considered an example of the general thesis that development increases migration in the short run (Carling and Talleraas, 2016, p. 15), and, most markedly, in the case of Anambé. As the management of the Anambé basin is not transparent, the excluded people find themselves in more difficult conditions, so for the local population, their long and frustrating attempts to obtain a parcel in the area are often contrasted with their hope for a rapid change of condition with the minimum initial investment required by the *laawol ley*, as stated by Sadio, a return migrant from Kandia:

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[106] The case of the Wolof and Toucouleur recent colonization of the Pata Forest is well treated by Mamady Sidibé's ethnography, *Migrants de l'Arachide* (2005), and by Sylvie Fanchette's historical analysis, *Colonisation des terres sylvo-pastorales et conflits fonciers en Haute-Casamance* (1999). The case of Pata forest is a good example to show how the historical Fulɓe space occupation could give pretext to frame these lands as *"vacant and without masters"* (Sidibé 2005, p.22), favouring other occupants who are considered more suitable agents of development. According to the Tenure Reform Act (Law 64-46 of 17 June 1964), the law favoured the settling of Wolof and Toucouleur peasants in the Kolda region starting from the end of the '70s. In fact, Wolof occupation, led by religious leaders and disciples, was nurtured by the "*droit de la hache*" (right of the axe), that guaranteed the ownership of unexploited land to whomever had first cleared it. The first Wolof villages in the forest, as Médina Mandakh, functioned as a bridgehead to allow newcomers to first settle in the region and then establish new *santhie* (villages), often within 0.5 or 3 km of the initial village: the dense occupation of space was part of the political strategy for claiming the right over the forest, to the detriment of the local population, whose nomadic herding was not recognised as a form of exploitation

The Anambé area was opened up to large investors, such as the great Mouride marabouts, within the framework of the GOANA plan (Great Agricultural Offensive for Food and Abundance) in 2008, projects that further exemplify the inability to meet the state's goal to structure a production capacity able to face the growing internal demand.

[107] Samba Lala, Yiri Koy 8/03/2020

[108] Nova, Suturé, 05/03/2020

"If you do not know the network, it is almost impossible to get a plot: you need to know the right people. They gave me only one plot (1.25 ha). If you know the right people, then you can get 5 plots even without moving. This is a problem. I live here, and I had only one plot, and yet some people are not from here and they have more than 50 plots. They cultivate with the right tools, while I have just the rice to feed my family [...] Even the President of the Union, he only lends money to his friends. If you are not with him, or you do not have your own tools, it is almost impossible to cultivate here. And today a marabout from Medina Gounass cultivates here, and another one who comes from Touba: they have many plots. It is so unfair."[109]

In a context where uncertainty is created by several factors, such as land pressure, perception of the climate change, the biennial reallocation of plots, the fragile credit systems, and the risk being unequally distributed between State and farmers, international mobility becomes a viable solution to reverse the situation. As Mamadou, another return migrant from Kandia, told me:

"If you do not have money and you do not have anybody who supports you, you cannot live here, especially if you see those who are not from here getting to work and invest here. You cannot stay like that, no matter how difficult it will be. You have to go."[110]

The evolution of transnational mobility

The Fulakunda society in the Velingara department saw international mobility as a way of facing the cultural, social and economic transformations which characterised the last 50 years[111]. The development of family "geographic capital"[112] was fundamental in determining the economic and

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[109] Sadio, Kandia, 19/11/2019
[110] Mamadou, Kandia, 19/11/2019
[111] As already said for the population of Futa Toro: "*Money and climate crises have pushed back the traditional mechanisms of compensation, livestock loan and mutual aid [...] creating the conditions for external assistance, particularly from the state. Indeed, recent droughts have pushed many families to monetary migration. [...] The cash income from migration or non-pastoral activities allows, among other things, to buy heifers. At the same time, the goats are multiplied for milk sales. Diversification of income sources allows better savings and increases the herd [...] If therefore the herd retains its usual functions of jealously guarded wealth and social reference, on the other hand it is less and less resistant to the pressure of increasingly numerous, diverse and pressing monetary needs. This creates the conditions for the emergence of what we might call neo-pastoral capitalism. This concerns all the processes of training and operating commercial herds entrusted to salaried shepherds [...] the Fulɓe way of life and economy have largely lost their spatial support. The current changes in the environment are increasingly calling into question traditional Fulɓe psychology and culture. Traditional values are grafted or opposed by new values based on wealth, on a new form of alienation of the individual and of goods. The dowry in money, for example, overtakes the dowry in bovines. The Pilgrimage to Mecca takes on symbolic value. New consumer goods are entering the villages: tea, sugar, tobacco, alcohol, transistors, furniture, non-plant building materials (cement, corrugated iron), enameled or plastic utensils, cast iron pot, kerosene lamp, cart...*" (Ba 1982, pp.366-370)
[112] As expressed by Marzieh Kaivanara in a critical review of the existing literature on this term, "*geographic capital as a derivation of Bourdieu's theory could be open to broad appropriation and interpretation. It can be considered as a separate form of capital highlighting the capacity and power of spaces and geographies, which are unequally distributed among social groups. This is a capacity that brings into play geographic resources that have a specific impact in terms of*

social conditions resulting from these changes. The wealthiest people I met during my fieldwork in Velingara belong to geographically scattered families. In addition to having one or two migrants abroad, they also have either a teacher or a civil servant in Velingara, Kolda, or Tambacounda, and a relative in Dakar who could be the *njatigi* (host) for the ones who study either in high school or at university, or who are looking for work; although they lived in Velingara, they cultivate some of the family's plots of land in the village of origin during the *hivernage* (wet season), or they own cattle which are kept by other members of the family; some of them have also relatives who are well integrated into development arenas, such as the Anambé basin, where they could easily get one or two plots for them, or any relatives, to grow rice in case they wanted to earn some extra money.

The importance given to the construction of a good reserve of "geographic capital" is also behind the expansion of Velingara. The presence of high schools and administrative and economic facilities, and the opportunity presented by rapid urban growth, made Velingara a place where it was convenient to have "part of the family".

The *laawol ley* started to be very popular in the middle of the 1990s due to the effects of the devaluation of the CFA, which gave a greater purchasing power to remittances, the long effects of the structural adjustment reforms which made the Libyan migration policies also perceptible in Velingara, and the spread of communication technologies and media, as most of the district delegates told me:

> *"Migration started 50 years ago, but after the Libyan crisis in 2011 there were at least 100 young people who immediately left – only from this district – and people are still leaving nowadays. I cannot tell you exactly how many of them are in Libya, repatriated or dead, so high the intensity of the movements in the last years has been. Almost all of the people who returned have left again to try their destiny again. Another period with a lot of departures was during the alternation between Diouf and Wade, around the 2000s. But when Wade took power, he made agreements with the European partners to bring the Senegalese migrants back. So, in 2002 he created the OMEGA plan and, later, the REVA plan."[113]*

> *"Illegal migration in this district started around 2005-2007, but movement to other African countries was always present. I had lived in Nigeria for 12 years doing business. When I was there, migrants came there to look for papers, visas, plane tickets: at that time the legal route was good. It was easy to go to Spain from there, but it was around 1989-90… Previously, all*

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equality. In this sense, geographic capital can be related to rare goods, is subject to competition, and has the capacity to bestow power on the holder. It can also be conceptualized in relation to other forms of capital, as symbolic capital in a field where material space is at stake or as the means that brings out the hidden quality of other forms of capital and allows an individual to gain recognition or legitimation" (Kaivanara 2020, p.606). I use this term to refer to the geographical dislocation of a network to which a subject can have access in order to gain access to other forms of capital.
[113] Thiankang 1 District Delegate, Velingara, Novembre 2019

the migrants were regularised in Europe. But all the people who left in the last years did not have the same possibility."[114]

Many interviewed people claimed that envy, jealousy and lack of mutual aid had sentenced several young Fulɓe Fulakunda to the *laawol ley*, marking a difference with the other ethnic groups of the region, as expressed by the Thinakang 2 and Centre 1 district delegate, who gave a different perspective on one of the richest and one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Velingara:

> *"You ask me if there are differences between Fulɓe and Sarakulleeɓe. Well, I remember having heard once on the news that there was a Sarakulleeɓe in a ship who died at sea. Most of the casualities were Fulɓe."*[115]

> *"Wolof and Sarakulleeɓe people seldom do the* laawol ley *because if they have a relative in Europe who is in a good position, he will do anything to bring them to Europe, too. For them, migration is like a chain. They help each other. That is why Sarakulleeɓe and Wolof groups dominate migration, unlike us, the Fulɓe: we do not travel a lot because we lack means."*[116]

In a society still living "in the shadow of slavery" (Bellagamba 2017), where the distinction between Fulɓe rimɓe (nobles) and jyaaɓe (slaves), although not expressed, is still there beneath the surface, social differences could re-emerge in new ways, fostering a feeling of envy which made most of the Fulɓe I interviewed complain that there was no solidarity for fear that others would *"earn more than me"*. This envy is clearly perceptible in family contexts, mostly between brothers of different mothers, while migratory success can overturn the age hierarchy even among "brothers of the milk" (Dupire 1963, p.220). The story of how Musa financed his journey in 2013 is an example:

> *"I stole my elder brother's money. He is in Spain. He sent me a sum to build a house here, but I used it to depart with a friend. It was a secret between the two of us. We left without saying anything, and then we called from Niger, saying we needed money because we had run out.*

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[114] Sinthiang Aidara District Delegate, Velingara, Novembre 2019
[115] Thiankang 2 District Delegate, Velingara, Novembre 2019
[116] Centre 1 District Delegate, Velingara, Novembre 2019. The Château d'eau and Samba 15 ans district delegates have a similar opinion, too: *"There are differences between the ethnic groups. Amongst us, the Fulɓe, there is jealousy: if someone sees someone else who leaves and is successful, immediately he wants to leave and be like him. Sarakulleeɓe have more patience: if somebody goes abroad legally, he waits till he can bring someone else."* (Château d'eau, Velingara, October 2019)
"Of course, sometimes there is envy, but also what we call imitation: your brother, your friend, or your neighbour left, and, on his return, you saw what he did, and you feel so in pain. Whenever you are in your life, you take the courage to go, and to try to do like he did. Even when there are possibilities to work here, over there it is always better: there is where you earn, so you can build your life there, and change the situation of the family here. This is the only reason that pushed me to go" (Samba 15 ans District Delegate, Velingara, October 2019).

My friend's mother helped us, to make us come back, but for the second time we did as we wanted, continuing to Libya."[117]

Transnational mobility has led to a renegotiation of the places, roles and possibilities of individuals in the Fulakunda society. Transnational travellers *"are part of this space of economic liberalism where money is at the centre of all activities"* (N'Gaïde 2003, p.730), as a means of social "poaching", to go beyond the historical mechanisms of social stratification. Notwithstanding this, transnational mobility has created a new social hierarchy which is no longer based on the *iwdi* (genealogical origin) and blood, but still on the public demonstration of difference. Economic power and the freedom to go to and come back from Europe have become the conditions of a new social position, for individuals and their families. As expressed by Bakary, the president of the Kandia Youth Council:

> *"Today migration is creating something similar to what there was during the time of slavery, in the sense that families with migrants often consider themselves to be superior. This is the reason that drives young people to leave, especially the more* débrouillard *(resourceful) because it is on those people that the family relies the most. This pushes young people to leave, and those who return with money put their families above the others."[118]*

The *laawol ley* became the way of hitting the jackpot, a *joni joni* (quick) way to earn the means for a good life, and of trying one's chance (*arsike*), the opposite of the *seeda seeda* (slow) solutions, such as a possible public job as a teacher, or setting up a local business. As Madou Ba phrased it:

> *"We live in a rural city but it has been a long time now that the main activity of children is going to school. It is different from the village space: from the moment an individual goes to school, before being able to finish the elementary school he has the appetite to go further. In our heads, we have a different destiny from being just farmers. Hence, children need to study till their baccalaureate, to be sure they have something. Here young people have two paths: the intellectual path and the sea, often with the help of a mother or an uncle"[119].*

Even though the intellectual path and the path of the desert and the sea are not always exclusive, it is true that all the returning migrants I interviewed were poorly educated, and most of them had quit school after a few years of studying. As the *laawol ley* becomes harder, more dangerous and less profitable, in the public debate schooling has become a real alternative to migration as a path to a good future, which could guarantee the means of success. However, *seeda seeda* solutions often appear

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[117] Musa, Nemataba, 21/10/2020
[118] Bakary, Kandia, 25/01/2020
[119] Madou Ba, Velingara, 28/11/2019

very daunting. With regard to school, families cannot always afford to educate their numerous children. Moreover, the overcrowded elementary classrooms and the very limited employment opportunities for recent graduates represent the points of departure and of arrival of a long-term investment which does not always pay off. The lack of school equipment and of official birth records (which are compulsory for accessing high school) are just some of the causes of children's slow rate of progress in school and frequent school dropouts[120]. This situation is well expressed in the neighbourhoods of Marewé and Sinthiang; Afia told me:

> *"There are some young people who want to go in for the baccalaureate, but there is a whole file to provide, and most of them get stuck in the procedure for getting the necessary papers. I know a guy who wanted to do the BFM but he could not because of the birth certificate, and another who wants to go to university, but he had problems with his documents. Sometimes you must prove your nationality and they ask for a certificate of origin for which the father's signature is required. Now, you can imagine someone who has lost his parents a long time ago, ... this pushes him to quit school and to look for opportunities elsewhere."[121]*

> *"Problems come from parents. Beside the lack of civil status documents, imagine a family that has to provide school equipment for all the children. For instance, a girl wants to study, so in the early years the father sells farm equipment for that. And the second year again: in order to pay the school fees, the family sells agricultural equipment, remaining in a regrettable state. Indeed, you need to have farm equipment to let the children eat. So, they end up asking the girl to drop out of school to get married."[122]*

Locally, running a profitable business is also made difficult by structural factors, such as the lack of bank loans (and those that are available often have an interest rate of up to 15%), and by cultural reasons, such as the lack of trust in building a group enterprise for men and by the intense pressure of the financial requests from family networks. As Demba Mballo, the owner of the Hotel Lewal at the border between Velingara and Sare Coly Salle, told me, one must close his eyes and his ears and keep on working to run a business in Velingara. Demba left for France as a student in 1987, and in 2009 he decided to come back to realise his dream and open a hotel in Velingara[123]:

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[120] The last PDC of Velingara reports 3,352 boys and 3,379 girls enrolled in the elementary school, while there are 702 boys and 343 girls at the high school. In recent years, the higher rate of dropouts in the female population has slowly decreased under the impetus of the national law on gender equality (2010-11 of 28 May 2010). However, there is an important difference between Velingara and the villages of the department, due to early marriage and other cultural legacies that still see female school investment as unprofitable

[121] Marewé District Delegate, Velingara, October 2019

[122] Sinthiang Hafia District Delegate, Velingara, October 2019

[123] An interview with Demba Mballo was also realised by the *Bureau de Mise à Niveau des entreprises* and it is available on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ex-_gvkNQmo

"When I negotiated the price with the bank the first time, they told me it was too much. They even asked me if I were sure that I was really going to use the land. So, I took all the money, more or less 2,000 euros, and I left. Now, the same people who told me before that I had no chance of doing anything profitable, they ask me for money. So, I took a loan of 5 million in another bank, with my elder brother because they did not want to give me money if I was by myself. However, I am the one paying it back. Nevertheless, when we took the money the mayor had already changed his mind and allocated the land to someone else. I lost 5 million like that. So, I left Velingara. I transported all the bricks here to the municipality of Sare Coly Salle. Here, the mayor gave me the land and now he gets all the taxes I pay. I went to work a little bit more in France to earn some extra money, and then I built my first five small houses. There were highs and lows, energy problems, I could not provide all the comforts that you see today, but projects must be done little by little, that is what I learnt in France. If you have a project you cannot be in a hurry to do it, and you have to tighten your belt."[124]

The possibility of maintaining freedom in transnational mobility was a key factor in tackling the constraints he had to face in the local context:

Since 2009, this is the first year I have staff I can trust. This is a general problem in Senegal: young people are only interested in their salary, but not in the success of the company. Either they are lazy or they are not honest. They do not understand that I do not earn what they earn because I have not finished repaying my investment yet. Here you have to adapt to the reality, you have to know the context and you need to hold your nerve. Indeed, you have to close your ears and close your eyes and keep your head calm. All the people here want to build a house, but that is not what success is about. In 2012, the magistrates who came for the elections found only five houses, so they preferred to stay elsewhere. I told them that I understood, and that we would meet again for the following elections. In 2019 they wanted to come here, but they found that European Union observers had booked the rooms a month before, so there was no room for them."[125]

Transnational departures feed on an inter-generational debate: fathers are often accused of having squandered everything without leaving enough for their children or of having worked hard all their life for nothing. The monetisation of the economy has accentuated the crisis of authority of the heads of the family (*jom galle*), as demonstrated by the disappearance of the *hourorde* – the circle of stones where the adult men of the family gather and where the father scheduled the next day's activities – from the houses in Velingara. The decision to leave is seldom made by the head of the family as part of a plan to diversify the income of the family, as was previously more common. Travellers finance the *laawol ley* either autonomously and secretly or using the money given by their mothers. The story of the Nasurullay District Delegate's son is a striking example:

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[124] Demba Mballo, Sare Coly Salle, 18/02/2020
[125] Demba Mballo, Sare Coly Salle, 18/02/2020

"My third son left in secrecy from me. He called me when he was already out of the country ... and me, as a father, I cannot do anything. He never expressed the desire to leave. I opened the tailor's shop for him here in Velingara; he had worked there for three years, but he left anyway. For two years, he only called to say he was outside Senegal. Now, we know he is in Morocco. I have another son, he took the baccalaureate, he went to Dakar, he did two years of university and he decided to go to Canada, and we did everything to send him there. If the other had talked to me, we would have found an arrangement."[126]

The financing of the *laawol ley* can take place through the savings obtained either by selling the products of the harvest season or by a short period working in Dakar, or in another Senegalese city, and then through the numerous jobs offered in the informal economy along the route. Another widespread option is the sale of one or more head of cattle or plots of land. The progressive impoverishment of the households and the increase in the value of land in Velingara make the invested capital difficult to recover, once lost. The effects of international mobility on the urban context of Velingara are evident even at first glance. In the central districts, round huts with thatched roofs have been almost totally replaced by brick buildings, often owned by people living abroad and by Sarakulleɓe families, who started the local house rental market to satisfy the demand of public officials and other workers coming from outside. Round huts became more common in peripheral districts, where modern buildings of different architectural styles are freely erected as public monuments to personal success. These buildings are interspersed with piles of bricks, the profiles of unfinished structures and ruins, all symbols of aborted transnational plans. Indeed, transnational mobility and its stories are part of the landscape. Defined by their material and ideological instability (Melly, 2016, p.86), houses are the clear image of the unfolding of the individual adventure. On one hand, piles of bricks and unfinished buildings, which are left on plots of land in Parcelles des Enseignants, Thiankang 2, or Sinthiang Wambabe, are visible signs of exploitation which are left there in order to maintain the right to own the land; on the other hand, they are the image of a limbo or graveyard of hundreds of life projects. They are images of imaginaries that were broken in the desert, Libyan prisons, the sea, or in the endless illegality in Europe.

Even housing follows a socio-economic hierarchy: while building in one's village is the first step to claim a new economic status, building in Dakar, the capital, becomes a great sign of personal affirmation and a valuable investment for the future. This perspective and the difficulties in managing

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[126] Nasurullay District Delegate, Velingara, Novembre 2019

a house so far away were also part of the conversations I had with the *jarga* of Sare Sukande and the Sinthiang Aidara district delegate:

> *"My boy supports me very well from Canada. He bought a lot of land in Dakar. Most of the migrants in the neighbourhood buy in Dakar. First, they buy here in Velingara, they build and they rent them out, then they buy in Dakar. Even the guy here, he works in Niger and he bought a plot of land here in Velingara, which he hasn't built on yet, and also in Dakar where he has a building. Even local deputies and politicians buy in Dakar."*[127]

> *"Like others, I had built a house in Dakar, at Golf Nord, to rent it out. However, there were always problems getting money from the tenants. I could not go there every month to get 100 thousand francs, so I sold the house. I bought the house for 22 million and sold it for 32 million".*[128]

To some extent, buildings can be compared to what cattle used to represent, that is, the social and economic potential of a family, or an individual. However, nowadays people prefer to invest in buildings, due to the fact that they are perceived as more durable, less subject to the uncertainties of climate, diseases, and theft. Moreover, buildings are easier to control and do not need anyone you can trust, as clearly explained by the Sinthiang Aidara district delegate:

> *"They invest mainly in the buildings for renting them out or to bring the family from the village or for the children who come to study. There are some who buy herds, but it is necessary to have someone you rely on to keep your cows. And this is not easy to find here".*[129]

Images from the outskirts of Velingara 1

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[127] Nasurullay District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019
[128] Sare Sukande Djarga, Sare Sukande, 23/01/2020
[129] Sinthiang Aidara District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019

Images from the outskirts of Velingara 2

Images from the outskirts of Velingara 3

Images from the outskirts of Velingara 4

Migration nowadays

Nowadays, the Upper Casamance preserves its peculiar mobility patterns. Although statistical data are very difficult to trust and collect, especially as far as transnational mobility is concerned, the 2013 *Recensement général de la population et d'habitat, de l'agriculture et de l'élevage* (ANSD 2016) reported a negative net migration rate in the years 2008-2013 (-0,7% and -3,857 people, with 17,398 arrivals and 21,255 departures). Between 2008-2013, Kolda received 5.8% of overall Senegalese internal migration, and 5.4% of total international arrivals, mainly men from other West African nations (2,384, of whom 1,324 registered in Velingara). Among the 8,100 registered departures, (7,420, of whom 4,489 were from the department of Velingara), 2,798 were headed for Western African countries, while 2,475 decided to migrate towards Europe, confirming the historical[130]*"predominance of emigration to the closer countries"* (Lessault and Flahaux 2013). With regard to internal migration, some destinations have maintained their appeal, such as Dakar (59.9% of migrants in 1988; 59.5% in 2002; 56% in 2013), while other destinations have registered a decrease, such as Ziguinchor (22% in 2002; 11% in 2012), and Tambacounda (7.5% in 2002, 4% in 2013). On the other hand, other internal destinations have become more popular, such as Thiès (7.7% in 2002; 12% in 2013). Temporary extra-department mobility during the dry season is reported to be still a widespread family adaptation strategy (Delaunay et al. 2016; Wade et al, 2017). People coming to the Kolda region are mainly from Ziguinchor (15% in 2002; 14% in 2013), Tambacounda (7.4% in 2002;13% in 2012), Kaolack (27.6% in 2002; 13% 2012), Sédhiou (13% in 2012) and Kaffrine (10% in 2012).

Nevertheless, nowadays mobility trajectories have become more complex (see Ba 2018) due to several new factors, such as new restrictions on transnational mobility, especially towards Europe, climate change, soil erosion (IRD-IPAR 2017; Wade et al. 2017), and access to information and communication technology. At a national level, other destinations have started to become popular, such as the Arabian Gulf (see Ndiaye 2018), or South America (see Vammen 2019). The land routes towards Northern African countries and Europe can take advantage of the new road infrastructure, and bus companies which leave from the Gare des Beaux Maraîchers in Dakar cross all the regions of the groundnut basin before arriving in Tambacounda. Here they pick up people coming from the

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[130] The EMUS inquiry (ANSD 1993) reported that 73.2% of migrants from the whole region headed to other Western African countries compared to 19.2% to Europe and 2.6% to North America. Ten years later, in 2002, RGPHAE registered 45.1% to West Africa countries, 34.1% to Europe, and 2.7% to North America (Lessault and Flahaux 2013)

southern regions before continuing to Bamako. Nowadays this international line stops in Velingara twice per week.

Moreover, the perception and the concept of climate change (spread by television programmes, websites and international cooperation) foster the vision of long-distance mobility as a necessary strategy of resilience to deal with the future situation (Diallo and Renou 2015): shorter rainy seasons, increasing temperatures, new livestock diseases, and lower levels of fisheries and of soil productivity (Wade et al. 2017) are part of the contemporary life experience of Fuladu. Meanwhile, as long as the Upper Casamance remains one of the most fertile regions of the country, it is vulnerable to social phenomena such as land grabbing, over-exploitation, and increasingly unequal access to land.

Ultimately, the quantitative study *Groupe d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Migrations* run by the Université Gaston Berger of Saint Louis (GERM 2018) defined the average profile of the contemporary traveller of the *laawol ley*: male, poorly educated (in Kolda region only 29% have the BFEM), often employed in agriculture and livestock farming (in Kolda, respectively 61% and 17% of the 235 people interviewed), not married (59.1%), between 20 and 30 years old, with the dream of going to Italy (30%), and with at least one friend already living abroad. He receives financial aid from the family (even though 40% declared to have received no kind of help), he is mainly moving to look for new economic possibilities, in order to help the family and to finance a future economic activity he has already in mind.

Despite the fact that migration still remains mainly male-dominated, female presence in transnational mobility has increased in the last 20 years. Female mobility is historically linked to marriage. The patrilocality of Fulɓe society has always implied that female mobility and marriage choice constitutes the most important chance for a woman to improve her social condition. This is the reason behind the "migrant fever" which has affected fathers and daughters in the last years: successful migrants or adventurers of the *laawol ley* have become the best choice for a husband, in the hope of obtaining economic advantages through international family reunification. Indeed, this fever has become another push factor for boys to try the route, due to humiliating situations such as a bride-to-be backing out of a marriage promise or the breaking of marriage ties between first cousins, in favour of a migrant abroad.

The interviews I conducted with several women showed a lower interest in the figure of the still-not-affirmed migrant as a suitable husband, mainly due to two different reasons, primarily the fact that men have started to refuse to bring their wives to Europe any more. Most of the men I talked to told me that migrants are scared that once their wives were in Europe, they would lose control over them.

Several stories depict women as unreliable. These "I-know-a-guy" stories are set in Europe, in an unspecified place, and often have as the main character a married girl who pretends to have been beaten up by her husband in order to obtain special protection from the police and to ask for a divorce to marry a wealthier European guy. Secondly, having witnessed the situation of a friend or a sister married to a migrant, most of the women have realised that being a migrant's wife is not as wonderful as they imagined: sexual abstinence and constant control both by his and her relatives are not even repaid by the few amounts of money sent them from Europe, as reported by two ladies leading important local groups of women:

> *"When a girl marries a migrant, she has a lot of problems. First, if two lovers do not see each other for a long time, love disappears. In addition, she is constantly under surveillance: sometimes some people call her husband telling him that she is going to someone else's house. And sometimes it is not even true. It can also have an impact on her sexual life: a woman cannot stay 10 or 15 years waiting for her partner to come back, that is why you have cases of extra-marital pregnancy. Choosing a migrant was only a matter of money. We had a moment when all the girls would have loved to marry a migrant, but nowadays they prefer someone who stays because this will save them from pain. If you love to have sex with your partner, and he is not there, then you end up cheating on him, and then you get pregnant. However, women should always preserve their dignity and moral integrity, that is being faithful and honest to their husband."[131]*

> *"You cannot wait for a man for ten years! It is not good for a woman to stay without having sex, especially in her child-bearing age. But many women remain faithful and after five years you see that they are sick, and the disease is caused by the need of a man because it has been too long since they had sex. Then, even if we take her to the gynaecologist, he will not be able to do anything."[132]*

Women's sexual needs are considered natural as well as a duty for their husbands. The public discourse, therefore, swings between moral reprobation of the act of cheating and blame towards a husband who has abandoned his wife, not satisfying her sexually or economically for too long a period of time.

Nevertheless, in the last twenty years, women have gained a more active attitude towards transnational mobility. Monetisation of the economy and temporary mobility towards Dakar and other towns have allowed women to acquire greater economic weight and more freedom in movement. Moreover, NGO projects, higher rates of female schooling, the Senegalese national law about gender equality, and the

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[131] Fatou Bintou, Velingara, 09/02/2020
[132] Madame Sidibé, Velingara, 07/03/2020

arrival of western television media and satellite channels convey a different and more westernised representation of women. These changes are claimed by Mariama, the women's president of the municipality in Linkering:

> *"Women are departing today. Why? Because school has awakened girls' consciousness. We understood that a woman can do everything a man can do. Previously, a girl did not even think about leaving the village, but now we put them at the same level as a guy: if a young boy can be president or deputy, then, why could not a woman? If we talk about competence, we are on the same level. Sometimes girls do not wish to leave, but they do it for their family. However, if a girl has one of her relatives abroad, especially a sister who is lucky enough to marry a migrant, she might think that her sister is going to help her if she tries the route. So, this is pushing a lot of girls to try to migrate by themselves. Another reason is the fact that women who have been abroad, when they come back with their husbands, arouse a feeling of emulation. Besides, a young girl who comes back without success is a very rare case. We have never heard about a young girl who has been repatriated."*[133]

Female transnational mobility is also favoured by the clear awareness of the easier access to Europe for women due to the representations of the female figure as a vulnerable subject in the transnational arena. Indeed, they meet with the approval of society. Women who leave are often described as *rewɓe susuɓe*[134] (brave women) capable of preserving their honour not only through premarital virginity, and enduring family difficulties patiently and with dedication, but through an active role in the economic context. In any case, women travelling the *laawol ley* are still an exception in Velingara, as demonstrated by the turmoil aroused by the news of a girl's journey a few months before my arrival in Velingara. In reporting what he had heard about the story, the Thiankang 1 District delegate exposed the widespread perception that, despite the dangers of the route, women are more likely to be welcome in European countries and, once there, to regularise their situation:

> *"Many women travel the* laawol ley *nowadays. I have a niece who is now in Spain, after having lived for four years in Morocco and having had a daughter there. She had made the route all by herself. She was married, she divorced, and she heard that her brother had just been repatriated from Libya, the next day she left. The family realised her departure only when she was already in Morocco, where she looked for papers to go to Spain. Now she has arrived, and she is building a house here. If she had been a boy, it would have been more complicated because often women are quicker on the land route. This story was an inspiration for other women to leave, and I heard about some others leaving their husbands or even who refuse to look for a husband. If they have the chance, they leave."*[135]

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[133] Mariama, Linkering, 24/11/2020
[134] Fatou Djaite, Velingara, 31/01/2020
[135] Thiankang 1 District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019

Women have also been targeted by international organisations for awareness-raising projects against irregular migration, in order to prevent mothers financing their children's travel.

Another phenomenon linked to international mobility is the return of the first generation of transnational migrants, who have reached the age for retirement in Europe. They are mainly people who left during the 1980s; they found a job, and then often brought their wife and children with them. They had been living between two countries, and now they exploit their transnational condition conferred by the pension and a passport from a European country. They move alternately between Senegal, where their family of origin is, and Europe, where their sons have planned their lives. Demba, a retired migrant I met in November 2019 in Sinthiang Houlata, told me about the difficulties he had in creating a sense of belonging in his children and a link with his homeland:

> *"They grew up there, they only know there. They have their school and friends there. When we are at home, we speak our language: my first two children speak Fulfulde perfectly, and I taught them our traditions and Islam. However, they are grown up now, and I do not know whether they practise... we talk on the phone: we do not live together any more, but when I talk to them, they tell me: "Yes, yes, that-that", but I do not know whether it is true or not."*[136]

What will be the effects of this emotional detachment on the local family economy? How is the concept of the transnational family reconfigured in these second generations? Are the second generations still willing to invest in development projects in an arena that they no longer perceive as theirs? What will be the effect on the geographic capital built up over the years? These are just some of the questions a further study should investigate.

Conclusions

The *laawol ley* is another chapter in the history of mobilities that has always characterised Velingara and its department. The local experience of the Central Mediterranean route must be framed within a historical process, starting from the time of colonisation, when the very concept of transnational mobility entered the lexicon of the local population, along with the habitus of crossing borders in order to deal with problematic situations. The development of Velingara has thus always been confronted with a relationship with a "nearby elsewhere", created by the political division of the ancient Fuladu, and a "distant elsewhere", whose appealing image was shaped by the return of the first Sarakulleeɓe diamond hunters in the 1970s.

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[136] Demba, Sinthiang Houlata, 22/11/2019

The elsewhere has become embedded in the local landscape and life: from the merchandise in the shops and the cars with the BNJ plates (indicating Banjul, the capital) to the large houses under construction, the movies and the European football matches broadcast on the TV. Meanwhile, the capability of reaching the "elsewhere" is an important form of accumulation of capital and the sign of one's new position in the always contested and challenged social hierarchy. Many complex reasons are intertwined: the individual's need to find strategies to make do and to be valued within society and the family, the uncertainty created by the lack of transparency and access to development arenas, the unemployability of young people leaving universities, the perception of environmental and social insecurity, the development of technological and road infrastructures – all these constitute the background of a new historical chapter.

Nowadays, the increasingly shared experience of unsuccessful migratory projects represents a new stage of this history of mobilities. As the "elsewhere" becomes more easily accessible by imagination, it becomes increasingly difficult to reach physically. Local mobility has always adapted to different economic, social and political conditions. How the people in the Kolda region will adapt to this new situation would be an interesting starting point for a future study.

The economy of Velingara: trends and activities

Two conflicting narratives always clashed in the interviews I carried out during my fieldwork. The first is the recurrent complaint of the return migrants that "there is nothing here, nothing but baasal (poverty)", and that they would never earn anything by staying put in the Kolda region. The second narrative, repeated by NGOs, government and international organisations, described Velingara as a land full of opportunities which local people failed to recognise or exploit. From the ethnographic analysis, the economy of Velingara appears still shaped to a great extent by the different occurrences which take place in the rainy and dry seasons, the cultural perception of some activities and the organisation of social events. However, new dynamics have emerged, painting the background of the scene in which returns after unsuccessful migration take place. Women have conquered new spaces in the public sphere, while imitation and monetisation have replaced collective forms of agricultural work. Chicken farming, "taxi moto" and forest exploitation have become the activities which characterise the local society of "getting by", while peasants are abandoning cotton in favour of groundnuts and new ideas of agro-business. Eventually, international migration continues to shape the local market through various formal or undetected systems of money transfer.

Rural life still gives a rhythm to the economy of Velingara, characterised by a great difference between the months of the rainy season (June, July, August and September), when money is scarce and families are constantly engaged in the activities of the fields, and the months from December to April, when the first sales of the crops give a new energy to all the commercial activities. The temporality of agriculture is intertwined with a socio-cultural temporality, marked by social ceremonies (baptisms, weddings and funerals) and religious events (such as Tabaski, Korité, Magal, and Gamou). These two temporalities regulate the circulation of goods and money within Velingara and its department along with other no less important factors: school expenses and school holidays, medical prescriptions and health needs, water and electricity bills, returns and departures of seasonal or long-term migrants. To deal with these "daily exceptional" issues, the local population has developed different strategies. For instance, chickens, goats, rams and cows constitute "saving on the hoof" which makes money always available thanks to the market in Velingara and the various *luumo* all around. Then, the arrival of chemicals and insecticides which enable the storing of the harvested groundnuts allows peasants to wait for the most favourable time to sell (from July to September). These new strategies present some risks of which social actors are aware (groundnuts may go to waste) or unaware (health problems

caused by the use of insecticides). Taking risks has become an unavoidable part of the effort to get out of an economy characterised by low revenues and a matter of subsistence rather than of capital accumulation. The *laawol ley* is one of these risks.

Seeɗa seeɗa and *joni joni*: a different gendered approach to economic activities

The needs created by the modern economy, western models of education, NGO interventions, the Senegalese law on gender equality and new media imaginaries have contributed to making women active protagonists in the public economic sphere. Women have always played an important role within Fulɓe families, running crucial livelihood activities such as growing rice, milking cows, and tending poultry and other small animals, in addition to the essential domestic tasks, from fetching water and grinding millet flour to cooking and childcare.

Indeed, women have a central role in safeguarding the honour of the family, not only through displaying a modest and chaste attitude, but also with their ability to cope with economic difficulties without publicly exposing the family's problems, finding solutions to back their husband up and providing for the children. Women have always maintained a certain degree of independence in the *halpulaaren* context (Dupire 1963, p.48; De Bruijn 1997, p.640-643), maintaining a strong connection with their family of origin and retaining ownership of some cows within the collective herd, even though they were managed by the *jom galle*. After the 1970s, women managed to carve out independent economic spaces in Velingara, as we have seen in the case of regional *luumos*, and nowadays most of them are involved in economic activities which have an important role in the family budget. As Tullay, the president of women's social advancement group, explained to me:

> *"In the past, women were not educated, so when a man told them to do something, they did it without any hesitation. We are lucky to live in a period when women are educated. In the past, women could have their own means, such as goats or chicken, but they did not have any control over them: if a man needed it, he sold it. Nowadays, we have control of our means and we support each other."*[137]

The female economy in Velingara is based on a *seeɗa seeɗa* (little by little) attitude, and on the ability to organise collective mutual-aid groups. The *tontines* – groups of women who periodically gather together to pool an amount of money for individual needs (see Guérin 2006) – are the most widespread

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[137] Tullay, Velingara, 28/01/2020

informal microfinance organisations. In Velingara there are several *tontines*, often arranged and managed by a *femme leader*, a woman who, thanks to her economic or political success, has become a reference figure for the development of the social and economic role of other women.

A good example of a *tontine* is the one organised by the HLM district delegate. On the day set for their meeting, each woman brings a sum of CFA 10,000 to share. All the money is collected in a calabash, an object traditionally and symbolically linked to women and their domestic role, but also a symbol of wealth and prosperity which is also used for practice of divination[138]. In the case of the HLM *tontine*, the money redistribution is done either by drawing lots or by a collective decision, depending on the urgency of members' needs. Deciding by drawing lots, as the neighbourhood delegate explained to me, is based on accepting God's decision. The *tontine* has its own secretary who writes down who, when and how many people paid the quota and took money from the *tontine*, in an official register. This way of managing the *tontine* is a sign of women's present-day greater competence in the administrative and economic fields, they claim. Joining this kind of female association provides women with a source of economic and moral support in case of need:

1:      *"The tontine is an idea born in Dakar. If you win, you can go to Mecca, pay for a vehicle, build a house, or open a shop. With the money you can pay for the merchandise, and then you can start. There are women who started a chicken farm, a soap factory, a local trade activity, and this is only thanks to the* tontine*: with the* tontine *you can do a lot of things."*

2:      *"I had benefited from the* tontine *and with the money I started a poultry farm which today can take care of all the family's needs. We started fourteen years ago, but I have been doing the* tontine *since 1993. Once, I won CFA 450,000; it really helped me. Most of the women take care of their family needs thanks to the* tontine*. And the husband comes to thank me, and there is no shame in it."[139]*

The *tontine* requires continuous participation, under penalty of a social sanction:

"There is only one rule: to pay the CFA 10,000 subscription every month. Even if you do not have the luck to win the draw but you are in need you can take it anyway, as well as if you see another woman that is in need you can decide to give her what you have won. However, if you just partake for two or three months, even if your name comes out you will not get the money, because you have to participate longer in order to have benefits. The tontine *is a solidarity*

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[138] Sitting on a calabash and expressing a proposition can reveal whether a project will be realised. If the calabash remains intact, the wish will be granted. If it breaks, it will never come true.
[139] Women participating in the HLM *tontine*, Velingara, 25/11/2019

fund, interest-free credit. If you win, you take everything. The next time it will be for someone else. That is why you have to keep on participating, otherwise it is not fair."[140]

Various economic groups, often linked to agriculture and farming or trade, have also been set up for the promotion of women in recent years. As Tullay told me:

> *"In the commune of Velingara there are many groups of women who work in the fields. They created a departmental group called the* 'Fédération des Groupements de Promotion Féminine du Département de Vélingara' *(Federation of Women's Promotion Groups of the Department of Velingara). There is also a federation at a regional and national level. The groups are often divided by ethnicity, but when they meet in the departmental office, they come together as a whole. A project I remember was the one where women started to process local cereals in order to help women who do not have enough milk to breastfeed. They used a flour made from peanut paste, niebe* [black-eyed peas]*, and millet. Previously, they also did market gardening at the school, but then the number of students grew so much that now they had to build classes where they used to cultivate."*[141]

Similar experiences can be found throughout the department, such as in Linkering, where Binta, the president of the women of the municipality, organised a cleaning service to meet collective expenses:

> *"There are periods in the year when women's groups play a crucial role. During the rainy season all the women work in agriculture, and they gain the money to do the* tontine. *However, during the middle of the dry season, as they do not have any other sources of income but the harvest, they start other activities such as cleaning the village. When they arrive in front of someone's house, people give them something. In a day they can earn a lot of money, which is collected for all the groups' needs. Some managed to make a project of a chicken farm, through which they hold on until the following wet season."*[142]

Women's ability to build successful collective initiatives has started to attract the attention of NGOs, local development actors and people of the diaspora, as in the case of the *tontine* in the Centre district:

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[140] HLM District Delegate, Velingara, 25/11/2019. The same concept was expressed by Madame Kante, another femme leader who owns a shop in Velingara Centre: *"Women have always managed to be financially independent [...]. I started with the* tontines *in 1992, and now I still have my* tontine *in Nasurullay. The first group I created was in 1996 and it was named after the drink "Liza". With that group, I managed to earn more than 5 million CFA per month, and with that money we financed women's activities: it was all our money, not the money of the bank. However, I started with the* tontine *in 1992. When a woman did not pay, I did not bring her to justice, but I had my way so that she could no longer have credit or benefits anywhere. Being part of an association has many advantages. For example, when there are social events, like a wedding, you need to have a lot of money to cover the expenses of the celebration and the food. So, with that same group we bought 20 bowls, 100 seats and 40 dishes to rent, and with the money we earned, we gave credit to women who needed it."* (Madame Kante, Velingara, 09/03/2020)
[141] Tullay, Velingara, 28/01/2020
[142] Binta, Linkering, 24/11/2020

"Realising the success of the tontine*, the mayor managed to bring the women of the neighbourhood together and finance them with money from the diaspora (5 million CFA) to set up commercial activities. Once every three months, almost all the women get together to divide the total amount of money. Then they go to work with that money for another three months and, after that, they bring it back to the bank account of the association here at the BCEAO. They have just set up a small business with the peanut harvest. They bought a machine to transform the peanuts into a paste which they can send to Dakar and Ziguinchor to sell. As the money comes in, they put it in the bank, and they use it to continue working."*[143]

At the opposite end of the scale, men are more resistant to creating collective enterprises. This is due to a more individualistic attitude, mainly based on a pervasive lack of trust and a cultural heritage which considers the employer-employee relationship to be similar to the historical one between *jiyaaɓe* and *rimɓe*. As reported by two female leaders,

"Men only think about themselves: if they manage to earn some money, they look for another woman. Women have solidarity, and they stand up together in difficulties to deal with them, while for men it is rare. They do not participate in the tontine *because if they did, they would take the money to travel the* laawol ley*. Even when the group is mixed, it does not work, because men do not pay. They have not the same solidarity, and they want everything* joni joni (fast)*."*[144]

"Men do not have the patience to do it seeɗa seeɗa (little by little)*; they only wait for very profitable projects to do something. Women have a will and a patience that young men do not have. I can own CFA 150 today and wait for the day after to get other CFA 150, and so on, until I have thousands of francs. Men do not have this kind of mentality. They want everything right away, all in one shot that could solve their life."*[145]

This opinion is also confirmed by the words of Alpha Yaya, a young business graduate from the University of Dakar who recently decided to return to Velingara with the intention of opening a small business to produce and sell fruits and vegetables typical of northern Senegal:

"It is difficult even to find someone willing to share the business risk to start a win-win situation. Men do not make tontines *and associations like women. Everyone cares about himself. Young people are not educated, and they believe that to associate is a waste of time. And in addition, you know, here, a real man must not do what a woman does here. Men do not have this culture of working together. But now it is starting to change, because there are young*

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[143] Centre 1 district delegate, Velingara, November 2019
[144] Mariama, Velingara, 30/01/2020
[145] Madame Sidibé, Velingara, 06/03/2020. The same opinion was expressed by the Centre 1 district delegate: *"The NGOs prefer to give money to women, because women are easy to group, while men have no associations. Moreover, young men do not want to work. Nowadays, there are even women who are building houses with the money they make"* (Centre 1 district delegate, Velingara, November 2019).

people who are educated, so they know that collaboration is a win-win situation, and they look for business partners. However, here in Velingara it is new as a phenomenon."[146]

As a matter of fact, if women accept longer-term economic activities where they can earn *seeda seeda*, men are more attracted to activities that allow them to earn everything *joni joni* (fast). As Bellagamba (2013) already wrote about the Mandinka community of Gambia, even in a male-dominated society, experiences of masculinity and femininity change according to the subject's age, having a different impact on their respective needs and social roles. The trajectory of a man's life foresees the achievement of independence and a good economic capacity at a young age, in order to reach important goals for entering adulthood, such as marriage and setting up a new *galle* (compound). A man's social and economic importance reaches its peak between 30 and 50 years old, then it slowly declines towards old age as his children grow up and start to become independent. Women traditionally have a different life path, and they acquire more importance during old age, as Fatou, a woman recently elected to the town council, told me:

> *"Here, women cannot become independent except when their children have grown up. A woman's freedom necessarily depends on her children. It is when they grow up that she will stop going to the fields or looking for peanuts. We say* "debbo ko leggal": *a woman is like a plant and if she has children, they are her branches. And these branches will be able to produce fruit which will make the plant stronger."[147]*

Hence, different economic attitudes being gendered has cultural roots. Men's *joni joni* ways of thinking are linked to the fact that their social status is at stake in the early stages of life. By contrast, women's *seeda seeda* disposition is based on the fact that they do not feel this pressure, and their economic wellbeing lies in their children. As phrased by Mariama, the president of Women's Solidarity Club, and Madame Sidibé:

> *"A young man goes to work to bring food for the family. But when he is old, he cannot work any longer. Women become the ones in charge. The man does the work very early in life, but later, it is the woman who takes importance."[148]*

> *"What a man wants is to be a father, to have wives and children, to have a family to manage, and to build a beautiful building. And he wants it right away. That is it. But women do everything little by little, because we are for our children. The children are there, so we must*

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[146] Alpha Yaya, Velingara, 10/02/2020
[147] Fatou Djaite, Velingara, 31/01/2020
[148] Mariama, Velingara, 30/01/2020

manage their needs, rather than think of big projects. So, we must first think about their education, and that is what the tontine *is primarily about: to allow children to get a good education. These children will graduate, and thus you are free: when your children are successful, they will give you money, and you can think of big projects or a big house. But a man is more for today: to have land, a vehicle, to go and come back. They want it* joni joni *because they already feel responsible. When they see a successful neighbour, they want success, too. A woman doesn't have these problems; she can be friends with a woman of a better condition without feeling ashamed.''[149]*

This has an impact on the social dynamics that revolve around the *laawol ley.* Men see in the backway the possibility of getting ahead rapidly in a society where earning enough money to get married and set up a new household when they are still young is getting more difficult. Instead, mothers are often key players in financing their sons' journeys, hoping that they will be able to provide for them in the future.

The *laawol ley*: a choice embedded in the society of getting by

Money and new economic means have produced a new social reality, new behaviours and ways of negotiating one's own role in the Fulakunda society (N'Gaide, 2003). In this process of redefining and renegotiating roles and possibilities, some productive activities have lost their degrading moral connotation. Once, for instance, the production of charcoal, or the harvesting of dead wood, was considered a humble activity reserved for Fulɓe Futa migrants. Nowadays, on the contrary, both are considered valid income-generating tasks. As Mamadu Yero, a local logger, told me:

> *"The exploitation of wood was started by Malians and later by Guineans. The indigenous people did not like logging because it was too hard a job and, previously, it had negative connotations. But when they saw they could earn money out of it, they also started to exploit the forest. Once, Fulɓe Futa were called pejoratively* "ramasseur de kirine" (charcoal collectors). *Sometimes you could see loggers coming into a small village and the chief gave them an out-of-the-way place to stay. If they had no money, they relied on a family who used to give them something to eat. Once the work was done, they paid the family back with the money they had earned. As soon as they saw the money they could make, our parents decided to do the same."[150]*

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[149] Madame Sidibé, Velingara, 06/03/2020
[150] Mamadu Yero, Velingara, 20/02/2020

The growing importance of an individual income changed working relationships and the very concept of work. Unpaid[151] collective agricultural activities such as the *kilee* or the *wampagne* – forms of collective work which were organised by field owners at the time of sowing and harvesting – disappeared.

Nowadays, the possibility of earning money has become the yardstick of any activity: the herd on the savannah, once part of the education of young people, is often left to shepherds who are not part of the family, and the groundnut or rice fields are cultivated by the very low-cost labour of *navetanes*, coming mainly from Guinea Bissau.

Economic activities are judged through a "backward morality" more linked to the income they are capable of generating than to the activities themselves. This also applies to international mobility. The difference between a successful and unsuccessful migrant lies in the results: only the arrival in Europe, the construction of a beautiful house and the improvement of the economic conditions of the whole family state the courage and the honour of the migrant. Those who do not reach their goal are accused of not having been brave enough, no matter the terrible things they have been through.

Souleymane, an old man who also worked for the UN on several projects for the dissemination of human rights, told me two stories that highlight the importance of learning how to live in the contemporary Senegalese society of getting by. People must be able to endure without being discouraged by the judgement of others and to follow their own individual project, however humble it may appear in the beginning:

> *"All young people normally leave during the dry season to make some money in Dakar, and then they come back just before the rainy season with new clothes, a bicycle or other things to show what they have achieved. I once told a young man from the village not to leave. I advised him to collect straw which he would have then resold at the beginning of the rainy season when people normally re-roof their huts. And so, he spent the dry season collecting straw with his cart, and in May he sold it in Velingara for CFA 400. He earned CFA 600,000 in total, he went to Gambia, and he bought the same things as those who went to Dakar, and he still had 400,000 CFA left to help his family. He did not leave, he stayed with his family and earned even more.*
> *I will tell you another case. When they were deforesting the Anambé region to grow rice, there were two young people who gathered the roots of the fallen trees. All the other people used to make fun of them, calling them* occiobedadi [those who sweep the roots]. *Everyone made fun of them, even the girls, and when they went to drink tea, they said, 'Let's go drinking the tea of the occiobedadi!'. Nevertheless, they continued to work. And with that money they bought a lottery ticket: they won two and a half million. They split the money and said nothing to*

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[151] People who participated in this form of social solidarity, sometimes accompanied by the rhythm of musical instruments and songs, were rewarded with the food of the day or, sometimes, with a part of the harvest to take home

anyone, because otherwise everyone would have asked them for money. Anyway, they continued to work gathering roots because they were not convinced by the easy money: they told themselves that it was that humble work that allowed them to earn the two and a half million. At the end of the job, they went home and started building, and buying things for their family, and everyone was amazed. Nobody believed that they only did the occiobedadi *job, because that job could not buy those things. The moral of the story is: there are many things that can be done here, but we are afraid of the others' eyes."[152]*

In a general situation of precariousness individuals have developed the ability to cope with the situation, finding new solutions and opportunities. In this context, money and goods become the measure of an individual's ability to get by, and to cope with difficulties through his own strength and his own head. Hence, the capacity of getting by is to be able to free oneself from economic and social constraints (*heɓtaare*) while maintaining control of one's own life, that is, without having to rely on someone.

Not only the agrarian ethos (Gaibazzi 2015, pp.74-87), but the whole context of the society of getting by offers a good training ground for the *laawol ley:* as you have to make do at home, you also have to make do in migration; as you may have to carry out tiring and underrated activities at home, so you have to do along the route. Both at home and during the journey, these small activities typical of the culture of getting by finance the migratory attempt. Ultimately, the *laawol ley* is a possible and desirable choice embedded in the effort of getting by and in a *joni joni* economic attitude, largely due to the cultural way of conceiving gendered life trajectories.

Mobility and deforestation

The discovery that charcoal could provide a complementary source of income led to an overexploitation of the area with very serious ecological effects. Despite the creation of cooperatives and quotas to curb deforestation, illegal exploitation continues to be a problem that mainly affects the more peripheral parts of the department, on the border with the two Guineas where controls are rarer, as denounced by Kamara, the president of the environmental commission in Linkering:

> *"Here, at the border, there are a lot of problems, like banditry and illegal cutting of trees. Without any respect for the laws, Senegalese or Guineans coming from beyond the frontiers cut trees indiscriminately. They sell wood in Dakar; others use it to make furniture all over the region. Others chop wood to bring it to Gambia, others to make charcoal."[153]*

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[152] Souleyman Sow, Nemataba, 26/01/2020
[153] Kamara, Tongya, 11/03/2020

The over-exploitation is favoured by the development of human mobility, both by the projects of transnational travel and by the illegal crossing of the border by young Guineans who come to exploit the Senegalese forests and are often employed as labour force by local loggers. This situation is well explained by Abdullahi, a logger from Velingara:

> *"Logging began towards Dakar and gradually crossed the whole Senegal until here, even though nowadays the activity is moving to Sedhiou, since the forest here is disappearing. Nowadays, there are limitations. For example, you cannot cut down trees that are used to feed humans and animals, such as fruit trees. Once there were ten trucks, at least, waiting to be loaded to carry either wood or charcoal to Dakar, and every truck had a minimum of 400-500 bags. More or less, we used to have 10 trucks per week leaving from Velingara, plus the trucks which take the Medina Gounass axis, and others which used to leave directly from Manda Douane. They carried big bags. The weight depends on the quality and the time of year: during the rainy season the charcoal is wetter, so it is heavier.*
> *Nowadays, the technical service of the state has established a quota system at national level, fostering the creation of cooperatives.*
> *However, there are people who do not play by the rules. For example, the agents try to limit the exploitable territory by marking the trunks of those trees that could be cut. However, when illegal loggers come, they do as they want. When the illegals arrive, they cut everything."[154]*

Local charcoal production is increasingly anchored to national needs and in particular to the growing demand from Dakar. Over the years, the excessive exploitation of wood resources in other regions, in the absence of effective reforestation and environmental sustainability policies, made the territory of the Upper Casamance ever more important, as exposed by Sadio, a trader in the charcoal market:

> *"Charcoal is used for domestic consumption and for cooking, and in Dakar, mostly in poor neighbourhoods, for heating the house. It is not only in Dakar, but also in Kaolack, Touba, and St. Louis. They have not a lot of forests left, so they take the charcoal from here. The price is not stable, but it changes compared to the price in Dakar and nowadays it happens concomitantly, because everyone has the same information in real time with new telephones: when they increase the price there, we automatically increase the price here. Initially, they bought a bag for around 700 francs from the operator, selling it for 3,000 in Dakar, but now people pay in the bush at least 1,000 francs up to 2,000, and 4,000 up to 6,000 in Dakar. When there is a shortage of butane gas, the charcoal price increases in Dakar. The price increases during the rainy season, too, because with the rain it is difficult to get a vehicle into the bush. And that has also an impact on the prices in Dakar."[155]*

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[154] Abdullahi, Velingara, 20/02/2020
[155] Sadio, Velingara, 20/02/2020

***Chicken, sheep, cows: breeding at the time of the* laawol ley**

The market demand in Dakar has also a major impact on the development of sheep breeding – and the breeding of rams especially – in Velingara. Historically, small ruminants have constituted a marginal breeding activity, often run by women. Over the years it has become an important source of savings that can be mobilised in case of need, ensuring food security and the possibility of dealing with either medical or other social expenses for the family. Small ruminants represent less economic and cultural value than cows, which makes them more accessible to the poorest families (Faugere et al. 1990). Sheep and goat breeding is also more feasible for those who live in towns. The breeding of various animals still follows a scale of social importance typical of Fulɓe's population: it starts with the breeding of chicken or pigeons at the bottom, the breeding of goats and sheep, and finally the breeding of cattle, the most noble activity. Even a small chicken farm can be a good solution for families who have no other source of wealth, since their reproductive rate is faster. The capital amassed through chickens could also make it possible to start to breed sheep and goats, and the sale of 3-5 goats or sheep, or of a good ram, could be worth a heifer, which could increase the number of cattle. Historically, the breeding of chickens, sheep and goats was entrusted to women, both because it required less mobility, and because they were more linked to the private needs of the family. The breeding of rams started to have a specific social relevance with the arrival of Islam, since the slaughtering of a ram is the core of the Tabaski, the Muslim festivity which commemorates Abraham's sacrifice. In a country where the population is 95% Muslim, the Tabaski is a particularly important popular festival as well as a major commercial event where, each year, thousands of sheep are sacrificed in one day: 670,000 sheep and rams were estimated to have been sacrificed in 2008 (including 230,000 in the Dakar region alone) (Ninot 2010, p.1), while the Minister of Livestock and Animal Productions estimated a need for more than 800,000 rams for 2020[156]. It is in this increasing demand that local sheep and goat farming has found favourable ground, including in Velingara. Indeed, the Tabaski festival and the rams market in Dakar involves a wide trade network which passes through Tambacounda, the most important market for rams in the region, where Malian shepherds also converge, usually with more valuable breeds (Ninot 2010, p.37).

In the rams market, there are two main parameters which contribute to varying prices. The first is the height, weight and breed of the ram. The most sought-after breed is the *ladoum,* a genetic cross

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[156] *Le Sénégal va importer plus de 800.000 moutons pour la Tabaski*, available at http://lecalame.info/?q=node/ 8984 [last viewed on 31/01/2022]

between the Mauritanian *touabire* and the Malian *bali-bali* (Fall et al. 2017)*,* which is worth from 300,000 CFA up to more than one million, while the breed *peul-peul* is considered less prestigious. The second parameter is the date of purchase: as the Tabaski approaches, prices increase. Despite that, there is huge demand for a beautiful ram, the purchase of which represents an important public affirmation of a family's economic and social status (Brisebarre and Kuczynski 2009, p.61). In Velingara, several families gather for the feast, agreeing to share the purchase of the ram and to divide the meat, as the prices for the Tabaski have recently skyrocketed.

During my evening walk with Ibou, especially during the curfew due to Covid-19 pandemic, we used to go and pay a visit to Mr. Ba, Ibou's sister's husband, while he and his wife used to come every weekend to have lunch with us. It was during these visits that I gathered all the information about the rams market while he showed me the photo album of all his best rams since his childhood in St. Louis. Mr. Ba's story is representative of the social mobility created by the development of the public administration and in particular by the spread of French schools. He comes from St. Louis, where he was born, and he arrived in Velingara more than twenty years ago when he was assigned as English teacher to the local high school. After having married Ibou's sister, he decided to stay in the city, where he claims to be the first to start breeding rams seriously. He recalls how local ram breeding used to focus on traditional local breeds, smaller in size and little valued on the market, that were left free to wander and to feed on whatever they found. Domestic breeding is based on keeping animals in a fenced area, often built inside the household, with greater attention to the animals' health and nutrition, and to the selection and purchase of better breeds.

Rams and ewes are kept together in a fenced enclosure inside the courtyard of the house, often tied up and close to each other. Three separate small stables, made out of a small stone building, host sheep that have just given birth or are about to, the male and the female that he decides to mate, or lambs with health problems. The most precious rams are rarely let out on the street, except for the grooming that takes place outside the house for public display. Moreover, domestic breeding requires a lot of care, mainly because the finest breeds are also the most delicate ones, and they are often exposed to the risk of several diseases which spread periodically in the region. They require a greater investment in water, feed and hay, too. The death of a ram constitutes a serious loss of a few hundred thousand CFA.

The local hay market is closely linked to the development of ram breeding. In his stories Mister Ba recalled the astonishment of the early years when the hay left over from the groundnut harvest was left in the fields or burned by peasants. In a context where there was no extensive breeding, the hay

had no particular importance and either was left as free forage for animals or was collected freely to rebuild the roofs of the huts:

> *"Here the hay was given to me for free. I remember asking a boy to go to the bush and collect as much hay as he could. And he went and brought me three carts with more than twenty-two bags. I just gave him CFA 2,500 to reward him for the favour."*[157]

Recently, the situation changed as the demand for hay grew higher:

> *"About seven years ago they started selling hay, but for CFA 3,500 you brought home a cart for the whole year. The turning point came three years ago with the flood in Dakar which led to a greater demand from the city. Thus, the price went up to CFA 12,000. The hay has become a business also for the* bana-bana [trade intermediaries]. *They used to buy a sack of hay in Velingara for CFA 1,000, pay CFA 1,000 for transportation, and resell it for CFA 5,000 in Dakar. Nowadays, peasants have noticed the disparity between the purchase and the sale price, so they raise what they ask for, and now a sack costs not less than CFA 2,500 and the margin for the* bana-bana *has been reduced."*[158]

The transformation of goat and sheep breeding into a business has also led to greater interest from men. Today, in fact, it is no longer considered a female activity. Domestic ram breeding involves mainly young men who see in it an opportunity to start to accumulate capital for other projects they have in mind for their future.

The breeding of sheep and goats continues to remain a form of "saving on the hoof", providing an alternative to the sale of cows, which are still considered a much higher symbolic and an economic value.

In the society of getting by everything can be mobilised in case of need: land, houses, crops, animals, motorcycles and bicycles, all have a value based on their fast convertibility into money. Fulɓe ceremonies and feasts characterising the religious and social life of a family, but also the increasing costs of education, medical assistance, and food, all add up to there being a great deal of pressure on this capital.

International mobility has favoured this attitude towards material goods: as a matter of fact, not only can land, crops, animals or motorcycles provide the initial capital for the departure, but also having someone in the family on their way to a migration destination means someone is always ready to

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[157] Mister Ba, Velingara, 25/02/2020
[158] Mister Ba, Velingara, 25/02/2020

mobilise capital to provide him with the means either to continue the journey or to pay a ransom to a Libyan prison.

Finally, livestock breeding at home in Velingara was also favoured by the development of the veterinary medical centre, installed by the NGO ASVF (Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières) in 2001 in Velingara Fulɓe. Through a vaccination campaign at affordable prices, the local population has been often able to cope with various animal diseases, which are always a major factor of uncertainty. They also promoted several chicken farming projects that targeted mostly women, as claimed by Madame Cissoko, an ASVF veterinary surgeon:

> *"We started with economic activities to tackle women's problems. Here in Fuladu most of the animals belong to women because they are part of the dowry. However, they did not dare to say anything to their husband if he decided to sell one or more animals and furthermore, they always felt the need to ask for his permission to do whatever with their own property! Today, women are also protagonists in the monetary economy of their families and, thanks to the income from the activities we have developed, such as poultry farming and the production of milk, they are able to provide for their family and have a say in important decisions [...] We tried with sheep farming, but the problem was that women sold the livestock to deal with the illness of their children or for other problems. So, we turned to chicken farming. It is a real hidden treasure, because it is quick: in just one year, you can have a real chicken farm, just starting with a cock and two or three hens. We have also encouraged practices of cross-breeding to favour bigger, and therefore more profitable, chickens."[159]*

The constant and faster cycle of production and sale of poultry (although more concentrated in the period of the *korité* and for the celebration of New Year's Eve) make people perceive small-scale poultry rearing as a simple and safe starting project. However, it also presents some constraints, such as heat, diseases and the money required for constant feed and water:

> *"It is through the CARIMA2[160] programme that I earned some chickens. Now I am teaching my wife how to do it, so if I am not here, she can take care of them. But it is not as easy as it seems to be. You have to think about feeding them, and the Dutch blue breed consumes at least 4-5 sacks per month and each sack costs CFA 16,000! And then there are diseases, and when you let them out, you may not notice that one goes out of the door and ends up eaten by wild cats or stolen by the neighbour. If they die before 45 days it is a loss, but you can always freeze them and sell them, just to get something out of it. Moreover, last year the money from CARIMA came too late and I could not sell the chickens for the Korité, and this was a great loss. At the moment, Dutch blue can go for up to CFA 50,000, while the other ranges up to*

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[159] Madame Cissoko, Velingara, 22/02/2020
[160] Resource Centres for the Reintegration of Returning Senegalese Migrants (CARIMA) set up by Enda Diapol within the framework of the CEDEAO-Spain Fund for "Migration and Development". The project was renewed by the GIZ (German cooperation) in 2018 with the second phase of CARIMA 2

CFA 20,000. During the dry season it is difficult to sell them at the same price. However, chickens at least give me something to do every day, otherwise I would sit and cross my arms until the next hivernage*".[161]*

I met Diallo again more than one year later, in September 2021. His chicken farm project had failed due to the heat and insufficient funds to buy feed during the dry season. He was trying to start again, with a lot of difficulties, to have some chickens to sell for New Year's Eve and then to start breeding sheep and rams. His failure shows how even *"hidden treasures"* are not within the reach of everyone.

Taxi moto: mobility for mobility

In the absence of the possibility of waged employment, young people in Velingara often choose temporary and precarious jobs, which are perceived as opportunities to acquire capital and to finance other individual projects, such as international mobility.

The recent phenomenon of motorcycle taxis is part of the development of the local and regional mobility which began with the opening of the N6 national road and with the dirt tracks which supported the transport of goods and agricultural products. The protagonists of this mobility are the *sept places,* seven-seater, very old, cars which leave and return every day from the coach station to Tambacounda, Diaobé and Kolda, up to Ziguinchor or Dakar. The bus company Demm Dikk started to connect Dakar to Velingara three times a week from 1 September 2019 for a fare of only 11 thousand CFA, and nowadays other bus companies cover the same route. The phenomenon of motorcycle taxis is concern mainly with local mobility, constituting a widespread urban mobility system, which, despite the anarchic management, has provided a good solution for people living in peripheral districts, as Saiku, the former president of the taxi moto association, told me:

> *"Moto Taxi started here in 2010 with Ciao and Bravo motorbikes. Mara was the first one, but he did not drive: he bought motorbikes in order to let the others drive. He was a guy who came from the North and he set up the business in Velingara. There was also a guy from here, Omar Balde. There were three: two guys from Dakar and one from here. Business developed rapidly involving mostly local people. I remember that in 2011 I was the eighth to start, and nowadays there are more than a thousand of us!"[162].*

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161 Diallo, Velingara, 28/02/2020
162 Saiku, Velingara, 26/02/2020

The development of the *taxi moto* was made possible in particular by the spreading of Jakarta motorcycles, which are cheaper than a normal motorbike, and it happened without any regulation:

> "Men with economic possibilities normally buy motorcycles and rent them to young people for CFA 2,500 per day, except on Sundays, when they use the moto to do their own stuff. Before, it was easy to earn even 10 thousand or 15 thousand per day, but today it is difficult even to reach CFA 2,500: motorcycles have become too many and they have spoiled the whole business. For example, from here to the market, the fare used to be CFA 500; now it is CFA 200. There is no fixed price. We would like to form an association to fix prices and organise ourselves, but so far it has been impossible. They elected a first officer, but the president, who has a term of three years, wanted to remain. So, the assembly created another office which is currently recognised by the prefect. At the general assembly last year, there were sixty people, but currently there are more than 1,000 taximen in the whole municipality. Last year, they made the licence compulsory; since then you need to look for an identity card, a driving license, a licence plate, you take them all to the town hall, and you pay CFA 1,500 as a membership fee. In all it was CFA 4,500. But nowadays there are still a lot of people that are not in compliance with the law. Another problem is that there is no training. People drive without helmets and without knowing the rules. So, there are a lot of accidents. You cannot recognise who is a taximan and who is not; even some teachers in the afternoon sometimes work as taximen, because there is no control. We also did a lot of radio broadcasts where we say it clearly: before getting on the bike, check that he has a Velingara Municipality CV plate, you will know that he is a taxi driver. Ask for the licence number, because if you have any problems, you can go to the town hall and there they have the whole list! But so far, people have not understood that yet."[163]

This chaotic situation is mainly due to the characteristics of the average moto taximan: young, often driving as a second or temporary job, trying to save money for other projects, and often not owning the bike he rides. As a matter of fact, taxi moto is considered a starting point for youngsters in order to earn money and to achieve important steps towards adulthood, as in the taximan Mamadu Lamine's story:

> "I do not think of continuing in the future. It is not a job for an old man. If I had money, I would invest in my barbershop, and I would start small domestic breeding, like chickens or sheep [...] Every day I wake up at 6, because I also work as a hairdresser. Before 8 am, I earn what I can, especially with kids that are going to school. During the day, if there is a customer who calls me, I go and come back. Moto taxi helped me a lot. I wanted to do like him [he points the guy at his side]: he already started a chicken farm with that, he got married with that, he bought two plots of land with that, and now he sends his three children to school."[164]

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[163] Saiku, Velingara, 26/02/2020
[164] Mamadou Lamine, Velingara, 26/02/2020

Mothers do not only finance migratory projects, they also finance their sons to start small businesses, such as taxi moto. Their role is crucial for directing their sons' decisions, and they are the first that take advantage of their success. This is clear from Seiku's words, as are the difficulties in trying to invest to create a larger business, due to the unreliability of the other moto taximen:

> *"The first thing I did with the money I had earned since 2011 was to pay back my mother. She bought the bike for me. She has a shop, and she is a bit like my private bank. Afterwards I bought another bike, and I rented it out daily for CFA 2,500. But finally, I sold it. You buy the bike for CFA 500,000 and you give it to someone who does not use it properly. What can you do? He behaves well for a month, but then he does what he wants. When I used to drive all day long, I could keep on renting my motorcycle, because I could meet the guy on the road, and he could not lie to me, because I knew what was going on. Once I gave the motorbike to a guy who had done a CFA 3,000 ride and then another CFA 5,000 ride, but when he came back, he told me that there were no clients, so he asked not to pay the rental. But I know it was not true."*[165]

The spread of moto taxis, jakartas, and other first- or second-hand motorcycles favoured the development of a whole network of small businesses: from cross-border traders with Gambia to traders specialised in accessories or spare parts, always necessary because of the wear and tear caused to vehicles due to the atmospheric conditions and the rough conditions of the roads. Moreover, mechanics and tyre workshops have been opened, and some teenagers and children drop out of school and go there as apprentices. All these young men, whose dreams of opening their own shops in the future often clash with the real impossibility due to the inadequate amount of money they can earn, have all been and are all representative of a prototype of potential future international adventurers.

Agricultural changes: the fall of cotton, the return of groundnuts, agribusiness and horticulture

The years of the first waves of international migrants from Velingara were also the years of the 1979 international crisis and, at the national level, of the dissolution of ONCAD, due to the chronic financial losses. Both these events marked a downward trend in public investment, which accelerated after 1984 when structural adjustment plans and credit squeeze were enforced. These events led the Senegalese government to launch the Nouvelle Politique Agricole (NPA), and to encourage both market liberalisation and the state's withdrawal from direct support to producers. The liberalisation of agricultural markets began in 1986, simultaneously with an overly ambitious plan to reach 80% self-sufficiency in cereal consumption. However, so far, all agricultural development plans have been

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[165] Mamadou Lamine, Velingara, 26/02/2020

confronted with overly ambitious initial objectives which have been consistently disregarded. Rice is a striking example, since imports represented 68% of total rice consumption in the 1960s, 85% from 1994 to 1999 and 91% from 2000 to 2004 (Oya 2006, p.214), despite numerous projects to improve the cultivation of this product. While the consumption of rice constantly increased, becoming the main food even in rural areas, the National Programme for Self-Sufficiency in Rice (PNAR) was launched with the goal of increasing white rice production from 350 thousand tonnes in 2008 to one million tonnes in 2012. The goal was also to lower the cost of local production of rice in order to achieve a more competitive price. However, the PNAR also ended up having too-ambitious objectives, as proved by the data in the USDA report 2018 (Olinski and Sylla 2018), which estimated a production of 462,000 tonnes (40% of which is produced in the whole of Casamance, but is mainly used for local consumption) for the 2018/2019 market season.

In general, the PASA (*Programme d'Ajustement Structurel Agricole*) and PISA (*Programme d'Investissements pour le Secteur Agricole*) of the 1990s too – characterised by the politics of liberalisation in groundnut and rice market, privatisation of public companies, and new policies which aimed to turn peasants into small self-employed entrepreneurs – did not meet expectations.

Even after the political election in 2000, which marked the end of 40 years of *Parti socialiste*, Wade's agricultural policies remained marked by major strategic inconsistencies (Oya and Ba 2013). Neither the *Grande Offensive agricole pour la Nourriture et l'Abondance* (GOANA) nor the Plan to Return to Agriculture (REVA) drawn up in 2006, were able to improve food self-sufficiency. Moreover, despite attempts to revitalise the sector, the main Senegalese agricultural product, groundnuts, entered a phase of lower production: the years 2000-2011 provided an average production of below 700,000 tonnes, 30% less than the average registered in the 1960s (Oya and Ba 2013, p.5). The production of cotton dropped as well, with a reduction of 19.1% in dedicated area between the Tambacounda and the Kolda Region (Olinski and Sylla 2019, p.4).

The fall of cotton, which had been a driving force for the development of Velingara department for years, was due to several factors: the greater unpredictability of the rains; the SODEFITEX's lack of flexibility in managing the farmers' debts in the worst years; farmers' rising awareness of the health risks involved in using chemical products; and the switch to other crops such as groundnuts, which have become more cost-effective in the last years.

Today cotton farming almost only remains in the peripheral areas of the department where the agricultural tools, fertilizers and seeds are still difficult to obtain with one's own means, as Omar, a former officer of SODEFITEX, explained:

"For many years cotton was the king crop of the department, even in 2012-2013, when I left for retirement. However, the first signs of the decline were already evident. The price of cotton was never stable, but it had increased significantly over the years. Until 1989 the kilo was 35 francs, but now it can reach up to CFA 250, because today the manure and all the other stuff you need are more expensive. Previously, for CFA 3,000 you could have a bag of fertilizer, but today you need CFA 12,000, if not CFA 15,000. Moreover, everyone knows that this is not good for their health, and peasants make their own calculations. This is my personal understanding… and currently groundnut is much more profitable, because a bag is up to CFA 20,000: if you made a cord of groundnut you could double what you earn with a cord of cotton. If SODEFITEX wants to stop the fall in cotton, the price must go up, but this would make the product not competitive on the international market. This has always been the peasant's way of thinking: imitate what others do, if it seems more profitable."[166]

At the beginning of SODEFITEX, the preference for cotton over groundnuts was due not only to the technical support provided, but also to the fact that groundnut cultivation was much more physically demanding. Nowadays, most people have changed their mind. To justify this claim they say things like *"les gens se sont réveillés"* ("people have woken up"), or *"before, we did not know what the business was".* As explained to me by Alassane, a former agent of the SONACOS (Société nationale de commercialisation des oléagineux du Sénégal):

"People did not know how profitable groundnut farming was. It was physically demanding, because here in Fuladu we did not know how to work with machines. But people from the north came and they showed us how to work the land. It all started around the year 2000. The real peanut basin is in the north because they started in the days of the colonists. But now that the rain has changed, they start coming here, because we have still a good rainy season."[167]

There are several reasons for the return to groundnuts in Fuladu. While other areas are increasingly losing their soil productivity, due to climate change and over-exploitation, southern Senegal is becoming a new agricultural and investment frontier. The same Wolof and Muride migration that we reported in the case of the Pata forest and the Anambé basin is increasing throughout the region. Secondly, groundnuts have become doubly profitable thanks to the hay market, which is a very important extra income for the farmers. In fact, the hay helps them to repay debts incurred at the beginning of the season for seeds, fertilizers and other products.

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[166] Omar Diao, Velingara, 18/03/2020
[167] Alassane, Velingara, 28/02/2020

Peasants make the choice of what to grow towards the end of the dry season, depending on their experience, past years' results, and other farmers' experiences and outcomes. The strict SODEFITEX's monopoly of the commercialisation of cotton contrasts with the free groundnut market, which, in recent years, has proved to be more advantageous, also thanks to the arrival of Chinese buyers.

The market price of groundnuts normally follows an annual trend based on the availability of the product: towards November and December, after the harvest, the price is lower as the availability on the market is higher, and it climbs as the rainy season approaches as the product becomes rarer. For this reason, especially in recent years, many farmers have tended to keep the harvest for the most profitable periods, even if there could be the risk of it spoiling.[168]

Each year the government sets the minimum price. In 2019-2018, it was 210 CFA /kg. Given an average bag weight of 70kg, the price was around CFA 14,700 per bag. Usually the price varies according to "Diaobé's voice of price", since Diaobé's market is the reference for all the transactions in the department. In the last two years, however, the arrival of Chinese buyers, who often operate through local *bana-bana* (intermediaries), had totally changed the price, as explained by the ex-SONACOS agent, Touré:

> *"This is not the first year that the Chinese merchants come, but this year they were more present. At the start of the campaign, they did not follow the state price. They came during the harvest, directly to the fields and they talk directly to the peasants. They came with intermediaries, with the government's approval, raising the price up to CFA 400-425 per kilo, while the government's price was 215! They take the groundnuts directly to China, in big containers. They wait directly at the port. They have also brought machines to shell groundnuts, and now they are renting them to the local population. There are other private operators who buy groundnuts here, from Touba, and, since they do not know the area, they look for us as we were former civil servants, and we know the situation. They contact me, they give me money, I go back to the village, I pay, and I bring groundnuts here in town, where all the warehouses are. After loading a truck, they transport the groundnuts to Touba. Even Indians entered the circuit this year. Nowadays, everyone is looking for a profit."[169]*

A clear example of the Chinese impact on the local market is given by the fluctuation in the price in January 2020, caused by the Chinese buyers' withdrawal due to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic:

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[168] *"The price varies throughout the year. In August-September, it is more profitable to sell. If there are people who need groundnuts, they have to pay dearly because there aren't many people who still have the product. But storing is complicated because you need money to buy powders or tablets to avoid peanut-eating caterpillars getting into the bags, wasting everything."* (Alassane, Velingara, 28/02/2020)

[169] Touré, Velingara, 28/02/2020

although on January 23rd the price in Diaobé had been quoted at CFA 22,000 per bag, on January 30th it was already dropped to 16,000.

Even in Velingara, cultivating during *hivernage* is still a very important activity around which most of the inhabitants' lives revolve during the rainy season. In this period, even teachers, pupils, public officials and merchants invest time and money either to work the land owned by their family in the surrounding villages or to rent some hectares which are worked by *navetans,* mainly coming from the two Guineas. As reported in the *Plan developpement de la commune de Velingara 2018-2023* (PDC), agriculture has suffered the process of urbanisation and the distribution of the plots of land within the municipality. Therefore, nowadays agriculture in Velingara has a peri-urban character, exclusively oriented towards self-consumption, with low productivity and few dedicated hectares.

Several attempts to develop market gardening (*maraîchage*) have been made, trying to develop a productive activity which goes beyond the four months' work of the rainy season, which is no longer enough to provide for a family's needs for the whole year. Historically, horticulture was practised by women mainly in valleys and lowlands. In recent years, successful returnees also started to invest in it, favouring the growing of new products such as cassava, watermelon, niebe and bissap, from which a juice is obtained which is widely consumed locally.

Return migrants and young graduates returning from universities have started to bring the idea of "agro-business". Their models are successful Africans such as the Senegalese-American singer Akon[170] (who financed a public lighting project in the city of Velingara in 2020-21), or entrepreneurs such as Thione Niang and Babacar Ngom[171]. They are considered examples of people who know how to master modernity, offering new role models, as opposed to the *jambaar* (warrior) of *laawol ley*. These models inspired Kamara, a young man from Velingara who, after graduating in Management at the University Cheick Anta Diop, came back and started to work his family's land, founding the company Senagro Fuladu. His return to the land, due mostly to the scarce opportunities for graduates in the Senegalese labour market, is reconceptualised by Kamara in the perspective of the global agro-business *ideoscape* (Appadurai 1996, p.45):

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[170] Akon is a Senegalese-American singer and entrepreneur who became famous for his project of building the futuristic Akon City in the Thies region, and for his recent project, Akon lighting Africa, which has brought streetlights and floodlights for a soccer field in Velingara

[171] Thione Niang is a successful Senegalese migrant who moved to the U.S. in 2000, and he founded the JeuZonr Farms (an agro-business platform for the production, commercialisation, distribution, and conservation of farm products in Africa), and the incubation platform Give1Project (which promotes global leadership and entrepreneurship for young people in Africa and in the diaspora). Babacar Ngom is the founder of the Sedima Group, a company leader in poultry production.

"People have more consideration for my brothers who are in Europe than for me, because of the myth that over there it is like a paradise. We studied and we know that the real opportunities are here. But this is starting to change because people are more aware. Before, African youth used to underestimate themselves: we did not believe that we could stay here and be superior to anyone who lives in Europe. Now, you can see guys posting photos of their successful activities here, who fight every day to develop Africa. We are overcoming our inferiority complex: before, if I was with a white man, I always felt behind. But now we have realised that this is not true, that we can be with a white man and feel more than him. Young Africans who are abroad have realised there are opportunities here too, and they have started to invest."[172]

These young entrepreneurs think of themselves as agents of economic and cultural change, a generation who can finally lead to the development of the treasure which they have been told is hidden in Fuladu. This is also the vision of Alpha Yaya, the young founder of his small company, Senagro Fuladu:

"Opening a business here is complicated. People here want to be employed by the state, to have their air-conditioned office, and then to say mi heptima! [I am in a good condition]. *In their vision, people who have done advanced studies, like me, do not have the right to come back and work the land. For them, all the people who work the land are people who have no other choice and who are poor. If I hadn't been solid in my head, I would have already given up. When I started, people told me: 'You made it to Dakar, and you got a master's degree in finance, and now you come back to work the land. It is absurd!' It is also difficult to employ someone because young people do not like working the land, especially for someone else. I started with three people, but all of them have already given up, because they are afraid of what others might think of them. It is more because young people have never seen a farmer who is respected and has earned a lot of money."[173]*

The entrepreneurial mentality claimed by Kamara is also in opposition to the *joni joni* temporal horizon of the economy of getting by, and with the collective management of the land which is seen as a critical constraint to the development of a successful business:

"My old man gave me two hectares. For the moment it is enough. So far, I have not employed anyone from my family. You know, sometimes family is a problem. For instance, if I give orders to a member of the family (since I am either his brother or his cousin), he will not listen to me or he will take it easily. And this attitude risks delaying the business. So, it is better to take someone with whom you only have a professional relationship."[174]

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[172] Alpha Yaya, Velingara, 10/02/2020
[173] Alpha Yaya, Velingara, 10/02/2020
[174] Alpha Yaya, Velingara, 10/02/2020

The transnational links of the local economy

Since the beginning of transnational mobility, the image of the "elsewhere" has always been shaped by the greater possibilities of paid work and greater earnings, as well as by the difference in purchasing power between CFA and foreign currencies, especially after the 1994 devaluation. In an economic context where to pay with a CFA 5,000 (7.67 Euros) banknote at the local market would be difficult due to the impossibility of the trader having the cash to be able change such a large note, and where a teacher's salary is around CFA 130,000 to 200,000 per month (200 to 300 Euros), international remittances are something almost off the scale.

House building – the modern symbol of success and economic wellbeing – is another good example. The cost for the land and a medium-sized modern house on the outskirts of Velingara is now around CFA 5 million. A person living in Europe, saving 150 euros per month, would be able to reach that amount in less than 5 years all by himself, something that is very difficult locally for anyone not employed in an important administrative position. Hence, transnational mobility towards Europe feeds on this perception of an "off the scale" purchasing power that successful migrants and their families have, and which has structured the local economy.

These transnational links are clearly perceptible in the days before the main religious festivities, such as the *korité* and the *tabaski,* when people gather in front of the bank from 5 a.m. in order to withdraw money coming from relatives living abroad. In those days, the flow of money was such that the only two institutions with enough liquidity to handle the flow through MoneyGram, Ria or Western Union channels struggled to maintain sufficient cash flow. These monetary transfer services have changed, speeding up the relationship with the "elsewhere", and giving local families the possibility of immediately counting on the support of the relatives abroad. In a context where the option to open a bank account is still very rare, the phenomenon of mobile money has provided an important technological platform for the informal local and multi-located economy, making remote monetary exchanges possible and increasingly frequent. Widespread services in Velingara and at a national level, such as Orange Money, Wave, Wari and Tigo, allow the user to transfer money through the use of their own mobile phone SIM card (see Brujin et al. 2017).

The *laawol ley* has also shaped the local economy. The economic relationship with travellers still struggling along the route is often structured by the *transfer local* (local transfer) system, an informal economic exchange which has developed between Senegal and Libya.

The name "local transfer" refers to the fact that the exchange takes place without actually getting the money out of the two countries. Cash is exchanged through an intermediary, often an old Senegalese migrant. It was during the interview I had with the *jarga* of El Islam that I firstly came across this system, thanks to the presence of an old man who used to run a business doing this when he was in Libya. The dialogue, in Fulfulde, was reported to me by Mama Samba with these words:

> *"When he arrived in Libya, he founded a* foyer. *He rented a house in Libya of which he became the master. All the people coming from elsewhere and wanting to stay in the* foyer *have first to accept that he is the boss, and they pay the entrance ticket. There is no distinction between Gambian, Nigerian and Senegalese people. In order to earn more money, he created a network with Libyan gendarmes, soldiers and police officers. As the number of people grows, he has been also able to develop a network of contacts in the sub-region of Senegal, Gambia and Guinea."[175]*

When a migrant arrives in Libya from the desert, he often finds refuge in a foyer of fellow countrymen. The foyer manager hosts him and feeds him for some days, while he gets information about the migrant and his family. After a few days, when the migrant expresses the desire to leave for the coast to try to embark, he organises the route, sometimes providing false documents:

> *"Most of the people want to go to the capital, but they do not know how. So, he helps them, but doubling the price: if it costs 2,000 dinar, he asks for 5,000 dinars, saying: 'I know the driver, I know the custom officers, and the police: you will not have any problem!' But he is in a deal with the police. You could pass the first checkpoint and the second, but at the third you are stuck. At every checkpoint, they ask you to pay, and they let you through, but, eventually, you find the checkpoint where you have nothing left. So, you fall into the tentacles of the network. Then, one of the policemen might tell you: 'My phone is over here: if you have a relative in Senegal, or in Nigeria, or in Gambia, give me the number and we will call him. Of course, you will pay for the call.' The prisoner can only agree with this proposal. And these calls go like telling the family that you are stranded in Libya and that they have to pay 150,000 CFA to set you free, or you are going to die."[176]*

Since it is very difficult to send the money directly to Libya, the owner of the *foyer* comes into play: he knows another man who works in Libya and who would like to send money home to Senegal. His job is to put the Senegalese families of both men in contact, so that the prisoner's family pays the sum to the worker's family in Senegal without any international transfer. Once the owner of the foyer receives the news that the exchange has taken place in Senegal, he acts again as an intermediary

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[175] Abubakar, El Islam, 24/11/2019
[176] Abubakar, El Islam, 24/11/2019

between the worker and the migrant, as well as between the migrant and the police or other armed groups whom he was colluding with.

At the local level, however, the risk for the involved families is that the local transaction might make the migratory adventure (always sought to be kept private) public, causing a drop in the selling price of the land or cows which they often use to collect the money. In Velingara there are actual brokers, called *courtiers*, acting as informal real-estate agents, who match the demands of potential buyers, often successful migrants, and the offers of those who are in need of selling land, often struggling travellers. As Abdullahi, a *courties* living in Thiankang 2, told me:

> *"The number of sales in Velingara varies according to the difficulties and the means of the migrants: sometimes there are people who come to bring documents of ownership of their land to sell it, but there are no migrants to buy. The majority of the land is bought by* Sarakulleeɓe*, for the purpose of building, not to cultivate. The cost of a plot of land is from CFA 500,000 up to 3 million: it depends on the position and whether there are already electricity and water facilities. Many times, people sell their plot of land to pay for the difficulties of a member of the family in Libya, and they sell it for CFA 450-500,000. There are people who take advantage of the situation, because they know the news in the neighbourhood. All transactions come through money* (kales tigi) *without the bank. Out of forty, thirty purchases are linked to what you have called* transfer local*, with an average price of CFA 450-500,000."[177]*
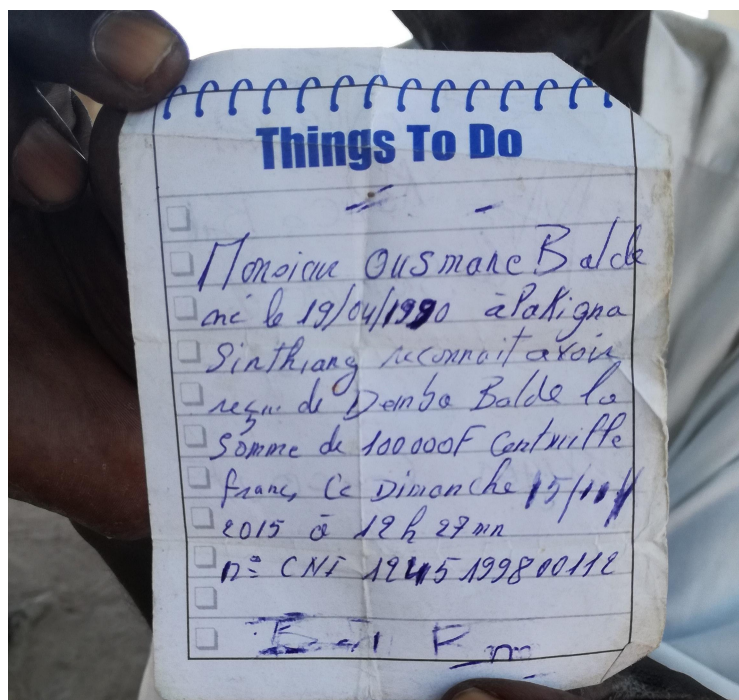
Informal receipt for payment of the local transfer, L'Islam 24/11/2019

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[177] Abdullahi, Velingara, 21/03/2020

Other forms of local money transfer take place in relation to promises of help along the route, as the Sinthiang Aidara district delegate once told me:

> "*When a guy from here wants to leave, he could make a deal with a migrant who already has documents and can freely come and go from Europe. They come, they take their money, and they leave, while the boy from here reaches Libya or Morocco. However, instead of helping him, this contact in Europe calls the family here in Velingara saying he is ready to help, but they have to give more money to his family here in Velingara. It is almost a mafia system. It goes like that: my brother is in Libya, and he cannot pass. Now there is someone who comes from Velingara who can help him. He calls, I contact him and his family, and I ask to send him or to give me CFA 500-600,000. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not.*"[178]

The "habitus of development"

Talking about how the economic relations with the "elsewhere" shape the local economy, one cannot overlook the intervention of various NGOs and international organisations in Velingara department, where some of them have set up their own offices. Thiam, an old man from the Futa Toro, is a key figure in the history that shaped this local "habitus of development", that is, the attitude of waiting for aid projects to be financed in order to start an activity[179]:

> "*I came here in 1996. There was already an NGO called 'Aide et Action'. Then we created an association called SYSED (Senegalese Synergy for Education and Development). The first aim was to promote literacy in women, and to integrate them within the local market economy.*
> *These were the years of structural adjustment, so the economic situation was worse, because all the social services, such as the ones concerning education or health, were seen by the World Bank as a luxury. It was a disaster. At the time, the government also understood that if we just gave money, men would have either looked for a woman or a way to migrate. In the family, it is the woman who we must help.*
> *In the first year I was here, almost 1,000 students were enrolled in the school, and the inspectors decorated us for our efforts. They could not believe our results, so they told us: 'Who is the marabout that made all this happen?' But there was no marabout. We told them that when a woman is literate, what happens to her, it happens to her children. too.*
> *It was functional literacy: we educate them just in order to get competences to improve in their job. For instance, we trained women in soap making. However, you could train a person, but if you do not support the effort with economic means, he returns to illiteracy. So, we developed some working projects. It is a long story, but we had educated many families. We identified*

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[178] Sinthiang Aidara District Delegate, Velingara, November 2019

[179] As Mariama, the president of women's solidarity club explained to me*: "It is difficult to get credit: banks have a very high interest rate on the money they lend. Plus, if you ask for money, and you cannot pay them back, they can take your house away. And then, what do you do with your children? This is the reason why nobody goes to the bank, because the bank always wants too much money. Luckily, there are projects. Projects are better than the bank. If you go to the bank, you die quickly."* (Mariama, Velingara, 30/01/2020)

young leaders in each village: they were young, and it was a bit expensive: we took 2,500 people. Those young people were all elected either to the council or to their municipality. However, then we were kept at distance, because the councils are too politicised. At the time we had a lot of donors, but after few years we had to find new investments, because projects were never financially autonomous, and so the project could not last."[180]

Thiam's arrival in Velingara corresponded to the local "NGO-ization" of local development which characterised the Senegalese economy after the law which regulated the intervention of international organisations in 1984 (Diop 2013, p.398). This process marked the withdrawal of the state from key development functions, and its replacement by international donors and NGOs, as well as private remittances. In Velingara, the projects brought by NGOs were part of the slow process of opening up, as well as a chance for local people to access new resources. The French NGO Aide et Action was one of the first to set up in the department in the 1990s, with the aim of improving school infrastructure by building classrooms in the villages, promoting girls' education and fighting against school dropouts. Despite the success of the initiatives on schooling, Thiam already recognised some structural problems which would have become the main weaknesses of future interventions: the lack of real job opportunities for those receiving training; the lack of financial autonomy of local organisations and the constant dependence on the arrival of foreign funds; the clientelist management of the local politics that traps and redistributes aid materials and money inside a specific network; the lack of follow-up and the limited duration of the various projects; the tendency to favour free individual initiative rather than creating an economic infrastructure to generate durable employment opportunities.

A different approach was that of AVSF (*Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières*). Since the 1990s, AVSF has promoted the improvement of the productivity of pastoral farming and of main food crops (rice, vegetables, etc.), spreading scientific knowledge and practices and distributing drugs. Other initiatives have concerned the intensification of cows' milk production through the creation of cow sheds, and the introduction of new breeds and female cooperatives (see Sall 2009).

Several projects dealt with schooling, child protection – mainly concerning malnutrition and the mobility of young *talibés* from the Guinean borders – and female empowerment, both through their involvement in economic activities and through the fighting of some social practices such as infibulation.

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[180] Thiam, Velingara, 26/11/2019

The NGO-ization in Velingara mostly involved subjects who were considered more vulnerable (return migrants, women and children), conceived as potential key actors in cultural and social changes inspired by Western societies. Several projects targeting women were recalled by the *femmes leaders* I interviewed, who were often chosen as ambassadors and key players in those programmes. Most of them were chosen amongst important local families in Velingara, who use these empowerment programmes to claim the right to participate in the political arena. The numerous certificates of participation the departmental president of the Velingara Women's Solidarity Club showed me during our interview are a good example of the diversity of the organisations involved:

- *2011:* *Agricultural trainer diploma from the National Office for Vocational Training (O.N.F.P.) in Velingara*
- *2012:* *a) Training on Gender Rights organised by AECID, Medicos do mundo and the Catalan Agency for Cooperation and Development in Dakar*
  b) National training workshop for trainers on health and food safety organised by the WHO.
- *2014:* *Training workshop on conducting community conversations about sexual and reproductive health*
- *2016:* *a) Atelier des homologues organised by Peace Corps in Thies*
  b) Seminar on violence against women by USAID Senegal in Ziguinchor
  c) Atelier Project Satisfy organised by World Vision Canada in Kolda

Velingara department is a striking example of the wave of international projects throughout Senegal between 2005 and 2019, in an attempt to curb the "irregular" transnational mobility from the country. MIDEL (Migration and Local Development) started in Sare Coly Salle between 2003 and 2004 with the help of the *Fons Català de Cooperació al Desenvolupament*, with the *Fondation Rurale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (FRAO). As Thiam explained to me, all Spanish co-development projects were structured on three interconnected levels: national-level agreements for the control of illegal migration; international cooperation agencies, such as AECID – which also funded the REDEL project (2008-2009) to promote local development through an "efficient" use of remittances from the diaspora – and the associations of the local diaspora, often coordinated by the GRAMC (*Grups de Recerca i Actuació Sobre Minories Culturals y Treballadors Estrangers*) created in Girona in 1989.

GRAMC has had an especially active role in the community of Sare Coly Salle, connecting funders with the association of migrants in Catalonia (ADECRS) and its Senegalese counterpart (ADESC). Several projects were made possible thanks to this collaboration, which was essentially based on two integrated dimensions: promoting migrants' integration in Catalonia and supporting development actions in their communities of origin. Furthermore, in 2008, ADESC promoted an important awareness campaign against illegal migration in the department, together with other local NGO

associations, such as Gounass (which no longer exists), and Gandia des Balantes. The project, born after the tragedy of the shipwrecks of the migrants heading to the Canary Islands in 2006, aimed to inform young people about the real risks of the Central Mediterranean route and to create a space for dialogue to find alternative solutions.

Another Hispano-Senegalese NGO based in Barcelona and Kolda is Fundaciò Gune, which promoted campaigns for food security, adult literacy and health in the whole department:

> *"We also did a project with a foundation called Guné based in Kolda. When they wanted to build their office, they found out that there were no masons in the whole community of Sare Coly Salle, and so we had to call them from Dakar. We trained young people in masonry and girls in sewing, in order to advance the local economy. Some of them still continue to do this job, others quit, sometimes because the marabout told them they should not do masonry. A project about food security also started thanks to a migrant who is now a nutritionist in France. He returned here for two years to run an awareness campaign on the risks of malnutrition. We have also run a project with Medicos do Mundo concerning this topic."[181]*

Spanish and French cooperation played an important role in Velingara. As early as 2005, Thiam had already listed 14 different associations in France created by people from Velingara department. Investments were encouraged by governmental programmes such as the PAISD (Aid Programme for Development Solidarity Initiatives), mainly targeting the most disadvantaged but high-potential areas of Senegal, such as Velingara department. Other initiatives tried to promote voluntary returns as a solution for local economic development, such as OFII (French Office of Migration and Integration) which started in 2009.

In recent years, German cooperation has also funded projects involving return migrants, in particular GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation), which replaced the CEDEAO-Espagne fund in supporting Enda Diapol in the second phase of the CARIMA project (Accompaniment centre for the reintegration and insertion of African migrants). This project focused on donating funding in order to encourage either individual or collective projects, in a similar way to that adopted recently by the IOM's AVRR programme.

Two different projects related to migration were led by the International Red Cross and Enda Jeunesse Action. The latter has been focusing on fighting against the uncontrolled mobility of young *talibés* coming mainly from the two Guineas, while, from 2014 to 2017, the Red Cross implemented a programme of psychological and economic support for the families of missing or dead migrants, successively renewed from 2018 to 2019.

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[181] Thiam, Velingara, 26/11/2019

Despite the overall amount of funding, *"the results are conflicting, and the phenomenon of irregular migration continues to grow in importance. This can be explained by a national institutional context characterised by a dispersion of actors and the absence of a clear and coherent national policy"* (Patuel 2020, p.4).

Thiam partially confirmed Patuel's vision, adding other reasons, such as the overabundance of unrelated and poorly coordinated projects, with a too limited duration and focused only on women and young people, with a lack of understanding of family and social dynamics. In particular, Thiam underlined how these projects failed to value the rural areas, still seen as poor and backward areas, rather than as development centres:

> *"The problem is that projects do not last enough to be effective. For instance, we did a very complex study for AGIR on return migrants and on how to use their stories and experiences for awareness-raising programmes. We set up an association, but the problem is that, when you* [the Europeans] *leave, we stay. I mean, after the end of the project, we need to find a way to keep the same project going. The project must be revitalised after 2-3 years.*
> *Secondly, I learned that we could win the battle with women, but we build with young people. This is how development works. Women are the driving force. They have to be fully involved, as well as young people, otherwise you are not going to build anything.*
> *Especially after the adjustment plan, the social structure we have to rely upon is the family, so the family has to be convinced that the guy can be successful in deciding to stay here. If not, the mother will tell her child to leave. Moreover, people believe that return migrants are always entrepreneurs… no! Whoever has gained something abroad rarely invests here: they prefer to secure the money and to build a house for themselves. We tried market gardening, but it was a problem, because when youngsters have a little money, they tend to leave. And you cannot do anything about it, because they are free to choose to do that. That is citizenship. Finally, you have to think about people's perceptions. We should not say 'rural areas'* (dowri) *because it is understood as pejorative, but 'production areas', using the word* ɓantaare*, which means development."*[182]

Conclusions

During my fieldwork I was struck by a sentence I read in a recent publication by the economist Steven D. Levitt: *"Morality represents the way we would like the world to work and economics represents how it actually does work"* (Levitt and Dubner 2009). Even though the sentence wanted to underline a (misleading) separation between economic and moral spheres, I would like to paraphrase it to outline the conclusions of this historical and economic analysis of the context.

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[182] Thiam, Velingara, 26/11/2019

Fulɓe Fulakunda does not separate economy from morality. However, the relation between the two has changed as people "*bring their traditional moral concerns to bear on the capitalist economy confronting [them]*" (Robbins 2005, p.44). It is the difference between how subjects come to imagine their possibilities and how daily life actually unfolds that makes transnational mobility become a possibility.

The change of economic paradigm modified the semiotic and the moral values of the world. In the past, a big herd was considered a clear sign of being easily able to cope with any possible difficulties in life, as well as a symbol of nobility. Nowadays, if material possessions remain the basis on which the possibility of honour lies, this role is taken by modern houses, and honour can be acquired through one's own personal effort. The economy of Velingara is more and more made by "*market values and market reasoning increasingly reaching into spheres of life previously governed by non-market norms*" (Sandel 2013 p.121).

The analysis of the relationship between morality and economy is a good tool to understand the discrepancy between the ideas behind development projects and their actual results. The morality of "going back to agriculture" has to face up to the system of patronage that precludes young people's access to development spaces, such as the Anambé basin. While some programmes rely on the moral duty of the diaspora to come back and develop the country, these intentions clash with the individual interests of migrants who already live abroad. The morality of the rational subject who can master modernity only by enacting Western models is confronted with the reality of the deficiencies in credit systems, employment opportunities and favourable structural conditions.

This tension between "the way we build the imaginary of how our world could work" and "the way the world actually works" constitutes the tension lying underneath the society of getting by. This tension is perceptible both in the words of older people who denounce the loss of traditional values (*aada* and *chosan* – customs and traditions), and in youngsters who express the frustration of reality which does not correspond to the one they see in their smartphones. As Sidibé, an elderly father who lost his son in the *laawol ley* told me while explaining his son's decision to leave for the backway:

> "*In the past, there was solidarity among people. For example, if you had something to eat, and the family at your side did not, then you went and helped them, but in a secret way, without showing it publicly. We used to wait very late at night to take a bag of corn or rice, and we put it in front of the door. And then, when the other family woke up in the morning, they saw the bag and they knew that it was the neighbourhood helping. Really, once there was not all this materialism. Nowadays young people have become too materialistic, and this makes everything more complicated. Today when they help you, they really want to tell people that*

they are the ones that helped you. When they give you something, they ask you to send one of your children so they can humiliate him.
The first migrants were very supportive: they shared all they had. But now, I am your friend, I go, and I come back, and I put myself above you, and I do not know you any more. That is really frustrating and leads people to say: "I'm going to do the same!"[183]

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the "elsewhere" is not just an idea, but a concrete daily presence through migrants' modern houses and remittances, through the money from NGO projects and of Chinese buyers, through the comparison between the uneven, beaten-earth soccer field of the municipal stadium and the green fields of the English Premier League where the local idol Sadio Mané plays. This has completely changed people's lives and perspectives, as the Diaobe 2 District delegate told me with this metaphor:

> *"Young people do not agree with the elders because the elders had the bad luck to be born in the darkness, at midnight, when you do not see anything. There was no school, and you weren't open to the world. But today, people are born at noon, so they can see everything. Elders want to take young people back to their world, but young people say: 'Here is not good!', 'We have to go there!'. That is why we never agree."*[184]

Several interviewed return migrants complain the main reason why they left was either *baasal* (poverty) or because of a vision of Velingara as a land without opportunities. However, when I asked to calculate how much they spent on their travel, they often figured out having spent a considerable amount of money, sometimes over than 2 million CFA among plots of land, harvests, cows and savings. This capital could have been spent for a local rentable project.

Still, when they left, the *laawol ley* was a preferable choice. At the beginning, the backway does not require a lot of money and effort, comparing to the ones required to get a regular passport and Visa, especially nowadays with the development of international bus connections. Moreover, migrants take their decision in a demographic context that continues to produce young labour in an economic background which fails to absorb it. Hence, the *laawol lay* appears to most of the young people a necessary path of individualization.

Velingara's history is an history built in relation to an "elsewhere". Nowadays, every smartphone, computer, movie, new agricultural technologies, drugs not only become instruments for accessing

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[183] Sidibé, Velingara, 20/11/2020
[184] Diaobe 2 District delegate, Diaobé, November 2019

modernity, but also the symbol of the local marginality and a question of membership in the global world (Ferguson 2002, pp.558-565).

Observing the history of Velingara, one can only agree with Ulrich Beck (1992) when he stated: *"In advance modernity, the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risk"* (Beck 1992, p.19). The quest for modernity appears strictly linked to a *"world risk society"*, where risk is not equally distributed, but it is accumulated at the bottom of the social hierarchy (while wealth is accumulated at the top). The figures of migrants who continue to die in crossings the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea are a clear image of it. Today international migration feeds also on the uncertainty given by the contemporary collapse of traditional rules, beliefs, and environmental knowledge. Ultimately, *"risks as opposed to dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernity and to its globalization of doubt. They are politically reflexive [...] risks are old as the development itself"* (Beck 1992, p.21). All this discourse was well summarised by the El Islam *jarga* talking about the decision to finance his son's *laawol ley*:

Me: *Why did you finance your son's departure?*
Jarga: *Migrants... what they did here, I could not do it. That is what pushed me. I could not go any more, because I was too old, so I urged my son to go, to take his chance. I have two boys, and I chose the oldest. It is not about the age; it is just that he had dropped out of school and he did not want to continue.*
Me: *Were not you afraid?*
Jarga: *I was afraid, but God is great. You have to take risks in order to have something: if you do not take risks, you cannot earn anything. Previously there were no risks like that: buying and selling cattle is not a risk. Previously the risk could be climbing on a tree to pick something, that was the risk. But it has never given anything.*[185]

The *laawol ley* is not a form of maladaptation, but just a form of adaptation to the dramatic change the Fulɓe Fulakunda have gone through.

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[185] Abubakar, El Islam, 24/11/2019

Three retrospectives on the backway

Return migrants' narratives are important voices in the discursive arena where they take place. Starting from three narratives selected from the many stories I collected during my fieldwork, first of all, I will show here how these stories are told not only according to personal experience of the laawol ley *but also according to the different voices which made migrants "collective agents of enunciation". Their "narrative capital" is one of the most important things left to return migrants to rehabilitate their social image and, more practically, to obtain subsidies or to join NGOs or local aid programmes. Then, I will underline how these narratives become laboratories of moral judgement: every story reveals an ethical perspective, expressing the relationship between life plans, models of excellence and experience.*
While migrants' retrospectives give us an image of a world where even the most basic rules of social coexistence are absent, and where the necessary endurance for the construction of community life leaves room for the constant effort of exhausting physical and psychological resistance, they also give us the image of new, modern heroes who have proven themselves in the harsh conditions they found along the backway.
In return migrants' stories, we can glimpse how narrating becomes the possibility of the reaffirmation of culturally important attributes, such as honour. Therefore, narratives are not just an oral source for historical reconstruction, or a psychological therapy to work through the pain of very harsh experiences such as rape, torture, robbery or having seen friends dying at sea, in the desert, or shot by a prison guard. They become the first step towards facing the difficulty and the shame of return in an honourable and courageous way.

This chapter revolves around three different travel stories I selected from among the dozens of interviews I conducted in Velingara and some of the villages of the department. The reason is not so much the protagonists represent a possible prototype of the average traveller of the backway, but that the rich narrative material offers a good synthesis of the other stories I hear during my fieldwork. Moreover, these three stories offer the advantage of being easily comparable: all the three young protagonists left a job at the time of departure because, in their opinion, it could not bring them sufficient income to achieve their dreams; none of the three were married at the time of departure, and still are not, due to the poor conditions of their return; all three are *Fulɓe* and dropped out of school when they were children.

The first person we meet is Ousmane, a 29-year-old boy with a passion for rap music, and today employed in a small tyre shop on the paved road entering Velingara, in front of the HLM district. He told me his story sitting in the atelier where his sister's husband allowed him to practise the same job he had done before leaving. I met Ousmane, who had left in 2016 and returned in 2018, for the first time in 2018 thanks to Bala, the self-appointed president of the informal association of return migrants,

and subsequently during one of the training weeks of the reintegration programme organised by the IOM.

Ousmane's trajectory crossed in Tripoli for a short time with that of Labi, a 27-year-old man, who today works in a small hairdressing salon near the Sodefitex factory, on the road leading to Gambia. After a couple of attempts working for a friend's business in Dakar[186], Labi left in 2014 and came back at the end of 2018. When I met him in the salon where he worked, he was trying to get funding for a small *maraîchage* (market gardening) project, but with little success, partly because he could not join the IOM programmes that were run in Velingara since he had been repatriated as a Guinean citizen. Finally, I did not meet Amadou at work, because, in reality, since he returned after three years of migration (also in 2018), he had never been able to fully resume his plumbing job. Amadou left in 2015 at the age of 21. I met him, thanks to Mamadou since he was on the list of eligible people for the Carima 2 project. He welcomed me in the courtyard of his family's home in the *Chateau d'Eau* neighbourhood, where he had lived with his brother and two sisters since their father's death, which occurred while he was abroad. As a reminder of the backway, he had two things: a photo of him, naked in a Libyan prison together with other people which, he told me, he had found on the internet and which he keeps on his mobile phone, and an eye which was blinded in the same prison as a result of torture with electrical wires.

Narrating the *laawol ley*

Return migrants' narratives are one of the most used tools to investigate the subjectivity of the migratory experience. Despite this, they are only one part of the discourses surrounding migration. We can say with Cécile Canut and Catherine Mazauric that migration is not just a matter of action, but also *"a matter of saying and speaking*" (Canut and Mazauric 2014, p.9). First of all, migration must be understood as not a merely movement "but a form of socio-cultural construct involving significant imaginary and discursive dimensions which inform processes of meaning-making" (Vium 2014, p.6). Thus, migration appears as a great discursive arena, made by different narratives which could be in conflict and used by individuals to achieve their practical goals. This is an arena made by different subjects and different rhetorics, with different objectives, policies and poetics (Leurs et al.

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[186] Most of the adventurers have experience of internal migration before leaving for the *laawol ley*. The Senegalese capital often appears in the journey preparation phase. Sometimes, return migrants also declare having headed to Dakar just to find a job for the dry season (November/December- May), but there they found someone who convinced them to try the backway.

2020): from novels to artistic representations (Mazauric 2012; Canut and Mazauric 2014); from interviews for obtaining refugee status (Pinelli and Ciabarri 2017) to the apocalyptic representations of visual media (de Haas 2008; Cutitta 2012), which have become the news constituting the *mediascapes* of everyday life (Di Renzo 2017); from the international organisations' awareness-raising programmes which aim to anchor young people to their land, to the representations of subjects in states of emergency as "bare lives" who need to be saved (Agamben 1998); from the construction of efficiency-driven policies based on binary processes of categorisation, such as worthy/unworthy or harmless /dangerous, in order to make border controls more rigid, to the discursive tactics used to evade surveillance and which continue to unmask the porosity and the ambiguity of the border, including the discourses around the need to turn migrants into good citizens (Ong 1999).

Against the background noise of this discursive arena, it is important to make room for migrants' narratives. In doing so, we must always also consider the relationship between these discourses and the arena in general, as a source of narrative elements which are manipulated by the subjects. Thus, migrants appear as "*collective agents of enunciation*", whose speeches are produced "*from multiple discursive spaces: public speeches on migrants; political, media, associative or artistic speeches; private, familial speeches, etc.*" (Canut, 2014, p.261). Those that may superficially sound as purely subjective narratives, are, instead, co-constituted both by personal experience and by the reappropriation of already-present polyphonic material, composed of a multi-discursive and interdisciplinary multiplicity that is continuously renewed, and heteronomic discourses which externally define the subjects (Canut 2014, p.268).

Therefore, subjection and subjectivisation constitute the first perspective from which migrants' narratives will be analysed here, in order to underline their fundamental dependence on a discourse that the migrants never choose but give rise to and support their possibility of action, i.e. sustaining both the process of becoming a subject and that of becoming subordinated to power (Butler 1997, p.2) In this regard, Paul Ricoeur spoke of "narrative identity". Narrating, according to the French philosopher, is the "*first laboratory of moral judgment*" (Ricoeur 2015, p.231), an intermediate dimension between *describing* and *prescribing*, where life projects are constituted as the "*middle zone of exchange between the indeterminacy of guiding ideals and the determination of practices*" (Ricoeur 2015, p.251). This hermeneutic relationship between *life plans* and *models of excellence* is the basis for understanding an *ethical perspective* grounded in the process of re-determination of action based on "*what is considered good and what imposes itself as obligatory*" (Ricoeur 2015, p.264). For Ricoeur, *self-esteem* is primary in every personal narrative: "*the aporias of duty*" (as well as a certain

vagueness of the cultural regulatory moral and ethical ideals) create situations in which *"self-esteem does not appear only as the source of respect, but as the recourse to it"* (Ricoeur 2015, p.265). According to Ricoeur, therefore, in his story, the subject becomes that of "*being capable of evaluating himself* " through an *"incessant work of interpreting action and of oneself"* (Ricoeur 2015, pp.274-276).

Methodologically speaking, however, the collected narratives are often the result of a *"collaborative storytelling"* where the anthropologist "*allows migrants to perform themselves into existence"* (Vium 2014, p.218). Indeed, this relationship puts ethnographers in a difficult position, which can take them out of their role, somewhere among activists, storytellers, and academics, making themselves often victims of the representation of "*tragic stories [...], painful and unspeakable pains and separations"* (Coutin and Vogel 2016, p.2). It is thus a delicate dialogue where the objectivity of the judgment is always questioned by human empathy. That is why an ethnographer must be aware of two fundamental facts. Firstly, storytelling is a powerful tool as well as a fundamental desire that allows humans to make sense of their life experiences, even the most disorienting and harsh ones (Vium 2014, p.2; see also Beneduce 2019). Hence, storytelling is one of the main instruments of the approach to dealing with *"migratory trauma"* (see Beneduce, 2019), not only ethnographically. Secondly, the narrative also allows return migrants to express a counter-discourse on which to build their social rehabilitation. An example is the analysis of the link between the crisis of masculinity and migration among the Fulani of Futa Toro, made by Aziz Faty (2014). As he noted, returned men complain about migration to construct the figure of a victim-subject of the imaginary and tangible deception of a suicidal enterprise, such as migration is. In their stories, they become prototypes of "anti-heroes", as opposed to brave and successful adventurers. They appear as *"a subject in pain, psychologically struck by the violence of the migratory experience"*, whose story is centred on the concept of "loss" or "wasting": *"waste of time, of points of reference, of identity, of reason"* (Faty 2014, pp.218-219). Thus, the narrative becomes the possibility of getting out of the corner and of the silence to which return migrants are often condemned: narration becomes a condition of existence, a narrative capital acquiring even more importance in a society such as the Fulɓe Fulakunda one, where the right to speak in public is a strong element of social recognition.

To sum up, the narratives of those who had travelled the backway are analysed here according to this theoretical perspective: the retrospective narrative constitutes the possibility of reconceptualising one's identity through the reconceptualisation of the lived experience, drawing one's own narrative material from a multiple discursive arena, and from the re-evaluation and selection of the cultural

heritage. Narratives are not analysed here either at the level of structure, or at the level of the subject's need to "*make sense of displacement and violence, re-establish identity in ruptured life courses and communities, or bear witness to violence and repression*" (Eastmond 2007, p.248). The focus is on the present, specifically on how narrative capital is reused at a social and individual level for the construction of oneself in the defeat of return. The (often terrible and harsh) journey and the shame of return are experiences that are destructive not only of one's physical and psychological integrity, but also of one's life plans, imagination, and social image. Otherwise, the narrative allows migrants not only to work through their psychological pain but also to rebuild their social image, reaffirming their dignity (as well as that of their families) in aligning their experience with widely shared and historically rooted values.

In other words, for migrants, narratives are the starting point for getting back to being "icons of becoming" (Vium 2014, p.9): once they have returned empty-handed, they try to get out of the corner of defeat by telling a story that is worthy of being heard.

Trying to understand retrospective narratives as a way to face the present situation has the practical advantage of helping the ethnographer to go beyond the limits of not having actually followed migrants along their pathways. While the dynamics of the backway and the intertwining of travellers and transnational networks could be better understood using a *trajectory approach* methodology (Schapendonk et al. 2018, p.212), retrospective narratives could be more interesting if we focus not on the time of the story, but on the moment when the narrative is staged. This is a different, but still valid, epistemological perspective: if it is true that the stories follow a precise temporalisation in order to make the plot intelligible by listeners, as well as by the same narrating subject, this is not enough to fully understand what the act of narrating is actually about for the subjects. We also need to consider what the cultural and social meaning of re-telling a story is, what it means in the present life trajectory of return migrants, and what they want practically to achieve through spending their narrative capital in front of someone. Ultimately, we are not interested in what happened in the past, but in the present, when the story is staged, where the selection, the storyline and the representation take place.

How and to whom to tell the story?

Often, return migrants report they do not share their stories with their friends or family members. This is mainly due to both the inexplicability of the migration experience and the lack of confidence. First of all, the sufferings experienced during the journey often surpass the verbal capacity of expression.

The backway appears as such as a continuum of psycho-physical traumatic events that, as Labi told me at the end of his interview, *"We went through a lot of things there; even if I tell you, you will never understand"*. Such vehemence comes with a sense of inability to give a rational reason or explanation. As we see, the limit of the language is often represented by the scars migrants have on their bodies, which represent the evidence of the unspeakable. Retrospective narratives, therefore, are not just made of words, but also of bodies which literally embody the story, also reenacting and going through it again: stuttering, sweating, staring into space and tears must be considered as fundamental elements of the narrative.

Secondly, we must take into account the relationship between return migrants' narratives and the context where they are produced. As already observed by Labatut (1987), speaking in public is a very delicate moment for the honour of a person in Fulakunda society. Despite the distance separating us from the work of the French ethnographer, I was still able to collect the same proverbs during my fieldwork, such as "*ɗemgal ko gaño jooma mum*"[187], "*haala ko ndiyam: so weciima ɓontataako*"[188] and "*neɗɗo ko haala mum ka ñaawirtee*"[189]. Speaking in public, that is, outside of the circle of those who are considered among one's close family members, could be dangerous, as it gives others the chance to "*have a hold on you"*, namely, to use your words to undermine your honour or to cast some kind of bad sorcery on you. Narrating is a double-edged sword since it could be both an instrument for emerging from shame and a risk to throw away one's reputation.

Speaking in public, therefore, requires the ability to control the expression of one's own emotions and feelings, as well as to accurately choose what to say and what not to say. Indeed, the most striking of all the interviews I collected is that, despite the hardness of their stories, the return migrants' tone of voice often remained neutral, and no strong emotions were expressed through tears or outbursts of anger. When it was about to happen, they tended to leave. However, the moral disqualification which affected the travellers who returned empty-handed often become a disqualification of their words. As they were seen as the losers, return migrants complained about the fact their stories were not believed, since they were accused of talking out of envy and frustration, just to discourage others from leaving. The success of others, in fact, might increase their dishonour, as expressed by this dialogue between two return migrants:

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[187] The language is the enemy of his owner
[188] Words are like water: once poured, they can't be taken back
[189] A person is judged by his words

A: *"In the village they think that we were afraid to go to the sea, but it is not so: you must have been on the road to really know what it feels like. There are two people who died from this village, one of them while trying to get to Italy. They ask you, but when you tell them everything, they answer that you are lying. But this is just because they do not know…"*

B: *"When I got back, a group of young people came to me for some advice because they wanted to leave. I told them what happens if you are caught in Libya: you could not eat, or sleep, and you could be shot at any time. Even to earn one's living in Libya is practically impossible, because all the time you have to hide, even when you are working. You have to return from work after the sunset, using a torch. If someone sees you, you could easily be shot. So, sometimes you have not even to use your flashlight, because you have to hide in order to get home safely. But often they tell you that you say it, because you do not want them to have the success you didn't."*[190]

The moment when the narration takes place is therefore critical and very delicate. The story they tell represents a narrative capital which, despite being difficult to spend, is a fundamental resource for demonstrating that they were not fearful or weak as it might appear from their humble homecoming. The stories feature very courageous individuals who were defeated only by an adverse superior destiny.

Eventually, migrants often report not wanting to talk about their journey to their family in detail, preferring to share the experience with other return migrants, or with people who are involved in aid and development projects. It is in this latter case where we can see how a story can be used as narrative capital for practical purposes. Especially with people coming from outside, who are external to the social competition, the storytelling can become more pathetic, with the aim of obtaining economic aid. The ethnographer must be aware of how the narrative can be influenced by his own mental representation created by his interlocutor. Retrospective narratives are not pure travel stories but are also contaminated by what the narrator thinks his interlocutor wants to hear, or by rhetorical strategies to control the practical effect of the narration. If telling something about one's life in public could be dangerous, and if the stories constitute an important, but delicate, narrative capital, then it is necessary to take into account how the narrating subject acts intentionally at the moment of narrating in order to reduce unwanted effects and achieve the real goals.

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[190] Camara and Lamine, Nemataba, 20/10/2019. Bala, the vice-president of the association of returned migrants in Velingara, also states: *"I can discourage young people by saying: "do not hit the road!" I can do that, but there are people to whom you cannot say that. Someone comes to your workshop and tells you that he wants to go to Spain. When I tell him about the road I did, if he listened to me properly, he would not go. But they leave anyway* (Bala, Velingara, 25/03/2020). These were also the words of Kamara, a return migrant in Mballacounda Thierno: *"I have talked with a lot of people since my return to raise awareness about the dangers of the road, but they all say to you: "You speak like that, because you could not succeed. If you had had, you would not"* (Kamara, Mballacounda Thierno, 31/10/2019)

It is therefore important for the ethnographer to understand what the narrator is aiming for, both to better manage the interview, and later for a critical analysis of the collected material.

Ousmane

> *"I know people who are in Europe, but in other African countries too, such as Angola or Sudan, but I only chose Europe, because the ones who go there, in five-six years they can do a lot of things: a big construction, buy a vehicle or something for their little brother or their family, have legal papers to travel... This is the reason why I chose to leave for Europe.*
> *When you are here, you are not going to understand that* [how dangerous irregular migration is]. *There were people who told me that crossing Libya was not easy, but this is our problem: when someone who has gone and has arrived in Europe speaks with you saying: "Ah my brother, the road is not good. You must not go over there!", you just think he does not want you to have what he has. He is there but he does not have a stronger heart than me, he does not have more strength than me, he does not have more intelligence than me. So, you say to yourself: "I am going over there!". That is what the reality is. Moreover, I knew about young people who left here and in two-three months they were already in Europe, so I thought that the* laawol ley *was only about having enough money...but today I have a lot of regrets... what I saw there... living there was the worst.*
> *To leave needs courage. Not everyone can do the road, it really takes courage. You have to leave, or you have to move, because here in Fuladu there is no more solidarity, deep in their heart people are not good. Here people leave because you cannot see every day that you get up and you have nothing, while the prefect's sons drive cars, build terraces ... and you, that your daddy has nothing, your mama has nothing... you have to go and seek."[191]*

Ousmane's reasons for leaving appear really straightforward at first sight: the impossibility of matching one's earnings with one's own ambitions (*"You come to open your* atelier *every day, from morning to evening, and you earn nothing, only 1,000-1,500 francs. You eat and mind your own business, but to earn and build your life is very difficult"*); the lack of solidarity in an increasingly competitive society (*"You have to make do, if you do not have the money, because there is no solidarity here. People do not want someone else to make money."*); the lack of a positive perception of the local reality (*"And even the government does not help ... so you have to leave, because you cannot wake up and see you have nothing, when the prefect's son drives a car, he built a terrace..."*). However, we can clearly note how Ousmane's discourse is embedded in a particular social context which he clearly describes: the envy created by international migration, which gave migrants a clear advantage in terms of economic and social capital, goes along with the need to find the courage to try to better face the actual everyday life situation of the society of getting by. Even when people claim their decision is

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[191] Ousmane, Velingara, 28/10/2019

individual, departures have always to be analysed in terms of the relation between the subject and the context, as well as in the relation between the local everyday life perspective and the situation they imagine finding once abroad. Even before his departure, Ousmane's life was surrounded by international migration.

For Ousmane the decision to travel the backway took shape in the contraposition between the general lack of solidarity and the courage of the individual; between envy and a sense of injustice, searching for social rehabilitation for oneself, but also for his family; between the contemporary *ideoscapes* individuals who are called to take responsibility for themselves, and the memory of an ancient cultural habitus: when you have nothing, you have to go and seek. Ousmane's story revolves around the message that "leaving requires courage". That is why he started to talk about the backway from tough experience of Libyan prisons. It is clear how the concept of courage is related to the accumulation of physical and psychological sufferings one could stand along the backway:

> *The first time, they caught me directly from a vehicle[192]. As you get there, they start hitting you. Every prison you go to, they ask you for money, more than 200-300 Euros, up to 1,000 dollars[193]. But Alhamdulillah [thanks to Allah], for all the prisons I have been in, I always had some savings with me. When all the money was gone, I still had some empty land here in Velingara and I sold it through one of my older brothers whom I called to help me to get out of prison[194]. When you are in prison, they bring you a phone and they say: "You have to call your parents!" When we sold the land to get me out of prison, it was because they asked me for 1,200,000 CFA [18,000 Euros] to free me. Overall, I spent over 6 million CFA.*

In return migrants' narratives, the *laawol ley* appears as an experience where even the minimum social rules fail. In the desert, they had to leave their friends dying and think only to save themselves, without even being able to bury them. In Libya they had to live in a constant situation of danger and mistrust towards anyone they met, while there were no rules to follow: they could have been captured or killed

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[192] In many interviews it is reported that capture by bandits or by the Libyan police takes place through checkpoints organised along the main routes. Along with roundups in the neighbourhoods of Tripoli and on the Mediterranean coast, where travellers attempt the last part of the backway by sea, this is the most common way people say they were imprisoned. The risk of being captured, either by police or by other armed groups, between which the stories never state a clear difference, is part of the extreme vulnerability which affects the travellers of the backway in Libya, as revealed by several IOM reports (2012; 2019; 2020).

[193] In several interviews, currencies are often mixed up by narrators. The confusion between dollars, Euros, CFAs or dinars testifies to a characteristic of the economy of the backway and of international migration in general, where currencies are constantly exchanged through money transfer services and different actors, such as smugglers, guards, and casual employers.

[194] Even though Ousmane does not specify it, it is probable that he used the system of the *transfer local* I previously described.

at any time for no particular reason. The violence always appears senseless, especially what suffered both in the official prisons and in those run by "bandits".

In talking about the money wasted along the backway, the story immediately juxtaposes all the attempts made to reach Europe. The shame of having lost so much is contrasted with the courage they have shown:

> *"So, I went from Libya to Malta, but they deported us to Tunisia. We were 456 people when we arrived in Malta and they deported all of us to Tunisia. Then, I was back in Libya, I tried to cross the sea again, and then I went to Algeria in order to go to Morocco. That is where they caught me. However, I did not want to come back, feeling I had not earned anything yet. The Algerians repatriated us, not the IOM. They took us and threw us into the desert. From there we walked to the IOM office. We walked from 4 a.m. until 3 p.m. to reach the first town in Niger. And from there, the IOM[195] took us to Tamba[196] by bus. There are young people who have returned, but we did not talk about the backway together. The only friend that I know is the hairdresser[197]. We were in Libya together, in the same room. He found me there. One day we were together having tea, the soldiers came and attacked us, and they took us to prison. I hadn't done anything! When they put you in prison, you are screwed. So, when we were in the vehicle, I got up, I fought with the policeman, I got down, I ran away… because I knew that when you got to the prison there, you were going to suffer again.*
> *Now, looking at my scar, there are young people who react like that* [he mimics a scared face]*, and they believe that I am a murderer or a bandit. When I look at it, it hurts. Frankly, I did not want this scar on my face.... but Alhamdulillah, there are some who had passed away or who are still in jail and they are probably going to stay there until they die. But if you get out of prison, afterwards you cannot do anything with your life. Wallahi, wallahi![198] There are a lot, a lot, a lot of people who are still there... When you are caught, you stay in prison for one month, and when you go out, you cannot do anything in your life. There are a lot of young people who returned here and who cannot work.[199]*

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[195] The International Organization for Migration is present, with offices, in the main countries of the Central Mediterranean route. Most of the return migrants I interviewed were on the list of the IOM programme of the Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) Programmes, since they had taken this opportunity to finally come back home. However, as Ousmane's story also reveals, repatriation and coming back are not straightforward or easy for travellers. Most of the time, people complained of having been dropped by the police at the edge of the desert and having been left to their own fate; at some other time, corrupt agents of Senegal in Libya were found to be part of a criminal human trafficking network; others, once they came back to Senegal, complained of having received less money than promised to them to facilitate their homecoming. Even without considering the critical issues brought by the same concept of AVR (see Chapter 7), the decision to take part in an ASV programme appears in the stories as the acceptance of defeat after having faced many difficulties and inhuman situations.

[196] The IOM office in Tambacounda is one of the two main points of arrival for travellers who take part in an AVRR programme, along with Dakar. The office provided accommodation for return migrants for a few days, in order to give them time to reorganise their homecoming.

[197] He is talking about Labi, the protagonist of the next story.

[198] "I swear to Allah." The use of these religious expressions, which are common in an Islamic context, often occurs in passages that express the hardest parts.

[199] The experience of Libyan prisons is described by all return migrants as something very debilitating: often crammed into cells with people from different parts of Africa, totally at the mercy of their jailers; the stories give us the image of one of the most traumatic experiences of the entire backway, together with the crossing of the desert.

Narratives are also really helpful for investigating the particular impact the experience of the backway still has on return migrants, even months[200] after their return. From Ousmane's story we perceive how the past keeps on disturbing the present in everyday life and transforming its perception: the encounter with other people who have tried the *laawol ley* brings to mind moments of common suffering; the (perceived) look of reproach of people increases the sense of shame; the isolation and lack of trust characterising the first period after the return keeps on reproducing the habitus of the backway; the poverty of the family brings to mind the money earned and then wasted in Libya; the visible signs of the success of others remind them of the lack of reward for the sufferings experienced.

Return migrants live in a present which is not free from the past yet, as well as in a present despite the past: the experience of the backway keeps on affecting individual perceptions and actions. In Ousmane's case, prison created a habitus of profound distrust he still feels towards others, as well as the lack of money is not only the memory of a defeat but the constant actualisation of the past suffering.

Ousmane's grief was also about the disqualification of his own story: ironically, the same attitude he had towards other return migrants before he left was now the attitude that others had towards him. Indeed, it was this sense of loneliness and isolation which created the conditions for the flashbacks and memories of the backway to keep on invading the present. Of those, the cold-blooded killing of his friend right before his eyes was the most heartfelt. With the death of his friend, whom he was sharing the experience of the *laawol ley* with, the last chance of an intimate sharing seemed to disappear. The language of the story became more fragmented and onomatopoeia, and repetitions, as well as dialogue, entered the discourse to express pathos and violence. The body seemed to reenact exactly the scene: mimicry, tone of voice and movements were used to support language at the limit of its possibilities. Listening to and watching Ousmane talking about the murder of his friend, you really understood his claim: "Anyone who has not been there cannot understand".

> *"They do not know what is out there. Since I returned, I have not had any friends. This is my friend: my atelier and my house. Frankly, I still have flashbacks of the time when I was there, and it makes me sad. Some people have come to encourage me, but they talk to me about things that still hurt me, as they ask questions such as "Why did you not get there?". So, I just want to take care of my problems, I do not talk about things… I am back here, that is all they understand and believe. They do not bother about the reasons that pushed me back here. They believe that it was my lack of decision or that I am not brave enough. So, this forces me to*

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[200] When I met Ousmane, he had been back in Velingara for more than a year.

avoid everyone and to stay in my place. But from time to time, I still spend the whole night without sleeping. And I see when I was like that with my friend [sitting next to me as he was during the interview] *and bang! they killed him like that* [he mimics a shot from a gun to my head]. *Arabs[201] are nasty. When they put you in prison, they make you work. That day, they said to him: "Get up! Go to work!". And my brother replied: "Today I cannot work, I am sick". "Ah, are you sick?! Okay. You go and tell God how sick you are!". And they put the gun like that* [he mimics a gun on my forehead] *and pam!*
He was my friend, we were together in the boat when we tried to cross the sea… When I was there, I made up my mind that I would never come back, before I had earned something. But God decides our destiny, and, frankly, Alhamdulillah, I returned here, and I can work. There are people who return but they cannot work, or that once they've returned here, they die from the consequences of the backway… in Libya they hit you, hit, hit, hit, hit… and when you come back you get sick…"

As we can see, two repetitive aspects punctuated Ousmane's story: mistrust and such a violence that he felt lucky for managing to be back in good physical condition, at least. Besides, the episode of violence suffered by his friend immediately brought to Ousmane's mind other abuses suffered during the trip. The story lost its chronological order and became an accumulation of violence and abuses, as if it were reproducing the flashbacks which captured Ousmane's mind when he was alone:

When I was caught, I had 1,800 Euros with me. They took them all. In Libya there is no bank: you work, they pay you with dinar, *but you cannot keep the money with you. I had my boss there, he took me to a friend of his, I gave him* dinars *and he gave me Euros, because you can save them better. I put them in my trousers and in my shoes: you break the fabric here, because the notes are not that big* [he shows me how he unravelled the hem of jeans to hide notes inside, and then sewed it back]. *But the Algerians, the time they took me, when I left to go to Morocco and try Spain, they managed to find the Euros in my trousers. We were on a bus (that is how we got caught) and they said to me: "Where is your passport?" I showed it to them. "Where is your ID card?" I showed it to them. They said to me then: "Get off!" I said "No, please, tomorrow I am leaving" […] but they took me to a prison, and in the gendarmerie, they searched me, they found the notes, and they took everything, also my phone. They told me: "We will give you it all back, when you get out", but it never happened. This is how they put me in prison for seven days and then they brought me to court. So, they asked me how I entered Algeria[202], and what I was doing there. I answered them frankly: "I just wanted to go to Morocco". They said to me: "Okay, we will set you free with a paper which states that you have two days to leave the country". I told them: "Okay, there is no problem". But instead of*

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[201] With the term "Arabs", return migrants indicate the people of the places they have been in North Africa, mostly Libyans or Moroccans.

[202] The route Agadez-Tamanrasset-Ghardaïa is also part of the central Mediterranean migratory route and makes Algeria an important junction between the two key end points of the African backway: the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and the Libyan coast from which boats leave either for the island of Lampedusa or other ports of the Mediterranean Sea. Migrants who could not succeed on one side sometimes decide to take their chances on the other, using the axis that crosses Algeria from east to west, going from the town of Ghadames (southwest of Tripoli) to Maghnia and Oujda, in Algeria and Morocco respectively, about 40 km apart.

freeing me, they gave me back to the police and they took me back to prison for seven days, and then they put me on a bus. It was full of Africans. So, after three days, we were in the Sahara again. I had nothing with me.

The past experience of the *laawol ley* not only constantly interferes with the present, but also changes the imagination of the future. Talking about his future and the lessons he learned from the backway, Ousmane revealed how the hope he placed in migration as a source of rapid economic gain had changed into a slower way of projecting his future. The ability to endure fatigue and the perseverance which he learnt along the backway were now taken into his life as a new habitus. Once again, courage appeared as the leitmotif of Ousmane's narrative: as taking one's own chance in departing and risking everything required courage, as well as facing the desert, the prisons and the harsh condition of uncertainty and violence of the life in Libya, coming back required the same courage *"pour travailler ici et savoir que si tu gagnes ta vie, c'est pour toi"*[203]. Ultimately, Ousmane's story has been told as a perfect demonstration of the fact that, despite what other people might think, he is a brave and respectable man:

> *How do I imagine my future? If today I earn my money as I did before, I am going to live well. I will build my place first, I'm going to look for a different job, I will get a diploma. However, now this is my job, my profession. I could earn money here if only I had a good machine to do the job. Then I could open my workshop here or even in another part of Senegal. I would like to build my workshop in Tamba, not far away. Even if I had the chance to go to Europe, I would say no, because after all that I saw there... It still hurts me, but now I know you have your rights where you are born and if anything goes wrong here you can still hope to be protected by the law. When you leave Senegal, even in Mali they start to mistreat you... Mali, Niger, Burkina, especially in Burkina, even if they are Africans like us, of black skin like us, they mistreat us...In general, it is the man who is not good, Arabs, Africans ... so you have to build your life without considering any other person. Now this is my idea.*

The experience of the backway had a pivotal role in the life of the ones who had gone through it. Not only before, during and after the journey return migrants continued to be part of a social context that was increasingly structured in relation to an (increasingly difficult to access) "elsewhere". In addition, the backway was understood as a turning point in people's life trajectory: if, at the beginning, departure represented such a potential improvement as to justify the risk of one's own life, now it embodies the outcome of a destiny to be reckoned with. Indeed, in the intertwining of imaginary, everyday reality and material possibilities, the backway gave travellers a different perspective from which to read their

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[203] You have to find the courage to work here and to know that if you make a living, this is for you (or this is up to you).

whole life story. For Ousmane, his return after failure was the proof of a destiny which had always characterised his life, and that has now become clear to him:

> *"Since I lost my mum and dad when I was a kid, I should have realised my life would be difficult".*

When I met Ousmane again during a training week organised by the IOM, he was writing a rap song which he performed in front of other migrants for the first time. He did not write this song on commission, but for himself, as a way to make others listen to his story. He already had it in mind when I met him in October 2019, and although he managed to finish it by January 2020, he recorded it in a studio in Kolda after the end of my fieldwork and so sent it to me via WhatsApp. The refrain of his song sums up what Ousmane had already told me during our interview:

> *I do not go, if yesterday was today*
> *I do not go, if I knew it was like that, I would not take the decision to travel the laawol ley,*
> *A lot of us died there, others are lost, others are in prison, others are shot where they were about to take the sea, Arabs poison you, shoot at you, they kill you, and those who have left disappear. Where do you want to go?*

Rap music is part of a new globalised way of reappropriation of masculinity by young people (Faty, 2014). Halfway between the local self-representation of new *griot* (oral historian) and a global contemporary music movement, this artistic form allowed Ousmane to narrate his experience and to give value to his story. By taking on the role of the rap artist, Ousmane manages to redefine himself and at the same time regains the right to be heard and believed.

The first verse summarizes the reasons for Ousmane's departure: the bad taste of poverty (*anngal wela),* the need to tighten the trousers, a gesture he used to refer to the fatigue of working in the groundnut fields, and the imagination of a better "elsewhere", represented by football, which nowadays is broadcast on satellite television to all the neighbourhoods of Velingara. Nevertheless, leaving means increasing the suffering and returning is exposing oneself to the mockery of the people. However, return migrants must walk with their heads up: only those who have been on the route know how hard it is, ever since the beginning:

> *A young man got up and he said: "I have to go to look for something",*
> *It does not matter what, there is nothing here, poverty does not taste good,*
> *I suffer, so I will do everything I need to do.*
> *He ties the belt of his trousers*

It is the suffering that he has in his house that makes him go,
However, he has to leave to search, not to increase his suffering,
but he is caught, attacked, trampled, sent back as a dead body,
and the neighbours come by just to make fun of him.
They speak ill of you, even if they do not even know how to live and to serve God.
You, who come back, you have to raise your head, and walk briskly
Life is like a rubber band, you do not have to be afraid of pulling,
Everyone has his own fight, everyone takes is own chance,
You had a penalty, now you took the shot,
Those who do not know they do not know,
nobody can say to you that you were not enough man for it,
Suffering began when you arrived in Mali
Those who came back are the lucky ones.[204]

The journey was presented as full of dangers: from Mali and Burkina Faso (where *soldiers, bandits and guards attack you without a reason*”), to the desert (where only real men can cross); from all the prisons of Libya he lists, to the massacre he lived in Grigarage (where “*they made fall the souls of more than 300 black people*”). The *laawol ley* was described as an experience with no safe shelter from bullets, fire, knives, bombs, and even bedbugs and fleas that *“stick all over our body”*.

The song ends denouncing *Osama of Zawya,* the evilest jailer he met, narrating the death of Umar, a Gambien man who was shot to death while trying to run away, and recalling his friend Chérif Mballo. In the very last part, Ousmane's song becomes a way in which "*the survivors are not only witnessing to the horror they suffered, they also speak on behalf of those who did not survive*" (Beneduce 2019, p. 123). Feeling guilty for having abandoned the body of his dead friend, Ousmane ends his song with a request of forgiveness – a forgiveness which, however, he does not grant to the executioners:

The situation is already hot when you arrive in Burkina: soldiers, bandits and guards attack
you without a reason. They put roadblocks and barriers even in the bush,
We paid till we had nothing left
We walked till our feet ached
Even before entering Niger, I do not remember having seen anything I like
Niamey, Agadez, you need to be a real man to cross the Sahara,
We are real men, we are not women
We did not know it would have become so harsh in the Arab countries,
They put us all in jails
They threatened us all with the rifles
They put knives at our throats
they burned us with fire
Murzuk, El-Gatrun, Sebha, how can we escape those prisons?

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[204] I present here the direct translation of Ousmane's song which was originally in Fulfulde. I translated this song directly with Ousmane in a talk we had in his house on 13/09/2021

Abdou Kafir, Ali's Gheto, Rukku Ginne, crossing Birak, Sakun Bani Walid, Abdul Karim, Abdullah Sara Ghetto[205]
Before arriving in Tripoli, we start to scratch
(because) bedbugs and moths were stuck all over our bodies.
My friends, Bey and Manka, witnessed it.

It is here, Tarabulus, the capital of all the crimes,
Where rifles and bullets are easier to find than the charcoal,
Up and down, left and right, there is smoke everywhere
Every minute is bang, bang, bang,
If it is not a bomb, it is tear gas
You start from Burselin
Zanzour, Medina, Habbatus, till Zuara[206]
Whenever you wake up you see blood shed everywhere,
Everyone saw and heard how they shattered Grigarage in 3 days,
they made fall the souls of more than 300 black people,
After that they surrounded Sabratha, and they put all the black people in the middle,
All those who did not die are now handicapped; others remained there without having even the chance to take the pirogue, others remained there having being shot, others crossed the sea, others drowned and were taken by the sea,
Others are still imprisoned today, and they wish to die.

Look how young people are tortured in the land of Arabs
Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya
Osama of Zawya the sign you have made on us will remain on our bodies till we die.
You have to know that you have wounded the heart of all the young people in Africa,
They put a bullet in the head of Umar, the Gambian. His brain was splattered over me,
Just the time to look behind,
And he had already reloaded his gun, and I escaped.
What really shocks me is that his family do not know the truth even today, and the fact that he was not properly buried is the thing that makes me cry the most,
Chérif *Mbalo, I am not disturbing you, but just pray God to forgive me.*

Labi

"I had ambitions like getting married and building a house": this was how Labi justified his journey. Despite having a hairdressing job (the same one he was doing at the time of our interview), the only solution he saw for achieving his ambitions was to leave. And leaving *"takes courage, because not everyone can stand the route"*. What he meant with this sentence became clear after I heard his narrative full of hardships and sufferings. Like the one of many other travellers of the backway, Labi's

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[205] These are all names of Libyan prison Ousmane claims having been through. Often the prison's names are composed by the name of the owner of the prison and of the place where it is. Birak is a small-town north of Sebha.
[206] Names of neigbourhoods and small-town in Tripoli area

international mobility was an evolution of the internal mobility towards the main Senegalese economic areas. He had tried twice to work in Dakar in a friend's business, but even that job did not bring him a satisfactory income. On the contrary, Dakar gave Labi the idea of trying the adventure with the money he earned there. Initially, he planned to do the route with a friend who, however, had pulled out at the last minute. In any case, Labi's friend would later decide to join him in North Africa, pressed by Labi's decision to leave anyway. The departure of a friend was a strong motivation for departing, as also were phone conversations and photos sent through social media networks.

For Labi, the journey to Tripoli was rather smooth, thanks to the few contacts provided by his family network. This kind of network might include people who settled in Libya before the fall of Gaddafi, and they are connected by a duty of hospitality. A *jatigi*, as the person who welcomes is called, has the duty not only to provide food and lodging, but also to protect and help his guest to move within the new context.

> *"I did Tamba, Mali, Bamako, Burkina, Niger. When I arrived there, I had a big brother whose friend was in Libya, in Murzuk[207]. He is the one who picked me up and hosted me for a month, before I moved to Tripoli. Then he gave me the contact of another man who hosted me there* [in Tripoli]. *Afterwards, this latter pointed out to me a foyer* [hostel] *for migrants in Grigaras[208]"[209].*

Then, Labi's story casts light on complex physical and human geography. For migrants, positive mobilities are mostly oriented to the north, since they bring them closer to their goal; negative ones point to the south. These mobilities are characterised by imprisonment, repatriation and various attempts being made by the authorities to discourage migrants. Movements are interspersed with moments of impasse, either in prisons, in a *foyer* or with a *jatigi*, or in cities offering travellers the possibility of employment to finance a new attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea. All these movements are overshadowed by risks: "*When you are in Libya, you risk*" Labi stated. The concept of risk is pivotal to understanding the *laawol ley*. Not only the courage of travellers is measured in relation to the risk of the life-threatening situations they live every day, but risk is quite present in all interpersonal relationships that cross their path. If the relationships with friends or relatives left at home might present the risk to try to prevent the journey mystically or stop sending money, the relationships created in Libya and in Europe are never certain and could hide several dangers.

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[207] Murzuk is a city in southwestern Libya in the ancient region of Fezzan. It is the capital of the district of the same name
[208] Grigaras is one of the peripheral neighbourhoods of Tripoli
[209] Labi, Velingara, 27/10/2019

We were in Garabulli[210], in December, it was too cold. We were tired, but the sea was not good yet, so we had to stay there. It took time. Everything was organised, but the weather was not good: there was rain and, also, we had no food. Finally, we all decided to leave the shelter. I was lucky to be with other migrants from Ivory Coast[211] and other nationalities. We had the luck to meet a taxi driver, we explained our problem to him, and we gave him my friend's number. The taxi driver called him, and he explained him the bad conditions in which we were living. There was no food, it was cold, there were people who were sick ... you know, you can have problems and meet a taxi driver who is a bandit, who tries to sell you to anyone, you never know…But when you are in Libya you take the risk. Fortunately, the taxi driver took us to my friend's house, and we stayed there. When I got to my friend's house, he said to me: "My friend, go to Zawiya[212]. My brother is in Gabon, but I will call him to help you to get to Zawiya". Then, after having called his friend's older brother in Gabon, he gave him the number of the one who was in Zawiya. After my friend and the one in Zawiya chatted, they decided to help me. I spent four months there without working, but when I did not have any money, my brother from Velingara used to send it to me. I was really hungry. My friend in Zawiya gave me more advice to leave. We took the road together and we headed to Suk el Giuma[213], and we stayed in a foyer. *We stayed there for two weeks, and then they took us.*

Labi's story unfolded along the entire coast of the Tripoli district in search of the right opportunity to cross the sea. It was an unorganised movement, which followed advice and opportunities created by casual encounters and through a fragile social network which the young person tried to lean on. The chaotic movement is well represented by Labi's narrative which appeared often very confused, with various time jumps and omissions of logical links. The story of the phone call, which implied a vast social network including Gabon, Senegal, and Libya, is an example of it. His way of narrating, which was made even more difficult to understand due to a nervous stutter, could not hide the difficulty of returning to the past through memory. We can glimpse it from that "*Ok ... Sabrata*", with which he tried to restore order in the exposition. Like a full stop, a sigh started a new chapter about another unsuccessful attempt to cross the sea, along with the experience of having seen more than a hundred people die. The narration of some memories appeared as quite a struggle for Labi:

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[210] Gars Garabulli is a town in the Tripoli district, 60 km from the capital

[211] The Libyan coast is the point of arrival for travellers of the Central Mediterranean Route, coming from all over Western and Eastern Africa. Despite the presence of *foyers* for people coming from the same country or even the same department, a traveller's life in Libya is characterised by various encounters and situations where a sort of pan-African communality is created

[212] Zawiya is a city in northwestern Libya, in the Tripolitania region, and is the capital of the Zawiya district. It is located more than 45 km west of the capital city

[213] Suk el Giuma is a district of Tripoli, around 5 km from the city centre

"Ok... Sabrata[214]. We went there with that friend I had discussed the adventure[215] with in Veligara. By this time, he had arrived. We left for Sabrata, that's where we tried the sea. There were more than 100 people who died, and it was also where my friend remained [he was among the casualties]. *Libyan police saved us. After that, they took us to Zuara[216] where they imprisoned us for two-three days. After that, they took us to Gharyan[217], as prisoners, and I served there for five months."*

From that moment on, Labi began his odyssey through Libyan prisons, repatriation attempts, escapes and forced labour. Prisons were described as excessively harsh places where people underwent inhuman treatment, and where both policemen and bandits ran their own business based on the ransom prisoners paid to get themselves out.

Prisons are the nadir of the condition of total insecurity, without any possibility of physical or legal defence: roundups, police checkpoints, human trafficking between bandits and official police are just few of the situations migrants have to undergo and which create a constant climate of distrust and alertness (*"I know Libyans, they always lie, they do not want to free us. They pretend and then they recapture us on the street and take us back to prison"*). Living in such an environment creates a habitus of suspicion and alertness, which leads to the attempt to remain always hidden and invisible. The experience of the *laawol ley* is about a persistent and continuous traumatic condition, where individuals cope with the concrete and constant possibility of violence and death, as well as with the total absence of any morality. The backway becomes embodied as an existential condition, a way of one's being in the world. This incorporated acquisition of a profound attitude of fear and mistrust takes to the extreme the attitude of getting by, typical of the contemporary Senegalese situation.

The prison was not good: there was no food, and they locked us in a container, with all the heat also coming from the ground. They locked us in trucks, and we were almost a hundred people in just one container. I stayed there five months and after that the Senegalese embassy came. It was a business. They told us: "You pay, you get out". White men also came; they saw the prisons, and they did nothing. So, after five months, the Senegalese diplomat came to repatriate us. But I did not want to go back: I wanted to go to Italy, because I had already spent a lot, and I could not come back like that. So, on the day of repatriation, there were five buses going from Gharyan to Tripoli. One bus broke down, and it stopped. The moment the driver got off, I stood up and got off like some others who wanted to help fix the bus. But I did not want to: I wanted to run away.

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[214] Sabrata is a town around 75 km west of Tripoli

[215] Locally, the French word "aventure" (adventure) often designates the *laawol ley*. For an image of travellers as adventurers see Bredeloup, 2013

[216] Zuara is a city in north-western Libya, close to the border with Tunisia. Zuara is the capital of the district of al-Nuqat al-Khams, and it is located more than 110 km west of Tripoli

[217] City located 80 km south-west of Tripoli

They caught me, they hit me a lot... the agents over there... they thought I was a thief, but they are the real thieves... they took me, and the agents of the IOM tried to help me by saying: "do not hit him, put him back on the bus!", but they hit and hit, and in the end, they put me back in a prison in Tariq al Matir[218]. They told me: "Now you stay here!" This prison was harder than the ones where I was before. I did a month, but they were still trying to get the money for our repatriation. There were four of us there. Me, I understand, because I wanted to flee, but why the others? Tariq al Matir's prison is harsher than the other one in Gharyan. They refused to release us, but one day we were lucky. There were Libyan soldiers who came to look for people to work. I was lucky, and they took me. The police officers did not agree, but they took me anyway. They took me to work in a military camp, and they offered us a deal: we had to work for four days, and then the boss would release us. We accepted. However, there was a guy from Niger, he had been there for five years. He told us: "I know the Libyans, they are always lying, they are not going to free us, they will make us believe that, but they will recapture us as soon as we hit the road, and they will bring us back to prison. If we find a way, we just have to run away. Then we decided to do that. There were four of us. It happened on Friday. We decided to flee in the morning: we got out of the 4x4; we took a chance... but we were in a situation where only God could help us. We ran everywhere, that is how it was, we took the risk... I was with a Malian guy; we were lucky to find a Libyan peasant woman who saved us. We did not know where to go, we did not know the neighbourhood, but she picked us up, she called a taxi driver, and then I called my friend. We talked with the taxi driver; he took us to my friend again. After that, I called my brother. He told me that I had to go back home, but I said "How can I come back? It is not easy! I indeed had some problems, but I'm not discouraged. So, you need to help me!"
He asked me to go back again, but I said I would try again because I did not want to sit and fold my arms [give up].

Despite the misadventure and his brother's offer to send him money to help him come back, Labi refused, arguing that he did not want to return and sit back and let things take their course. Despite everything, being in migration means being mobile and not being condemned to a condition of immobility and stillness. Hence, remaining in the backway meant keeping on being the agent of his own destiny, and not just a viewer of others'. Despite everything, Libya is an arena that still offers *agency*. Moreover, Labi claimed he managed to survive and he could also have seen some favourable signs, such as the luck of being one of the prisoners chosen to work, of having met the Nigerian boy, the peasant and the honest taxi driver. Despite everything, his network of contacts still granted him support. It was precisely the accumulation of these "despites" that gave Labi the strength to continue the journey. In his story, Labi repeatedly described the possibility of returning home as something to refuse, since he *"had already spent too much and could not return empty-handed"*. Thus, the money spent and the property sold at home to finance the adventure become motivational multipliers, increasing the weight of responsibility that migrants feel on their shoulders.

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[218] Tariq al Matir is the detention centre in the eastern suburbs of Sebha, around 770 km south of Tripoli

"Afterwards, I stayed with my friend for a few months. I rested, because in the prison there, you lose weight and a lot of strength – it's like that. However, I decided to try again – that's how it is. So, I went to Sabrata, to try the sea again there. Every day they said we were going to leave, but we did not. There were always problems. We were in bad shape. There were some Nigerians, they were bandits, I do not know... but they came one day, and they attacked us. They came and they caught a lot of people, but we had the chance to escape with some friends. We called the people in Zawiya and we walked for a long time, before entering the city. But everything is risky and dangerous in Libya. That day there were people shooting rifle bullets everywhere. We were running away; we hid in the bush and we spent the night in the bush."

So even after his brother's proposal, despite the shooting and the risk of being captured again, Labi decided not to go home, but to find a job in Libya. Even though sending money directly home is almost impossible, except through the *transfer local* system, finding a job allows migrants to maintain a certain independence and to reposition themselves within the context, re-establishing their health and preparing, even financially, for a new attempt:

"I stayed in Zawiya for a week and then I moved to Tripoli with a friend, but when I decided to find a job, I went to live in another neighbourhood in Tripoli, I do not remember the name… next to Grigaras... I was working in a bakery when, one day, I received my friend there, too… we had already met in Gharyan. A friend gave me his contact information, and after a year I met him again. We talked about the road, and he tried to give me the courage, saying "I'm going to try again!" But I said to him: "Anyway, now I am working, maybe I will try again, or maybe I will go back to Velingara with some money." He said to me: 'You know that going back is not easy.' Anyway, one day he called me, saying: 'I am in Italy!' I said to him: 'What? The other day we had a chat here, and now you're in Italy?!' And he said to me: 'I will give you the phone number of the Libyan man who helped me.' He sent it to me, and that same day I decided to quit my job at the bakery. I went to Zuara, where he had departed. And again, I was in a foyer, in poor conditions. The time was going really slowly, and there were a lot of police around. It was in 2018 and the situation was not going well. One day while we were there, the Libyan police attacked and locked us up again. They took us to Gianzur[219], a repatriation prison. And there I thought to myself: 'I am going to give up, because now I am tired. I have to go home."

Once again, we can see how a friend's success influences the other travellers' decisions. It was just his friend's success which led Labi to convince himself to try the crossing again. And still it was the difference between the results of his and his friend's attempts that made him decide to go back home. If the backway is one of the roads where travellers prove their destiny, the comparison of his own continuous suffering with the friend's quicker success was read by Labi as a sign of something that

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[219] Gianzur is located just 12 km west of Tripoli

even his courage and his determination could not surmount. As we have also seen from Ousmane's story, homecoming is not straightforward. During the *laawol ley*, several return migrants, for example, told me about the need to change their identity: from buying and selling fake passports in Mauritania and Libya, to burning identity documents before embarking on the Mediterranean. The political identity of the travellers appeared to be a situational identity which was not only determined externally, but also decided by the subjects on the basis of the advantages of the contingent situation. The change of identity allowed Labi to return in the contingent situation. Even during several interviews, I collected the story of the Senegalese diplomat who got arrested in Libya, temporarily preventing travellers being directly repatriated to Senegal. According to these accounts, he was involved in the illicit trafficking of migrants, making money out of the repatriation of their fellow citizens. In order to return home trying to avoid this situation, Labi used his ability to speak Fulfulde to convince the OIM to register him as a Guinean citizen. Although this choice seemed to be the best at the time, it would have serious consequences once Labi was back. As a matter of fact, when I met him, Labi was still trying every way he could to enter the IOM training and aid programme in Velingara, but, due to the fact that he had been repatriated as a Guinean, he could only receive training and funds from the IOM organisation in Guinea. Even in the *a posteriori* interpretation of these "wrong" decisions (such as not having left with his friend or having chosen to return by pretending to be a Guinean citizen), return migrants see the signs of the inevitable harshness of their destiny:

> *"The Senegalese diplomat came there, but he did not come to help us: the guy came to do business. Afterwards, the Libyans even arrested him, saying: 'Ah, you did not come to help them, but to do business!'.*
> *So, they said: 'Now, if you want to have a chance to come home, because you stayed here for a long time, you have to register in Gambia or in Guinea, because your diplomat came here and he tried to do business, and the police took him.' We went on like this for a month, but no one else came, and I decided to try to go for another country.*
> *Me and another friend registered as Guinean people. I had the luck to speak Peul, and Guinea (Conakry) is a nearby country. But my friends from the North, they did not understand Fulfulde, they only spoke Wolof. And so they stayed there while I had the chance to be registered. And they took us, along with the Guineans, and they brought us back to Guinea. I had a friend there, we were in jail together, and I stayed at his place for a month, and then I called the family, saying it was time for me to come back."*

Amadou

Luck, destiny and God's will marked Amadou's narrative of his journey,too at four very important moments, all connected to a real threat: the struggle to cross the desert, where the poison of the scorpion could be deadly; the prison, where he was blinded in one eye as the result of torture with electric cables; the escape from the prison, after which he met a *cokseu*[220] who decided to help him; and the return, when God gave him the chance of arriving home at night to cover his *hersa* (shame).

The peculiarity of Amadou's narrative was the precise reconstruction of his journey as an effort to order and make sense of the whole experience. His story focused more on the first part of the journey, describing the world of *cokseurs*, police raids, crumbling shelters, and casual encounters with people from all over sub-Saharan Africa. This world already began in Agadez[221]. Indeed, it was from the desert onwards that the real suffering began. The Sahara appeared as the real rite of passage of the backway, which separates the moment of the imagination from the reality of the *laawol ley*, as well as the prelude to the land of violence and hopes that was North Africa[222].

Narratives about the desert described trucks full of people, long and exhausting walks to cross the border illegally, often with only a bottle of water, and without the possibility of stopping: some even described having seen their friend or companion dying from the hardship, getting killed by traffickers because they could not keep up, or people drinking their own urine. However, to succeed in

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[220] In Senegal the term *cokseur* indicates a man responsible for directing customers to taxis and coaches, in stations. In the language of the *laawol ley* in Velingara, while the term *passeurs* indicates, for example, the actual driver who leads the crossing of the desert, the term *cokseur* is more used for the one who organises the crossing, creating a connection between the smugglers and the travellers

[221] For an in-depth analysis of the conditions of migrants in the first important stages of the Libyan route, see Brachet, 2005.

[222] The desert is often described as the most exhausting part of the journey, to the point that often it seemed impossible to put into words, as it is impossible to understand for those who had not gone through it, as several return migrants' stories testifies:

"The desert is not easy at all. [...] When I left, I did not know the road; they wanted me to take the 4x4, with other twelve people in the car. There were even people lying under the seat! And then, all of a sudden, it stopped in the desert, and they said: "Get out! Look over there. Go straight on!" You walk for 10 km, and there are people dying, because there is no water. I tell you, if you know what the road is about, you could not go" (Bala, Velingara, 25/03/2020).

"I left in 2015, and then I came back in 2018, and then I left again in 2019. The first time was easier, because you took the bus to Agadez and, from there, there was the 4x4 to bring you to Algeria, to Tamanrasset where there were normal buses that took you where you wanted. But in 2019 ... it was hell. We had to do the mountain. The driver asked us to get out of the car when we were close to the border, and we had to go on foot. We walked all the way up the mountain and after that, the 4x4 picked us up. This is a great risk ... there are young people who died there: if your water finishes, it is over, my brother. In 2019 there were two girls who died. They were Ivorians." (Mamadou, Tambacounda, 23/02/2020).

"I would not dare suggest illegal migration to anyone, because to arrive in Algeria, Tamanrasset... if you see where we went through, you will think that we are brainless. The desert... To reach Tamanrasset, you walk for a week in the middle of nowhere. We made it because we met a Tuareg, we paid 150 thousand CFA francs, and he brought water with a camel, and he saved us." (Demba, Linkering, 22/11/2019)

overcoming the hardships of the desert gives migrants greater impetus and courage. The desert marks a before and an after, a north and a south: a first point of no return. The second stage is the Mediterranean Sea: natural obstacles become embedded in the life experience of travellers:

> *"I went to Dakar and I worked a little there. After having earned the money little by little, I left. In Dakar nobody helped me. I left with some friends I met there. We arrived in Tamba and there we took the bus. There were five people I knew, and there were also others from Kolda. We went through Mali, and we stayed there for seven days, then we did Burkina, three days, and we entered Niger, Niamey. There we spent seven days, and we headed to Agadez. In Mali there are garages, and you sleep on the ground there… in Niamey too, it is like that. In Agadez we spent around five-six months. There were young people in the garage who told you: 'If you sleep here, you have to pay.' But in Agadez, there are some crumbling houses, and there I slept. A guy takes you in there, before the police come over to check you. The* cokseurs *do that. Now if you have money you can pay for something to eat, and you stay there until the day they drive you through the desert: they come to pick you up at night, you jump on the 4x4 and then you go to the desert. I did not have any contacts there, but there are* cokseurs *over there and they look for people for the desert: in Agadez there is a* cokseur, *in Niamey there is a* cokseur... *there are a lot of them. They are from Nigeria, Mali, Niger, and even from Senegal.*
> *After they took us, they left us in the desert… yes, the Libyan Tuareg left us there, and they came back after five-six days, and they took us again. We stayed there for five days, and we saw nothing, only sand, wind, sand, wind… That is what we saw… Afterwards they came again to pick us up… One more day like that in the desert, and I would have been dead[223].*
> *I was not prepared for the desert … You think about dying … Actually, you think about a lot of things. You do not know where you are going or what to do, whether it is like this or like that... Even the car that is passing by right now* [during the interview], *you would not have seen it, so intense the wind and the sand were.... You just pray God. Even going to sleep... in the desert is like that. There was a scorpion that stung a friend of ours… The desert scorpion… I tell you, if God is not there, you are going to die. Anyway, I went all the way to Libya... We were in Dirkou[224], we hadn't arrived at El-Gatrun[225] yet, and the* cokseur *who took us there sent another 4x4 to pick us up. And that was how we entered Libya."[226]*

As soon as he got to Libya, Amadou was captured by a group of bandits, entering into a circle of physical and psychological suffering, the signs of which were still visible in the knife cuts on his whole body and his blind right eye. Amadou's body also bore witness to his suffering in his bent posture, in the nervous movement of the hands, in his attitude of looking elsewhere, and in the anxiety

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[223] In Amadou's story it is possible to notice how already in 2015, a well-developed infrastructure of roads, transport and traffickers allowed migrants to leave easily alone, even without the need for any contacts.

[224] Dirkou is a rural municipality in Niger that is part of the Bilma department in the Agadez region, which is about 500 km away

[225] El-Gatrun is a village in the southern part of Libya, located in the Fezzan desert, on the border with Niger. More than 1,000 km separates this first Libyan village from Tripoli and the coast. For this reason, migrants often stop in Sebha, which is about 260 km from El-Gatrun

[226] Amadou, Velingara,14/11/2019

in his voice. Indeed, retrospective narratives of the backway are stories that are deeply embodied, and which are not just told, but actually physically relived.

Having no more money with him, and having to wait for his family to get organised to find the amount of money required to free him, Amadou spent four months in prison:

> *"We reached El-Gatrun, but the bandits took us there. I did four months in prison* [he shows me the wounds on his arms, and he tells me that there are the same on his back and legs]. *These were made by a knife. There were a lot of people there: men, girls, children from everywhere: Mali, Ivory Coast, Nigeria... They said we all had to pay 150 thousand[227] to get free. There are people who have a relative in Libya with money and there are* cokseurs *who help them to transfer the money they need… For example, there are* cokseurs *who have left Ivory Coast, so if your relative has the money to send to Ivory Coast, he pays the* cokseur *and he gives the money to the Libyan there. But I did not have the money, so I stayed there for four months. I got tortured, even with the (electric) current. Every day, every day it was like that. When most of the people had already paid the money, only five of us remained. I called my parents, but they told me that they could barely find the money to eat at that moment. So, they decided to sell us to another prison still run by Arab-Libyan bandits."*

Finally, the condition of Amadou's imprisonment improved in the new jail, thanks to his skills as a plumber:

> *"There I had my chance: there was a problem with a faucet in the water supply system. They came and asked: 'Who can fix the faucet over there?'. And I knew how to do it. After they got me out, I did what they asked me to do, and after the job was over, they let me in again. But then they stopped the beating. Still, they were hitting other people, but now they did not hit me. I had diminished the beating, but I was not out yet. Until I had paid, I would stay there."*

In a context of extreme precariousness and uncertainty, where the concepts of luck and destiny played a decisive role in the perception of one's experience, these favourable events were often interpreted as signs of possible future success. The determination not to give up and to continue the journey was also fostered by travellers having spent greater amounts to finance their journey: having been freed thanks to the money obtained from the sale of the only family land (except the plot where Amadou was still living at the time of our interview), Amadou's moral burden became even bigger and the desire to succeed became a "must" he had to realise at all costs (*"We had already sold everything to get me out, so I had to try to sail to Europe"*). The well-being of the whole family was now at stake. This greater expectation and pressure must be taken into consideration as they have major impact in

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[227] We assume Amadou was referring to CFA

the event of a return, as well as their suspicions of having been cursed or jinxed. Along the route, sometimes people have some lucky moments they interpret as signs of their future success. However, they know people can cast jinx, hex over them. Often, they think they have failed despite the favourable signs, because of the jinxes people cast on them for jealousy. Amadou's story, in fact, revealed how travellers acquire a habitus of lacking trust and of perceiving reality as a constant danger. Nevertheless, it is through precarious and casual social networking that travellers construct their adventure: it was when "working in the fields" that Amadou "found someone" who organised his trip to Tripoli; in prison he met Somali people who helped him to run away; once he had escaped, Amadou called an unknown telephone number given him by an unknown Nigerian. Paradoxically, even though these narratives were full of expression of a general mistrust, it seemed that the only way to move forward was to take the risk of relying on someone (or "on God" as Amadou would say). Ultimately, all the stories told of a vicious circle characterised by the presence of criminal networks and of a vast informal economy. It begins with the attempt to go north, it continues with capture either by bandits or by the police, then the payment of the ransom or running away, and it ends with the search for some temporary job in order to make a new attempt.

> *"Finally, I paid the money: my brother sold the field we had to get me out, otherwise I would have died there… Since we had already sold everything, I had to try to cross the sea and get to Europe. So, I headed to Sebha, and I started to work there. Over there you cannot find a job as a plumber, you have to take what you can find. You know the Arabs: they offer you a job, but at the end they tell you that they are not going to pay you. So, you go back, they take you to the fields and you work there... When I had the money, I found someone, and I told him that I wanted to leave for Tripoli. I paid him, and I found other people who wanted to go there. We went to Bani Walid[228], and when we were about to leave for Tripoli, the bandits caught us again. We spent five days in the prison. But, one day, when the bandits were bringing in the food, there were Somalis prisoners who attacked them. Then they started shooting at them. This situation gave us the chance to run, run, run, without shoes, without anything, into the desert. There was a small town, we stayed there two-three days; after that I called a* cokseur *whose number was given to me by a Nigerien Hausa. When I called the cokseur, he said: 'No, wait for me over there! I will send you an Arab, who will come and pick you up.' That is how I entered Tripoli. When you are there you have to trust God. I accepted his help even if it was not safe. And so, I entered Tripoli, and I started to work again, little by little, to earn something. When I earned the money, I paid another* cokseur *to try to go to Italy."*

There are just three ways to get out of this loop: succeeding in crossing the Mediterranean Sea; reaching Morocco through Algeria (Maghnia-Oujda is the most common route) and then reaching

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[228] Bani Walid is a city in Libya, included in the Misrata district. It is located in the interior of Tripolitania about 150 km south-east of Tripoli

Spain[229]; going back home. Amadou's story of his attempt to cross the sea was full of details: from the amount he paid, to the night of departure, the shipwreck and the rescue at sea by the Libyan coast guard, ending with the usual refrain typical of Libyan prisons "*Call, get the money and we will free you*":

> *"I paid almost 400 thousand CFA to cross the sea. We stayed there like in the bush. There were big stones next to the sea, and they said to wait, since we were waiting for the pirogue. Then they hurried us, and they made us embark, at 11 p.m., to sail to Italy. Before the morning, we entered international waters. They said that at any moment the Italians would send a boat to come and rescue us. However, there was a little hole in the boat, and the water started to come in and people were falling... the water kept on coming in like that* [he mimics the rising level of the water]. *We called the Italians, but it was the Libyans who answered. We saw a boat coming, but it was not the police yet, it was a boat which transported gasoline... There were four people who died because they fell into the sea. They were on the other side and when the boat capsized, they fell overboard. If you can't swim, you die like this. Afterwards, the boat stopped, and they called the Libyans. They came and they arrested us all. They took us to Tagiura[230], in prison. Even the police tell you: 'Go, call your* cokseur *in Tripoli. He will pay us the money, and you will be free."*

The story of Amadou's return was very similar to Labi's: both of them, defeated by a series of failures and sufferings, finally took the decision to return home, but, due to the arrest of the Senegalese diplomat, they both decided to be repatriated to Guinea Conakry. Since then, the experience of a mind full of memories and pain and the sensation of a head always about to explode have never left Amadou, even two years after his homecoming.

Keeping in touch with people met along the route is very difficult. The experience of the backway unfolds in the casual intertwining of individual trajectories, shaped by different information, opportunities and movements brought about by attempts and captures. Moreover, most of the travellers claimed they had lost or broken their mobile phone, losing all the contacts they had saved in their address book.

Nevertheless, it happens that return migrants still have contact with friends and family members who left after or even before them, who arrived in Italy or who are still struggling in Morocco or Libya. Although they knew the situation there, return migrants often talked about them as the ones who

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[229] Although I collected several testimonies about experiences of migration in Morocco, for the purposes of this chapter I preferred to relate the stories reported here. Even those who have had the experience of Morocco report the same dynamics. While Morocco and Libya are places where people try to cross to Europe, Algeria often represents a crossing point between the two main points to reach Europe: the Libyan coasts and the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta. However, many migrants use the Tamanrasset - Ghardaia - Oran route to get to the north.

[230] Tagiura is a Libyan town in the Tripoli district located about 12 km east of the capital

manage to stay ahead, beyond the desert or beyond the sea. They are the ones who still have hope: their path to a better "elsewhere" had not been completely blocked yet[231]. Their own is over.

> *"After all, the guy from the Senegalese embassy came to take our photos and to bring us to Senegal. Samba, the guy from the embassy, said to us: 'Wait for me, I will be back in one month!' But we stayed six months in the prison, and we did not see Samba any more. Now, what could we do? We were not eating well there, because macaroni was the only thing we ate, and stuff like that... Afterwards, one day the Guinean embassy came. At the time, I wanted to go back, because I was tired: I had already tried the sea three times. So, I went with the Guineans, because I believed they would go back straight away. Instead, they brought us into the bush again, and they locked us up again. And the Guineans shouted: "No, we want to go home!". But they beat them. At night, the Arabs came to pump poison gas over them, and everyone collapsed, and they took us to a very small underground prison. We stayed there for eight days. It was only after our Guinean friend died that they took us out. There was Yaya, he works at the UN. He came to talk[232], and the next day he took us back to Tripoli, to Tarek al Sika[233]. We slept there, and the next day we took a flight to Guinea Conakry.*
> *When we got off at the airport, I didn't know anyone. So, I left, and I called a UN guy who was working there. I explained my case to him, and he said to me: 'You are Senegalese?! Why did you not return to Senegal?' He told me that I should have waited for him to contact the IOM in Dakar. But I was very tired[234]: I found myself without any strength, because I was in prison and there are still things buzzing around me here* [he indicates his head]. *Even if I stay still, my head goes like that* [moves his hands circularly to indicate constant work]. *So, I said to myself: 'I must go', and they gave me some money to help me get back here. [...]*
> *My friends, with whom I began the adventure… I have not seen them anymore, since the first time they caught us in the desert. I do not know whether they have been killed or if they are somewhere else now. So far, I have only heard from another friend who is still in Libya, in Tripoli. He wants to return, but he does not know how to do it."*

Conclusions

The three examples analysed here clearly show how narrating is primarily a moral laboratory through which the subject makes sense of an intense and hard experience, as the *laawol ley* is. Return migrants' retrospectives offer us an image of the backway as a world where the most basic rules of social life fail, leaving room for exhausting physical and psychological endurance. As a period of constant anxiety, alertness and fear, the backway remains as a habitus and a way of being in the world which goes beyond the temporal boundaries of the adventure. In this context, human relationships become

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[231] To indicate their failure, most return migrants use the Fulfulde verb *barugol*, which literally means "to block a road with something"
[232] From the stories, it emerged that migrants were always the object of continuous bargaining between different actors who make up a real market of human beings
[233] Tarek al Sika is a detention centre in Tripoli
[234] In his interview, Amadou used the verb *larugol* which indicates intense physical as well as emotional fatigue

even more ambiguous, characterised both by a constant lack of trust and by the need of fundamental support. Despite their *agency* in moving through the complex North African scenario, travellers often appear to be at the mercy of several factors: bandits, policemen and corrupt officials; financing capacity of the family and the informal and unreliable job market built around the central Mediterranean route; the jealousy of relatives and neighbours who can always try to block the way through mystical interventions; the unfathomable will of God.

The backway is the experience of facing one's own destiny. We can see it from the way Labi and Amadou interpreted unexpected situations and the success of a friend as a favourable or adverse sign: it was comparing his own struggling with the sudden success of his friend that convinced Labi to give up. The signs of one's destiny are often sought and interpreted during the journey and, as some lucky episodes are often read as favourable signs, their disproval feeds the conviction of having been the victims of mystical acts. While these thoughts could also be considered as psychological strategies of de-responsibilisation, to lighten the moral weight of the failure, they are also the cultural expression of a fatalistic way of thinking, as well as of the renewal of an ancient image, such as that of the savannah (*ladde*).

The *laawol ley* is the new way through the *ladde*, which for various Fulani groups used to represent the space outside the place of social life (*wuro*) (Dupire 1970; Riesman 1998; De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1999; Ciavolella 2010). From the *ladde*, the *laawol ley* retains the characteristics of being the land where a man is subjected to God's will, as well as the space that allows the individual to seek the means for his own independence. Similar to the Fulani of Mauritania described by Ciavolella (2010), the *laawol ley* is the imaginative and practical effort to continue to build an "elsewhere" to relate to. Hence, the backway is the image of a possible reconceptualisation of the *ladde* in the post-colonial space as *"a political and economic resource to escape from crises, inserting oneself into a cyclical history of migration against the hazards of destiny"* (Ciavolella 2010, p.222). Ultimately, as we have partially seen in this chapter and as we will address in more details in the next chapter, the experience of the backway calls into question cultural meanings and concepts, giving them a new historicity (Stewart 2016, p.80), according to individual and collective experience.

It is according to these concepts that return migrants find a way to reconceptualise the suffering of the backway in a positive way. Even though the three retrospective narratives I have presented here were told by young, unmarried people, irregular migration cannot always be conceived as a rite of passage to acquire the means for social adulthood, as it is also travelled by men who are already married with children. Actually, many of these people leave precisely in order to live up to the roles that they

already have as heads of families, but which they claim they are unable to cope with due to a lack of financial means. Before resigning oneself to one's own condition, one must try his own destiny and learn how the world really works. This is what the *laawol ley* is about. As some people state: *hakkil ko yas* (leaving makes you clever).

Coming back means having to face a different future from the ones the travellers had imagined. Ousmane says that his current project is to open his own tyre shop in Tambacounda. In the meantime, he has started investing his money in buying some rams to breed at home. In this different way of investing and accumulating his capital, we can see Ousmane's different way of picturing his life, less linked to the rapid earnings promised by the backway, and more to a slow process of navigating the scarce local economic opportunities. Labi was hired by a friend and he still works as a hairdresser, but at the end of my fieldwork he was trying to obtain some funding for a project of creating a market garden he wanted to do together with some friends. The last time I saw him, he told me he hoped to earn enough to start his own business in Velingara. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Amadou was still struggling to overcome his backway experience even more than a year after his return: the difficulty of finding a job as a plumber and any other source of income, as well as the indefinite waiting for financial aid from some development project, still cause his head to wallow in his memories. Despite the differences in their current condition, all the return migrants claim that being able to return from the Libyan hell is proof of their ability to overcome the toughest difficulties. As Labi said: "*We are men, we will get through everything*". This is what returning home is about for them.

The local experience of coming back

Return migrants construct the interpretation of their homecoming, their past, present and future life trajectory through the use of cultural concepts such as heɓtaare *(independence),* tampere *(fatigue),* baasal *(poverty),* ndimaaku *(dignity),* hersa *(shame and discretion) and* wondugol *(the effort of living together). Even though mediated by historical, economic and social changes, the defeat of return after failure is readable through the* hersa */* ndimaaku *dialectic typical of Fulɓe societies, already explored by researchers working in other Fulfulde contexts.*

The chapter underlines the fact that return is not just an individual experience, but something which involves the whole family network, as well as the entire society, since the increasing number of unsuccessful migrants in the last years has been reshaping the relationship between 'the local' and 'the elsewhere'. This situation goes along with the spread of internet access, telecommunications, money transfer, transnational movements and investments by the local diaspora, while the sons of those who left in the 1980s, and who grew up in Europe, are challenging their emotional and financial connections to Velingara.

The laawol ley *continues to shape the daily life of return migrants, not just by the physical and psychologically traumatic consequences, but also as a sentiment of mistrust and social competition, even within the family. Eventually, the experience of coming back is also linked to ethical ways of dealing with suffering, religious and mystical discourses, and the effort of valuing the backway as a school of life, where travellers learnt new skills and ideas to shape the construction of a (still) possible future.*

Five fundamental concepts

Return migrants often talk about their homecoming using the French word "*échec*" which means "failure", "lack of success", suggesting the idea of "being stuck", "blocked", "held in check". They also use the Fulfulde verb "*baarugol*" which has two meanings: to block a road or a path (denotative); to find it impossible to reach a place or to achieve a goal or to realise an idea (connotative). The return blocks the path which allows people to come out from the *"socio-temporal space characterised by economic, social and political marginalization"* (Vigh 2010, p.148). Even though the anthropological literature on migration has described the backway as a rite of passage to adulthood (Bredeloup 2013, p.178), the local experience of the *laawol ley* suggests the need to go beyond this vision. This interpretation is not sufficient to explain people leaving despite having already one or more wives,

children, a house and a job, or fields to cultivate. These individuals are adult, economically responsible *jom galle*[235].

For them, travelling the backway is not about entering a new stage of life, but taking on the responsibility of being an adult, that is to provide and take care of the family, and to look for a better future not only for themselves.

To better understand the subjective meaning of the backway I use another, more emic perspective, taking inspiration from the past anthropological tradition[236] with the project *"of an African psychological sociology of everyday life"* (Ly 1967, p.67), and of a sociological study of African moral values.[237] The analysis of the local notion of wellbeing and independence (*heɓtaare*) – together with other five key concepts of the Fulfulde speaking lifeworld (*tampere, baasal, ndimaaku, hersa, wondugol*) – gives here the way to the socio-cultural contextualisation of migrants' experience of return. The analysis of these concepts is not a purely academic exercise, but it means joining an ongoing debate in contemporary Fulakunda society. The large increase in cases of young travellers returning after having failed the *laawol ley*, especially after 2015, is a chance to observe this debate coming to the surface in the collective effort to build a new moral order related to inherited values ("*aada* and *chosan*"). This debate has become part of daily life and it takes the form of gossip, stories and moral judgments when men gather to drink tea, or when women chat while braiding their hair.

Return migrants are part of (and take part in) this debate. Concepts like *heɓtaare, tampere, ndimaaku, baasal, wondugol* – used explicitly or as implicit shared moral references – are both used to morally disqualify and to socially rehabilitate. For instance, return migrants complain of not being considered *dimo*, and of being accused of cowardice and of having wasted all the family's means, while they

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[235] The head of the household

[236] The reference is the analysis conducted by Boubacar Ly in the 1960s. Although Ly's work was written between 1963 and 1964, I used the last edition by l'Harmattan published in 2015. Ly's work must be framed within the particular period of decolonisation, as well as the beginning of the mobility of the Toucouleur towards Dakar and France. Similar to Riesman - who worked in those years amongst the DjelgôBé - Ly is part of that French anthropological trend interested in the "moral psychology" of cultures. Ly himself, in the title of an article published in 1967, states that his work is a "*contribution to the sociological study of the African moral values*". In the same article, tracing the origin of this tradition in the works of Georges Gurvitch, Mikel Dufrenne, and Georges Balandier, Ly claims his privileged position as a native African researcher. He is a man of his time: he is convinced that his insider's point of view could give a deeper, less superficial and less "dry" perspective on the way African societies work (Ly 1967, p.66)
 Like Riesman, Ly was interested in the relationship between social cultural heritage and individual freedom. Ly observed the crisis of "*traditional moral values*" (Ly 1967, p. 66) in societies increasingly losing their rigid social stratification, where the descendants of the lower castes were adopting the nobles' moral ideals
Ultimately, Ly's ability to grasp fundamental aspects in the link between individual actions and shared moral values makes his work a good reference for interpreting the phenomenon of *laawol ley* and returns after failure from a local perspective
[237] Ly's concept of "traditional moral values" is not deterministic and does not seek to neglect the individual character of each experience. This notion serves as a reference for connecting a set of individual experiences

claim to have always behaved with courage and determination. They highlight that *ndimaaku* also lies in accepting God's decision with self-respect and self-control. Far from being defined once and for all, moral values remain a terrain of constant appropriation and redefinition. Hence, reintegration *"is not a return to a stable cultural norm, but an exercise in creative, even revolutionary, power akin to the invention of culture"* (Farnetti and Stewart 2012, p.432), both at an individual and a collective level.

Heɓtaare: being free from the fatigue of living together

The *Dictionary of Verb Roots in Fulfulde Dialects* (Seydou 1998) collects the roots *"heɓ-"*, *"hett-"*, and *"hewt-"* in a semantic field which includes several meanings: "reaching", "getting", "obtaining", "overcoming a constraint", as well as "regaining" or "recovering something you have lost". In daily language, the expression "*mi heɓtima*" (I am well) expresses the absence of illness, hunger, concerns or conflict but, in a metaphorical sense, it can also be used to communicate having some spare time. It is also an expression that women use after having given birth, to express their freedom from the burden of pregnancy. Finally, it is also the expression of someone who has just come up with a solution to a problem, who is finally free from worries. Historically, the word *heɓtaare* has also assumed the meaning of social freedom, mainly associated with the word *hoore* (head). "*HeBtugol hoore mun*" was an expression that acquired a strong political connotation in the second part of the 19th century and in the late colonial period to express the conquest of sovereignty and the end of oppressions (Bellagamba 2017, pp.73-75).

Eventually, *heɓtaare* also implies *"the economic and social capabilities to handle one's life at its best"*. The property of one's head (*jeyaal hoore mun*) is based on "*a sense of self-autonomy that the individual achieves with full adulthood: the ability to formulate purposes and turn them into action in the awareness of being part of a larger social environment that demands respect for its rules and feelings*" (Bellagamba 2017, p.82). The *heɓtaare* used to be also related to the freedom from the *ɓoggol*, the rope tied around the necks of cows, which metaphorically also indicated the condition of slavery. For return migrants nowadays, it constitutes an impelling moral imperative to not depend on anyone, even in arduous economic, climatic or social conditions.

Since *heɓtaare* is a concept that goes beyond the analysis of returns, I have tried to define it through different voices. For instance, Mariama, the president of the *Club de Solidarité des Femmes du Département de Vélingara,* once told me in a conversation:

"Heɓtaare... *everyone wants* heɓtaare. *But* heɓtaare *is not freedom: it is to reduce the fatigue. Hence, freedom and* heɓtaare *are not the same. We say* mino hepti o wattu because mi alaa tampere, *meaning I have time to be free because I am not fatigued."*[238]

Heɓtaare means being freed from the fatigue of being subjected to someone else's will, and from the fatigue of hard work. In the past, the *heɓtaare* was connected to the breeding of cows, a typical activity of the *rimɓe* (nobles), while hard labour concerning human survival, such as cultivating, used to be done by *jiyaaɓe* (slaves). The meaning of *heɓtaare* becomes clearer when referred to the female condition: a woman is considered to achieve greater independence during old age when her children provide for her expenses and needs, and she is relieved of domestic duties, which are carried out by the wives of her children.

In local Fulfulde dialect, there are two verbs expressing fatigue: "*loorugol*", which indicates physical or moral exhaustion, pain, suffering, or disease; and *tampugol*, which is the struggle and the suffering of not having the *heɓtaare*.

"*A tampi*?" (in French "Tu es fatigué?", in English "Are you tired?") is one of the questions people asked me more frequently during my fieldwork, mainly when they saw my struggling in dealing with the constant heat that characterises the Upper Casamance between February and May. The opposite of "*mino tampi*" can be expressed only by the negative form "*mi tampaani*" which can also be used as an expression to indicate "*I am feeling good and full of energy*". The *Dictionary of Verb Roots in Fulfulde Dialects* lists all the different meanings of the root *tamp-*:

> *1) se fatiguer, être fatigué /be tired*
> *2) être nécessiteuse / be poor*
> *3) être importuné / be bothered*
> *4) euph. Être terminé, épuisé (spec. Les semences dans la besace du semeur, qui doit aller se réapprovisionner) / be finished, exhausted, used up*
> *5) se donner grand mal; s'épuiser, s'en plus pouvoir/ wear oneself out*
> *6) se dégouter, être las (de) / be tired of*
> *7) manquer, être à court de, échouer /fail; fall short of; not know how*
> *8) manquer de force / lack strength*
> *9) chercher en vain, échouer / seek in vain, fail* (Seydou,1999, p. 693)

Tampere can be caused by physical effort, as well as by material conditions or by being fed up with someone or something. 7), 8) and 9) help us to understand what return migrants mean when they say

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that they are "*fatigués*", as they are stricken by a sense of failure, of having searched in vain and of lacking the strength to achieve their goal. Being the contrary of *heɓtaare*, *tampere* also means to keep on being busy with problems and worries. This is well expressed by the refrain of one of the most listened-to songs on the radio and people's smartphones during my fieldwork, *Baasal Wéla* by Mokoba[239]:

> *"Yana himmo, jom galle yana himmo*
> *jom galle baasal bimbi yana himmo*
> *sabu goDDum alaa ande, yana himmo*
> *ayi baasal de ko yana himmo"*

> [He falls and he gets back up, the householder falls and gets back up,
>
> when he gets up in poverty, he falls, and he gets back up,
>
> because today there is nothing, he falls, and he gets back up
>
> because also poverty can fall, and come back again"]

The anaphora of falling and getting back up expresses perfectly how *tampere* can also be considered the sentiment of daily fatigue, a vicious circle from which it is difficult to escape. The good *jom galle* is ready to face the dangers of the backway to reduce both his *tampere* and his family one, and if he falls, he is called on to get up again and find an alternative for everyone's well-being. For return migrants, *tampere* is routinised in their daily life and strictly connected to the fear of *baasal*, namely a situation of poverty that is difficult to get out of. As the song clearly states*: "baso tampi, billahi, baso lorima"[240],* or, as a return migrant put it: *"kalaiam boni, tampere wadi"[241]*. *Baasal* prevents the *jom galle* from spending a good day in peace, forcing him to wander constantly in search of help, or of some money, without the comfort of a meal on his return home, and of people's respect. Hence, *baasal* is an economic and social condition making the subject and his family vulnerable and dependent on others' help, affecting his possibility of reaching a condition of *heɓtaare*, and of maintaining dignity (*ndimaaku*)[242]. In Fulfulde societies poverty does not allow to have "*the control*

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[239] Mokoba is one of the numerous amatorial or semi-professional rap singers who characterise the vibrant rap scene of the contemporary Kolda region. During my fieldwork, I found out that in almost every village of Velingara department it is possible to find at least one young man who writes rap songs. The spread of internet connectivity in recent years has made it easier both to download backing tracks, as well as to share songs via Xender, WhatsApp or Youtube. Affordable recording studios opened in Kolda and Tambacounda, but many use their own devices to record

[240] Translation: "Poverty is fatigue, poverty is suffering"

[241] Souleymane, Dambirou, February 2020. Translation: "My money is wasted, the fatigue has come"

[242] See the dedicated footnote in the glossary section for a wider reference to existing literature on *ndimaaku*

of one's own head", it is shameful, as it *"decreases one's noble status, one's power because it implies the loss of [...] assets, i.e. cattle, milk power"* and force the subject to *"engage in types of labour which negates nobility"* (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995, p.401).

Possession of material goods and cattle was strictly linked to the possibility of stating one's level of *dimo* in the social hierarchy (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995, p. 202). The *ndimaaku* was a set of moral values and behaviours that publicly demonstrated one's belonging to the noble class: self-respect (which implies having a cool head in difficult situations and not losing control of what one says or does); being courageous, righteous, honest and keeping one's word; showing publicly a selfless generosity and respect for the reserve and the difficulties of others (which implies politeness and discretion). In the past, following the *ndimaaku* was a way to state (and demonstrate) one's *iwdi* (genealogical origin) and a public expression and reproduction of social classification (N'Gaide 2003, pp.712-714).

The concept of *ndimaaku* has changed. Historical processes like the rise and fall of the Fuladu kingdom (Bellagamba 2017, pp.77-80), the spread of Islamic religion (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995, p.202), citizenship in post-colonial Senegal, education and integration into the urban world (N'Gaide 2003, p.727) resulted in a conceptualisation of the *ndimaaku* less connected to one's origins and more to the enactment of a set of moral rules (Ly 2015, p.224). Being *dimo* has become an individual claim constantly flaunted in the public arena (Ly 2015, p.226), despite one's origins, the "social poaching" (N'Gaide 2003, p.733) in the constitution of the contemporary social hierarchy. Once inextricably intertwined, the genealogical material and moral components of the *ndimaaku* are nowadays separated. While the ancient social hierarchy still informs the way people relate to each other in certain aspects of life, such as marriage (Bellagamba 2020, p.158), new modern means, such as money, houses and cars, have replaced cattle in providing the material base of one's honour. These changes are also due to the extension both of the audience of people who can be considered as one's peers, and of the geographical arena of the social competition. Citizenship, as well as access to new economic resources, have extended the competition to a wider population, while internal and international mobilities have created a multi-located village (Dia 2015, p.43) where resources for the social competition can be drawn from different contexts, and in different ways, escaping the possible moral reprobation certain actions may raise. It is not so important to know all about the activities through which migrants in Europe build their houses in Velingara, what matters is the house.

Even when a man has to be accepted poverty "*as a fact of life*" (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995, p.402), keeping one's honour is mainly about preventing anyone else from *"holding control"* on him (Ly

2015, p.100 vol I). Today as in the past, this is a fundamental rule of the collective effort of building a possible way of living together. In Fulfulde, the verb *wondugol* expresses both the concept of "*living together*" and of "*enduring, bearing*"[243]. Ultimately, having *heɓtaare* means being above the others, or rather above the "social duty to bear society".

Returns after failure are experienced as a blockage in the way to the *heɓtaare*. "*Baarugol laawol, ko baarugol heɓtaare*": the blocking of the road is the blocking of independence. Coming back empty-handed dramatically emphasises the *tampere* of being stuck since the possibilities of "unblocking" are constantly threatened by the economic and social vulnerability brought by the homecoming. Return appears as a real moment of crisis characterised by the disappointed hope in "*the context of the moral breakdown of the present*" (Kleist and Thorsen 2017, pp. 2-9). The way return migrants direct their behaviours according to the idea of *ndimaaku* shows the effect of *"the past in the present"* (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995, p. 110), how *"the traditional society provides to the modern one the values, [...] the mentality and personality"* (Ly 2015, p.228).

Samba yano arti, addorani lartake / Samba yano arti, addori Di jaɓɓe[244]

Return after failure is not just an individual experience. It is the experience of the subject's whole network in relation to a social context. The complexity of the analysis lies in the fact that a plurality of dimensions must be kept together: that of the subject; that of the relationship between the subject and his family network; that of the relationship between the subject and the cultural, economic and social context; and that between the family network and the context. In addition, the increase in

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[243] A certain *"tragic sense of life"* (Riesman 1998, pp.154-155) is deeply rooted in Fulfulde cultures. We can also grasp it from an analysis of the greetings. All the questions not concerning directly how a person is feeling are expressed in with the negative form: *tanaa* ("trouble" in English) is usually the word for asking how the interlocutor has passed the night *(tanaa finaani?)* or the day *(tanaa ñallaani?)*. "How are you?" *(tanaa aala?)* means literally "is there any trouble?". The hardship of living is fully and more clearly expressed by the word "*wonda*". For Riesman, the name *gondal* (names beginning with "w", "g", "ng" can come from the same root, due to the consonant mutation which characterises the different Fulfulde dialects) means cohabitation, neighbourhood. Seydou's *Dictionary of Verb Roots in Fulfulde Dialects* attributes these meanings to the root *"won-"*: to be, to exist (with the negative form *wonaa*); to be; to live in, to reside in; to be in trouble, to suffer.
The [d-] gives an inclusive meaning to the root "wond-": "live with", "be together with" or "cohabit", but also "suffer from". Furthermore, expanding the research into a more hypothetical field of connections, Charles A. Ludwig Reichardt (1878, p. 30) reported different definitions of the words *gondi* ("tears", "grief", "crying") and *gondo* ("secret"). The form of salutation *jam tan gonda?* (literally "only peace in living together?") best expresses Fulɓe conception of life and society: life and, most of all, living together, is about enduring; the *puulaku* is the art of performing worthily this effort of enduring, and *ndimaaku* is the social recognition of the success in this effort.
[244] "Samba went and he came back, he does not bring back anything, so he is left apart / Samba went and he came back, he brought back (money), he is well welcomed"

number of returns after unsuccessful migratory experiences, in recent years, must be taken into consideration, too.

The possibility of international mobility through the *laawol ley* has become part of the modern local socio-economic system, enhancing the agonistic character of the Fulakunda society. The backway has been increasingly understood over the years as (ideally) accessible to anyone who has the desire to improve his condition. Sometimes decisions to depart have been made to try to even out the inequalities created by the migratory success of a brother, a friend or a neighbour. The more the backway becomes difficult, the more the success demonstrates individual strong moral qualities, as much as good fate and the favour of God's will.

Honour amongst Fulakundas is based on a simple principle: "*to be more and never to be less*" than those who are considered social peers, and to "*never allow themselves to be left behind*" (Ly 1967, p.48). This principle was already expressed in the epic of Samba Gueladio and Silmaka, the two legendary heroes of *pulaaku* whose stories are still well known throughout the Kolda region (Ba and Kesteloot 1968; Ly 1978; Wane 1980; Belcher 1994; Seydou 2015). Several epic fragments talk about how Samba Gueladio and Silmaka constantly tried to surpass each other in generosity through gifts of cows, goods and slaves. Each gift aimed to demonstrate their capability of doing something that no one else could equal, explicitly challenging social peers in approaching or overcoming the consistency of the gift. This epic is echoed in the words of several return migrants I interviewed:

> *"Migration here is in the blood because to leave means to gain the respect of the people. There are cases where they tell you that if you do not leave, you are not going to marry the girl you like. Even if you make a living here, they only want migrants. Social networks have an influence, too because you grew up with someone who had nothing, like you, and one day he wakes up and he leaves for Europe, he arrives, and he sends photos saying that now he is well off. After two years, he starts to build a house, he takes his parents to Mecca, and you, you were with him, you were like him… but you are no longer like him.*"[245]

> *"When you see that your friend, who is your age, went somewhere else, and now he comes back, and he does whatever he wants... and you decided to stay here, and you worked every day for nothing. So, you have to go and try your luck. It is envy, but also what we call imitation because you see what your friend or your neighbour has achieved. And so, you take the courage to leave and to do like him. Even if you can work here, it is better there: what you can*

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[245] Samba, Velingara, 19/02/2020

earn there is better than what you can earn here, so easily you can build a life there and change the family situation here. That is the only reason that made me go.''[246]

In the multi-situated town, unsuccessful migrants appear as the great losers, especially at the moment of their return. This is well expressed by the final lines of another local rap song which was famous during the time of my fieldwork, *Yaadu* by King Abib and Codde Umar:

> "*Samba yano arti, addorani lartake*
> *Samba yano arti, addori di jaɓɓe.*"

Those who face successfully the dangers of the *laawol ley*, bringing back wealth for the family, are honoured and welcomed as important and worthy people (*jaɓɓe*). By contrast, the one who comes back defeated is set aside, not looked at (*lartake*). He is *woppado,* namely, someone totally abandoned by everyone: nobody looks at him or speaks to him or about him anymore. He is beyond the level of shame that is acceptable to partake in society. Return migrants' dishonour lies not only in having returned empty-handed but mostly in not having been up to the standard of their social peers. They have been defeated in the social competition. As the moral judgment on the backway is given retrospectively, it does not matter what a traveller had to endure: honour is measured by the conditions that a subject is capable to create for himself and his family.

Over time, international migration has contributed to raising the level of the social competition and changing the local meanings of mobility. Past migrations differed greatly from the contemporary ones, as they used to involve the whole family and livestock and often had the purpose of founding a new village. However, both past and present mobilities follow the same proverb: "if you cannot find a living here, you have to leave to look for it somewhere else" (as repeated in many interviews, in French, "*il faut aller chercher*"). This was well explained to me by Aliou, a return migrant of the previous generation, whose adventure dates back to 1996-2004:

> *"My father had planned the family: he sent my brother to Dakar, he ordered another to stay, and another joined the army. I was the one who had to leave. When I left, he told me: 'You will go and search for seven years, and if you do not find anything, you come back'. And I respected his will. Since he also told me: 'You do not go in order to bring but to seek something. So, if you succeed, come back. If you do not succeed, come back anyway.'*[247]

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[246] Demba, Kansantang, 30/10/2019
[247] Aliou, Linkering, 23/11/2019

Nowadays, the overall socio-cultural context has changed significantly. In the society of getting by people do not leave to search as in the past, they go to find. Sometimes migrants claim they have left to search and not to find, but this affirmation appears to be more a rhetorical strategy: most of the time, people leave to earn new resources for themselves and their families. Failing to do so is not neutral: it means endangering not only one's own honour but that of the whole family.

The agonism in the family

One of the toughest things return migrants often have to face is the agonistic contexts inside their families. Competition develops along two main axes: the strengthening of the divide between "blood brothers" and "milk brothers", and the bypassing of the principle of seniority among family members. Regarding the first aspect, Marguerite Dupire (1970) already wrote about a different kind of bonding between "milk brothers" ((i.e. those born of the same mother or who drank the same milk), and "blood brothers" (i.e. born of the same father, but different mothers) within the Fulɓe family. International migration marks these differences even more, especially between siblings and co-wives. In the Kolda region, a mother's honour depends on her son, so that a man's successful life spills honour over his mother. The mother is also the first to receive financial and material benefits from her children's earnings. Just as the role of men as breadwinner and head of the family diminishes as they get old (Bellagamba 2013, pp. 13-14), a mother acquires more independence and importance as her children begin to take care of her needs. For a man, being unable to provide for one's own mother is often seen as a great disappointment and dishonour. The words of Madame Kante, one of the most influent old women in Velingara and president of the regional women's platform, well express a mother's point of view:

> *"I always speak about the* laawol ley *with the other women. I tell them to pay attention because our children like to leave, but where does it come from? I tell them that it comes from their mothers because they talk a lot in the family, saying things like: 'There you go, I do not have this, I do not have that… look what we eat!'. A young guy, hearing these words, at the age of 15-18 years… he gets hurt: 'My mum gave birth to me, she is in this situation, and I have arms and legs, that is all I need. Today she is here talking, and it is up to me to answer.' And what is the answer? They leave, and they cross the sea, just to satisfy their mothers.*
> *A second case is a father who says to his wife 'Your children are worth nothing, they will stay here and die like that, and it is because of you, you are worth nothing like them' … in Fulfulde*

he says: 'Be Nafara!'[248] *And he compares her to a co-wife who maybe has two or three children abroad when she does not have any. What are the children going to do? They are going to die in the* pirogues *because they do not want their father to insult their mother in front of them. So, I tell, women, to be careful when they talk in the family. Our children must not hear us saying: 'Ah, look at the child of this one… look at the vehicle that he brought…, look at what he gives to his mother!' These words are like wounds. Indeed, some parents push their children to go. You are in a* tontine; *you take CFA 150,000 and you say to your child: 'Voilà! Hide from your dad and go! All the others did the same!'. But when he is along the way, he calls you and you must collect other money. So, the mother gets up and goes to look for the money to send. The woman there, Diallo, is still crying for her child: the guy called her saying: 'Mum, I am in Morocco, now they are asking me for CFA 700,000 to cross the sea.' His mum told him: 'Ok!', and she sent the money to him. He left, and there he died."*[249]

International migration, especially through the *laawol ley*, is an element of family tension, mainly when brothers or cousins have a different outcome. In families where someone has arrived abroad, returns after failure appear more difficult to bear also for other people, as expressed by a return migrant's mother who interrupted the conversation I was having with her son:

"In life, everyone seeks: if your brother (of another mother) *spends all day looking for something, you spend all day and night to get the same. We say:* 'Si nene goroma walla, baba goroma, ñalli heɓde, hankadi waalu ɗaɓɓuɗe'[250]. *That is the reality now because if your brother has found something, you have to go and search for the same. You cannot be less than him. If your brother is in Europe, and you cannot earn any money here, you have to leave. So, when people ask you for something, you can hand it over saying: 'That is what I have'. Although, when they ask you, and you have nothing, it is the edge of the shame, and that makes people look."*[251]

Migratory success creates a different hierarchy within the family which does not follow the logic of seniority: the co-wife with a child abroad, even though she is not the first one, often becomes the most important, and even the word of a younger brother who lives abroad could worth more than the one of an elder brother at home. This is the experience of Souleymane, a return migrant I met in Sare Sukande:

"Those who are in Europe are freer: parents do not have the same control over those who live here and over the ones who left. If there is a conflict between me and my father, if he does not

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[248] The expression comes from the root "*naf-*" which indicates usefulness, profit and advantage
[249] Madame Kante, Velingara, 09/03/2020
[250] "If your mother wants something and also your father, spend your day for having it; you do not rest and you search"
[251] Kadijatu, Velingara, 4/11/2020

manage to control me, he calls my brother in Europe, telling him what is happening. So, my brother in Europe calls me, threatening me: 'I am not going to do this and that for you anymore'. And he means not paying for holidays, cell phones, or any other gift."[252]

This situation contributes to increasing social pressure to leave. It often pushes "successful" Fulɓe Fulakunda migrants not to help anyone else to migrate – unlike in other ethnic groups, such as the Sarakulleeɓe fostering a sense of abandonment in those who stayed or came back. In several interviews, return migrants criticise those who live in Europe, accusing them of keeping the money only for themselves and of having completely forgotten their families. This is clear in the conversation with Diallo, a return migrant whose brother is currently in Europe, while he is striving for settling a small chicken farm:

> *"It is difficult to come back here with a brother who is in Europe and who does not help you. We grew up together, and now he is there. He earns something, he eats and also has money to put aside. However, he does not think: 'Does my brother in Africa eat?' But here in Africa, it is like this: if anyone has something, he just wants to enslave you."[253]*

Often, return migrants have to face two other sources of tension: the money they spent on the backway, which may have anchored the family even further in poverty, and the (shared) secret of their departure. Building his opinion from his personal experience in the support programme for the families of missing migrants held by the Red Cross in the department of Kolda, Velingara, Maka and Goudiry in 2018-2019, the psychologist Cissé expressed his point of view on this topic:

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[252] Souleymane, Sare Sukande, 23/01/2020

[253] Diallo, Velingara, 10/02/2020. Issa and Yusuff, both return migrants from Libya, express similar opinions: *"My older brother arrived in Europe. After he left, he took his wife there too, and he has lived there since then, and he has never helped the family. Look at the house here, it has not changed. When he left, he did it because he wanted to help the family, but he did not. We have the same mother, but this does not change anything. Did he bring me something or did he bring something for any of my children? Did he finance me a project to work here, in order to earn some money to feed the family? No, he did not, and he never told me why. Sometimes we talk on the phone, but it happens only if he has things to do here. He asks me to do them, and I do them, but then I turn the phone off. There are people here who ask me: 'What is your brother doing now?' And others who gossip behind my back, saying: 'If he has been in Europe for so long, why is their house so run down?' Some of them take pity on me and wonder why my brother does not help me"* (Issa, Mballacounda Thierno, 31/10/2020)

"My brother (the son of my father's brother) is in Italy. But that was not the reason that pushed me to leave. Even my mother did not want me to go. But I had already put that in my heart. Here, even if you work, we earn just enough for eating. On the contrary, those who have left, they are doing things that I could never do here. My brother made buildings because he worked there, even though I do not know what he does there to make money. They call you on WhatsApp, but if you ask them what they are doing, they will not answer you. I only know that he is in Italy, and that he built a house for himself in Sare Toro. So, there are tensions in the family, and that is because only one has succeeded. When they call you, they tell you: 'You have to work because your situation is due to the fact that you do not work'. They have forgotten what life is here. I cannot ask him to give me something, this would be shameful" (Yusuff, Velingara, 27/02/2020)

"Often migrants say: 'When I left, I did it secretly', but in most cases, this is not the reality. There are usually at least two members of the family who are informed, and the secret is kept between the migrant and someone (a younger or older brother, the mother, or the father...). Informing all the members of the family is very rare. However, migration is an experience that is not quite certain, it is an adventure. So, by going on an adventure, we secure ourselves: there is always at least one member of the family who is informed and who prefers to hide the truth. But if the migrant fails, there will be problems. People will ask: 'Why did you let him go?' So, there is also another source of tension: it is a secret that is not shared in the family."[254]

Family is therefore the first arena where return migrants have to play their reinsertion, facing the latency of the old tensions which led them to leave, and the new ones created by their unsuccessful attempts.

The supernatural and social envy

Competition generates a social climate of generalised mistrust and the fear of being the possible victim of an attack through mystical means, organised by envious people. The fear of mystical attacks (*bau*)[255] permeates different aspects of life in Velingara: from the protection of newborn babies through *gris-gris* (amulets), to the soccer tournaments between neighbourhoods where the best players are always at risk of being targeted by all kinds of curses. This constant fear of the possibility of a mystical attack is also crucial to understand the experience of the backway. Although return migrants in Velingara say that consulting a marabout before travelling the *laawol ley* has become rarer than before, travellers always leave wearing gris-gris that protect them from the

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[254] Cissé, Velingara, 1/03/2020

[255] Fulɓe Fulakunda believe that mystical forces help to increase or prevent the chances of success and failure. *Bau* has the same root of *bawɗe* (power) and of the verb *waawugol* which means "to be able" (also used as the English modal verb "can"), "overcome", "be stronger than". *Bau* indicates the mystical power recognized to certain marabouts to influence human life. It is different from the concept of *barki* (benediction) and *kuddi* (malediction) analysed by Mohammed Camara (2008) amongst the Fulani of Guinea. *"The Fulani distinguish two levels of benediction, namely earthly blessing called* barki*, and celestial salvation called* baraaji*. They also distinguish two levels of malediction, namely earthly curse or* kuddi*, and sin or* junuubi/junuub*. Although both ultimately emanate from God, barki and kuddi may be transmitted to individuals through fellow humans (parents, spiritual guides, holy persons) and materialize essentially in worldly life whereas* baraaji *and* junuubi *are distributed directly by God and revealed only on Judgment Day"* (Camara 2008, p.48). *Bau* is more related to mystical power and "*black magic or witchcraft (whatever is meant by such)*" (Camara 2008, p.54). Although Camara reports that "*Muslim Fulani abhor such pagan beliefs*" (Camara 2008, p.54), the testimonies collected during the ethnographic work confirm that the mystical power attributed to marabouts and other figures is part of the *"belief system to interpret and give meaning to risk"* (Gueye and Deshingkar 2020, p.10) of migratory journey, and to homecomings. As in many other African context, also in Velingara *"witchcraft is one of the main causes that people evoke to explain individual and collective misfortune"* (Gardini 2015, p.213).

adversity of the route and from the envy of the people they have left behind. Before departure, marabouts give prophecies about the journey, about which days to leave, which days to avoid, and which roads to travel on, and during the journey – especially before very dangerous moments, such as the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea – families in Velingara might go to consult a marabout[256], both to know how the journey will go and to summon mystical support for the traveller. The ones who have succeeded in their journey and now live abroad continue to hide important information from their family and friends, such as where they live, what they do, and under what conditions. This is not just about the necessary containment to preserve a successful image which they can use to have a greater say in the family. This is also about the fear of "*the dark side of kinship*" (Geschiere 2003, p. 43) and neighbourhood. According to local belief, mystical attacks must first be able to reach the target to be effective. To do so, people need to know the person's name and the place where he or she lives. This is why, for example, traditionally the husband gives a new name to his wife when she moves into his house: by giving her a new name, jealous people from her village will not be able to cast something on her.

The power of marabouts hides a basic ambiguity: their *baraka* (spiritual power) can be used either to support or to prevent the success of someone else. The interpretation of the psychologist Cissé of the Red Cross gives an idea about the impact of this belief system over the experience of returns after failure:

> *"Sometimes there are migrants who tell you: 'Someone did something to me! A boy told me that he left with his brother, but the boat was shipwrecked in the middle of the sea and his brother died. And he had already seen it in a dream. So, he said to his brother: 'I saw in a dream that if you leave today, the boat will break and you will die', and he begged his brother not to leave. But the brother replied: 'It is only because you do not want me to succeed.' The boy is convinced that it was his father's other wives that caused the shipwreck. For him, what happened to his brother could have happened to him, too. Others say they had a good start,*

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[256] Marabouts are often considered "*brokers of hope*" (Vammen 2016, p. 40) who *"play a very important role in shaping the migration decision in a context of extremely high-risk migration where the dangers are well known"* having a *"mystico-religious influences on migrants' imaginaries"* (Gueye and Deshingkar 2020, p. 10). Marabouts *"play a critical role in both delivering God's message to migrants and their families and also engaging in prayers to higher cosmic forces to protect the migrants and shape their destiny"* (Gueye and Deshingkar 2020, p.20). They provide *"services for aspirant migrants, helping them to magically manipulate officials, protecting them against danger on the journey"* (Gemmeke 2013, p.114). Even during the journey marabouts are seen as capable of directing divine intervention. *"Failure to consult one often ends in an unsuccessful attempt to reach their destination or in the marabout alleging it is thanks to his mystical intervention that they were able to return safely to land despite disaster at sea"* (Nyamnjoh 2010, p.4). Consultation often takes place through women who *"play a critical role in organizing and supporting the migration of men through the mobilisation of financial and religious resources"* (Gueye and Deshingkar 2020, p.5)

but it was their brothers at home that prevented them from arriving. They went to see some marabouts since they were jealous as they did not dare to leave.

Here in Velingara, also for the baccalaureate e*xams, there are people who tell you: 'I would never take the exam here because people could cast something against me. I have to do it somewhere else.' It is the same for migrants who tell you: 'I was with a friend, and I was braver than him, but he managed to arrive, while I did not. Surely, this is because there was an invisible hand behind that prevented me from succeeding.'*

Sometimes the first thing they do when they come back is to try to rebuild good health on a spiritual level, going to wash to get rid of the bad things that accompanied them on the journey. Often, the lack of trust is widespread and general, since migrants do not know precisely who is responsible. They begin not to trust even relatives and friends. This feeling of distrust has a great impact on the reinsertion process. They often become such that I have seen a case of one return migrants who does not even dare to eat what his family put on his plate; such his fear of his relatives was!"[257]

We can say that among the Fulɓe, *bau* is the ambiguous side (Marie et al. 2008, p.295) or the dark side of the *ndimaaku*: it is a coward, instinctual, hidden, dishonest way of acting. This is why these mystical powers were mainly attributed to *jiyaaBe* and to women. The *ndimaaku* consists of publicly demonstrating one's ability to act honourably, and it also implies "positive" social competition, that is the need to equal or surpass a social peer in what he does or in what he has. The aim of *bau* is to diminish one's rival in secrecy: it is the instrument of a "negative" social competition based on the principle that "if I cannot keep up with someone, I can try to prevent him from succeeding". From this perspective, *bau* appears as functional to coexistence[258]. When competition appears to be too unfair and unequal, people might turn to mystical means as the very last resort to prevent an unsustainable level of competition.

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[257] Cissé, Velingara, 1/03/2020. Cissé's words are confirmed also by the president of Tambacounda Returned Migrants association who told me during a journey outside Velingara:
"For the majority of those who return without anything, it is a complete failure. This feeds a debate that sounds like: 'We have known him since he was young; he has never been a good worker…' and they call him many names... On the contrary, you - the one who has returned - think that you are here just because there is someone who made something to you, and you feel you are the victim. This contempt is towards the family in the first place, but also towards the neighbourhood. We live in polygamous families, so you suspect your brothers or your mother's co-wife, and this contempt becomes big enough to upset the whole family." (Ibrahima, Tambacounda, 23/02/2020)
[258] Riesman states in his study about Djelgôbé, talking about the ambiguity of social relations: *"This ambiguity is not a quality that one might infer from an analysis of kinship structures, but rather it results from the fact that in order for these structures to come true human will is necessary. [...] The fact that you are a brother or son of someone is not an assurance that you are in solidarity with him. Solidarity, far from being a given in social life, is rather a goal towards which people strive more or less depending on their particular situation. But solidarity is a given in another sense, since the ideology of kinship creates a situation where the acts of a man engage, in the eyes of others, those who are close to him, whether they want it or no"* (Riesman 1998, p.231)

Eventually, the use of mystical means often appears as the expression of the duplicity in the relationship between man and society. African *"kinship has been all too easily equated with solidarity"* (Geschiere 2003, p. 43): nobody *"ever guarantees that the community (and the family itself) is unanimous in wanting your success"* (Marie et al. 2008, p. 278).

Hersa

> *"Returning and maintaining your dignity are very much linked. We had dignity before we left, and we kept [our] dignity. We left to save our honour but as luck did not smile on us, we still have to preserve our dignity, even if we would have liked to be more autonomous in life. But we are still* dimo *because we do not lie to anyone, we do not steal, we do not beg."*[259]

> *"When I came back here, my head was too stuffed: I could not even go to bed, and I did not sleep. It was my friend who, seeing me like that, asked me to come here to work. My family did not agree with my decision to leave. I only told them once when we were together, and they said: 'No, you must not do that!' Since that day, I have never spoken with them again about it. I took my money and left in the night. When I returned, I did not even dare to look my parents in the eyes, for all the money I wasted. I had mental complexes because I did not gain what I wanted: I was back to the same old life, and I had spoiled all that we had as a family."*[260]

As shown by these two different interviews, return migrants' first step to reinsertion is to demonstrate that they have *hersa*.

Hersa can be translated as shame, modesty and reserve. It is a fundamental concept for understanding social relations amongst several Fulɓe (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1999, p.44). *Hersa* regulates the behaviour of a real *pullo*[261] before society. The attitude of *hersa* is a mix of modesty, self-respect, discretion, politeness, and control of one's own emotions and words (Riesman, 1998; Ly, 2015). Immediately after the homecoming, a sense of being ashamed of the others'gaze is reported by several return migrants. Most of them tell of having undergone a period of isolation where they barely led a social life. This is not just about the need to recover from the hardship of the journey. They also want to avoid being exposed in public and demonstrate to have the qualities of patience, self-control and a cool head that have been questioned by their failure.

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[259] Assane, Sare Sukande, 22/01/2020
[260] Ousmane, Velingara, 28/10/2019
[261] The term "*pullo*" used to be linked to a genealogical condition which had to be constantly sustained by public performance. In the past, this name was given only to the *dimo*, the freeborn man. In the Senegalese republican contest the genealogic part is minimized, and a "real *pullo*" is a man who follows the *pulaagu*, as the set of moral rules which guide his behaviour

In fact, coming back goes against the "*moral obligation of courage*" (Ly 2015, p.131): it gives the image of a man who let himself go, who did not have enough moral fibre, patience, and determination. The physical presence of return migrants contradicts their claim of still being *dimo*. The *hersa* sometimes becomes unbearable, as well expressed by two return migrants during a group interview in Kanstang:

Ibrahima: *"You should have to commit suicide to get to Europe, as you said:* 'Barça or Barzakh!' *Once you are back home, the family looks at you from an angle of defeat. You are considered a coward, someone who did not really want to succeed. You do not feel well with them anymore. Even if I manage to be reintegrated in my family now, some of my brothers are still not happy with me being here."*

Daro: *"People say:* 'He sold the motorbike, the cows, the land…and then he came back without bringing even five francs…' *If you listened to all these people, they would drive you crazy… one, two, three people, all saying that you have impoverished the house, and then you are still here! Coming back brings a lot of problems at home. To leave is to leave: you do not think about coming back. Elsewhere means elsewhere, to succeed means to succeed. If you come back without earning anything, you should not dare to go back to your family."*[262]

Return migrants' presence has an impact also on the *hersa* of the whole family. Not only the return implies the temporary or definitive end of the collective hope for an improvement of the conditions of life, but it may generate the *basaal*, a condition of dramatic dispossession. That sense of collective hope which serves as a "push factor" to travel the backway, and as a motivator factor to face all the difficulties of the journey, now makes the individual pay a moral price. Return migrants experience the *dark side of their social capital* (Åkesson and Baaz 2015, pp.39-40) not just in an economic way. As the family's assets and networks are used either to organise the journey or to help the traveller along the Central Mediterranean route, the more the goods are wasted, the more the moral burden prevents the migrant from returning empty-handed. This situation leads to prolonged suffering and a deep sense of shame after returning. The sense of shame is constant: the whole landscape in Velingara is surrounded by the material effect of international migration, and periodic returns of migrants from Europe show off what it is possible to acquire abroad. Moreover, images shared via WhatsApp or on the social media by migrants in Europe constantly feed the local imagination, while the possibility to receive cash from the money transfer help to organise more ostentatious weddings, baptisms or *tabaski* celebrations.

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[262] Ibrahima and Daro, Kansantang, 30/10/2019

In Velingara people complain how the modern "*puissance*" changed from being a form of social regulation to shameless ostentation, as already described by Ly (2015, p.225, volume II) in the context of the Toucouleur and Wolof society of the 1960s. *Hersa* is not just about preserving one's dignity, but it is a fundamental principle of the *wondugol:* people should not do anything that puts someone else's honour at risk. As noticed by several people I interviewed, successful migrants tend not to take into consideration the necessary respect for the honour of others. Moreover, *"the will to fulfil demands of rank leads to try to reach the situation or the goods that one's neighbour possesses, to do the same things that he does, [that is] to have the same behaviours and practices"* (Ly 2015, p.226, volume II). In this regard, ceremonies that publicly expose the family, such as weddings, baptisms and funerals, become privileged moments to observe how migratory failure is truly an experience lived by the whole network. While these ceremonies are now "*valued according to the number of oxen sacrificed and the amount of money spent"* (Ly, 2015, p. 226, volume II), they could be the *coup de grace* for the few resources still left at the family's disposal, as they are employed in the attempt to preserve one's respectability in the eyes of the neighbourhood.

Valuing the experience: migration as a school of life

El Hadji Faty (2014) analysed the use of disqualifying narratives on the backway as a discursive positioning aiming at the symbolic reconstruction of one's masculinity amongst return migrants in the *halpulaaren* context Futa Toro. Following the official anti-irregular migration discourse of NGOs and government, international migration is described as a senseless, insane effort which compromises the well-being of the whole family. I encountered this kind of rhetorics. in the Kolda region, too. These discourses are embedded in the Fulɓe Fulakunda's agonistic society, where a *pullo dimo* must match the condition of his peers to claim his honour. Both the *bau* and these disqualifying narratives are strategies to lower the social competition. Demba, the president of Conseil de la Jeunesse of Dambirou, for instance, deals with several young people who have come back or are willing to go:

> *"I was a migrant for 15 years and I know what they go through there, and the consequences of the* laawol ley. *If I abandon the idea of the backway, it is because it is a losing game. Firstly, your children will not be educated. Secondly, in Europe, you will always be a foreigner. Thirdly, if you earn 150 euros to send here, there you have to earn more than 3 million because*

if you consider the accommodation, plus the food, transport, plus your credit card, utility bills ... it is all money."[263]

Narratives about the backway are not only filtered through the construction of a suffering subject and the notion of loss. Most of the time, when return migrants are asked whether they regret their choice, they often reply that despite not having found what they were looking for, the *laawol ley* should be considered an important experience of personal growth. On this point, it is important to keep in mind how, in Fulfulde speaking contexts, wisdom is about having experience and knowledge of life and the world, too. A wise man is capable *"to demonstrate penetration of mind, acuity, clairvoyance, lucidity, sagacity and finesse"* (Ly 2015, p.169, Volume II), qualities return migrants claim they acquired along the way.

For them, local knowledge is not enough to define a wise man. They use the experience they earned in travelling to try to overturn the perception of having failed, describing the *laawol ley* as a school of life where a man can see new things and develop different ideas making him more aware of how life is and how society actually works. Return migrants claim this knowledge made them wiser than those who stayed put, as well expressed to me by Labi:

> *"Even if you did not earn any money, you gained here* [he touches his head]. *You will have the experience. This is what will help you. I have changed a lot, even the business I did in Libya changed me ... Even if you do not arrive where you wanted to, you have gained experience. Nothing is lost. I came back healthy, and I saw friends there who became sick or went crazy. My friend died in the sea. And others were shot dead. I saw things ... Indeed, I did not have the chance to reach Europe, but Alhamdulillah, I am in good health."*[264]

The first aspect that makes the backway an important school of life is the ability to manage difficult situations, dangers and humiliations. Several return migrants report having developed a new awareness and a new perspective even on their own society:

> *"Along the way, I had problems, but I learned very important lessons for my life. The main lesson is that a man can only be in the middle: he will always meet people who are stronger than him, while he is stronger than others. Sometimes you are stronger than the one who*

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[263] Demba, Dambirou, 22/01/2020
[264] Labi, Velingara, 27/10/2019

succeeded. I was exhausted along the way, but I had more courage than others, and some people were braver than me."[265]

Furthermore, as reported by Coulibaly, a return migrant who managed to open a grocery shop a year after his homecoming, travel made people more responsible in managing money, helping them to understand how important their role within the family is:

"I am different from the man who left. Now I know what I want. In the beginning, we did not know how to manage our money to build our life, but now we know. Before, you are here, you work and then you leave and you waste your money, and you do not know whether tomorrow is coming or not. But since I came back, I do not have time to go to parties anymore. I only think about how I am going to be successful."[266]

Participation in the informal labour market along the route and forced periods of staying put in a place to earn the necessary resources to continue the journey left travellers with new ideas and skills to be put to use at home. While clashing with the current economic and social impossibility of their realisation, these ideas become part of the way they imagine a future, also allowing a re-evaluation (at least at a representational and imaginary level) of their home context, as expressed by M., a 22 years old man I met when he was just returned in the IOM centre in Tambacounda:

"You have to leave, even for five years, but then you have to come back. You have to leave to have ideas. You see Algeria and you have ideas. My problem is that I learned how to cook, but I do not have a place that hires me. Also, the other guy here learned baking in Libya. But in Algeria, they did not give me a diploma. My boss taught me everything, but I cannot get a paper to apply for a job in a hotel."[267]

In the discourses of return migrants, the public school appears as the real alternative to migration for their children. Despite the value they give to mobility, the majority of return migrants assert that they

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[265] Cheick, Medina Dinguirai, 03/11/2019. Malick and Lamine, two return migrants from Libya, express similar opinions: *"There is a lot of difference between a guy who tried the* laawol ley *and a guy who did not. We went out and we saw a lot of things. When we want to do something, a person who stayed here could say that it would not be possible. In Libya, you can be insulted or hit by a child or by a woman, and you cannot do anything about it, otherwise, their parents or husband will come and kill you... I saw a lot of things: I saw how it is to live amongst people. I can say that it opened up my mind, and it also taught me what you can do when you earn something, so that you do not spoil it. When I earn something now, I know what to do with my money"* (Malick, Medina Dinguirai, 03/11/2019)
"Before leaving, we would not have dared to do what we do now because before leaving we were not very open to the reality of the world. This was all we could see, but when we discovered reality, we re-evaluated what was at home. During the journey, we also developed a feeling that one had to resist, be brave, and a strong man to survive. This experience transformed us, now we can face whatever life brings us." (Lamine, Sare Bassi, 16/11/2019)
[266] Coulibaly, Vélingara, 5/02/2020
[267] Moussa, Tambacounda, 23/02/2020

do not want their children to have the same experience, especially because of the dangers encountered. Most of them declare that they are doing their utmost to send their children to the public school[268]. The school is pictured as the hope for a new generation at a time when reaching the global North has become increasingly difficult. Furthermore, describing migration as a school of life also helps to keep alive an individual and collective hope that the investment was not totally wasted: what learnt along the backway could be used to avoid sinking into *baasal*, as expressed in this dialogue I captured during a conversation between two return migrants in Nemataba:

"B: *When I came back, a group of young people came to me and wanted some advice because they wanted to leave. I told them what happens if they are captured in Libya: you do not eat [or] sleep, and they can shoot you at any time. Even to earn one's living in Libya is practically impossible because every time you have to hide, even when you are working. You have to return from work after sunset, using a flashlight. If someone sees you, you could be shot easily. Sometimes you avoid using the flashlight since you have to hide and get home safe. I have no contact with the people who left after me because it is almost impossible to contact anyone on the* route. *Since my little brother left, I do not know anything about him. I only know that he is on the way. But during the backway, you can hardly make enough money to support your family because every time you earn something, they arrest you. [...] When I returned, I decided to start a little trade with all the legal papers. It is migration that gives you this kind of idea.*

K: *We have a river here, and my goal is to make a beautiful garden where my wives and children can work. I saw this in Algeria and in Libya. Even in Italy, my brother told me that many young people do this. I would never tell my children to take the* laawol ley. *The school is the solution: we must enrol them in school. We have a school here: in the rainy season they can work, then in the dry season they go to school: now I see that it is a good place to build a future.*

B: *I would never advise my son or another young man to do what I did because of the consequences I had. This river is enough to build a hub for young people to earn a living, building alternatives for trade and market gardening. We need to help young people to make the best use of this space. The truth is that we lack means, and we are not supported. Here, some young people want to work 12 months out of 12, both during the rainy and dry seasons.*

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[268] The number of children per woman and per family makes providing the means for education for everyone very difficult. Children who quit school because their parents cannot afford to pay for their education, or do not morally support their studies, continue to constitute a future human reserve for the *laawol ley*. In this context, a brother's school career can be a push factor for travelling the backway, in order to avoid being considered a good-for-nothing. Despite the loss of authority, each householder is called upon to decide how to spend resources on their children's education. While the increasing participation of women in family income generation can help by covering the education and health care costs of children, on the other hand a certain precariousness remains in a lot of family contexts which often does not allow many to complete their schooling

However, if we do not get help, it is impossible to work, especially during the dry season. And it is during this season that people attempt the journey. What is missing, therefore, are the conditions to give young people the opportunity to work."[269]

Most of the return migrants claim they learned enough to probably be more successful in the next attempt. Some of them told me that if they find the money, they will be ready to travel the *laawol ley* again since they are prepared for what the backway actually is. Returning home is therefore a moment of strong personal, social and economic crisis which forces travellers and their families to reconsider their own life trajectory. It takes place in the encounter between individual and collective aspirations and material possibilities, a sense of shame and a desire for redemption, ideas and skills learned during the journey and great difficulty in putting them into practice. It also takes place in the economic and social context of the society of getting by, from which they have tried to escape once, and to which they must return now, from a more disadvantaged position. To get organised for a new departure is a viable solution, especially for those who have faced the *laawol ley* only once.

To be content with what you have and with God's decision

*"We say you cannot ask to be braided with the same braid as the others because you do not have the same hair. You have to accept the fate that God gave you, otherwise, if you insist on wanting what the others have, you will hurt yourself. We say '*yonndinorgol*', be patient and be happy with what you have, be without ambition and accept your fate."*[270]

Madame Kande, one of the most representative women in Velingara, who reached an important political role after the Senegalese gender equality law of 2010, uses the verb *yonndinorgol*[271] to indicate the capacity to be patient and to endure difficulties. This vision is related to the predominantly Muslim context where *"luck is the lot (*rizq *in Islamic theology) that God allocates to people as part of their personal destiny"* (Gaibazzi 2015b, p2).

Return migrants often claim the moral duty to accept the destiny God decided for them. The required courage to face the *laawol ley* is equated with the effort required to endure the fate of returning. The necessary willpower to bear the *hersa* and to maintain an attitude inspired by the *ndimaaku* is not less than the willpower necessary to travel to Europe. The use of the word "destiny" or "luck" appears to

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[269] Ibrahima and Abdoulaye, Nemataba, 21/10/2019
[270] Madame Kante, Velingara, 09/03/2020
[271] The verb *yonndinorgol* comes from the same root of *yonndinare*, which means "patience" and "endurance"

be a discursive strategy adopted by return migrants to shirk responsibility for their failure. This view recalls the ancient way of conceiving the savannah as "*ladde Alla*" (Riesman 1998, p.245), the land where a man's destiny is in God's hands. The persistence of this signification shows the importance of reading the phenomenon of the backway through its historicity (Stewart 2016, p.80), that is, how local pasts affect perspectives on both the present and the future. Indeed, the *laawol ley* constitutes a new way of relating to the savannah where a man seeks the means to live and where he meets his own luck and destiny, as it appears clear by the words of Kante, a return migrant I met in Mballacounda Thierno:

> *"It is just about luck. When you go, if you have luck, you will earn money and succeed. But those who are unlucky, they get sick. Others do not earn anything, and others cannot return even if they have money. You need to have the will to succeed, but the Fulɓe say* "Seria Kollabitari"*: when you have tried once, twice, three times and you have not been lucky, you have to stop."[272]*

If the departure can be seen as the moment in which individual and collective hopes and imagination are put into motion, in the return, the theme of destiny is predominant. Returning and definitively accepting the end of one's migratory adventure does not only mean dealing with one's loss but, definitively, dealing with one's destiny.

The traumatic legacy of the *laawol ley*

> *"The problem is poverty: you left to search for more, and now you have less than before, so mentally and psychologically you are not at ease. Not everyone has his head on his shoulders and that is a way of poverty."[273]*

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[272] Kamara, Mballacounda Thierno, 31/10/2019. Several interviews confirm this interpretation: *"Here in Africa, to work and to earn something is difficult. You work and you do not earn, and you have a hard time living here. So, you see that there is a little brother who is leaving and for two years there is a change in the house, and you, who work here, you do not earn anything, and you are tired. Everyone has his chance. If you do not have the chance, you will not get there, and it is only a shame. But if you have the luck, all the doors are open"* (Samba, Sare Mandi, 1/11/2019)
"You have to try migration before you start working here. You have to go and see what your destiny is" (Souleymane, Sare Bassi, 15/11/2020).
"Afraid? Afraid of what? Dying? Even here you can die. God decides, not me or you!"(K., Tongya, 11/03/2020) *"Only God knows whether I am going to get there or not. I left home because I had courage and I tried to succeed. If I had stayed here in the same conditions, what could I have done? It takes more courage to go than to stay. But we have to surrender to God and be content with God's decision. If God decides that you will return, you will retur"* (Diallo, Tambacounda, 24/02/2020)
[273] Madame Sidibe, Velingara, 3/02/2020

Madame Sidibe's point of view, president of the MashAllah association and focal point for women with problems with the justice system, is confirmed by the ethnographic investigation. Coming back could represent a moment of deep crisis for the individual. Return migrants describe it as a condition of separation: they are back but their mind is still away, trapped in the permanent desire for the elsewhere, and in the harsh and traumatic events of the backway. This appeared clear in several interviews, as the one I ran in Tongya with A. and L., two return migrants who came back in 2018:

A: *"The money that you are going to spend on the road and even to cross the sea... you did not get there, and they have taken everything from you. If you think about it, you feel bad... Now you think that you have to start from zero again. And to have this in your head is not easy. To forget what happened, you try to take your mind to the future because it is only when you think about the future, that you can try to forget. The future is what is to come yet. Maybe the head will find solutions. It is not easy but we are going to try. You see, you have to calm your spirit first, try not to have depression in your head and not to be demoralised. You came back empty-handed, you have nothing now, your money is completely zero, there is not anyone who can help you. Even your family and your neighbours have nothing: if you have nothing, how can you help them? Sometimes when you are alone, you have thoughts. You are happy when you talk with your friends, but when you are alone, the spirit will leave to go somewhere else. The worst is when you are all alone, and the mind returns to the road. Sometimes I still have nightmares... it is depressing ..."*
L: *"Sometimes we talk about what happened, but when we see a successful migrant coming back, driving around in a car, then our mind is in Europe."*[274]

Through their words, migrants show a spirit assaulted by memories of the past, seeking its redemption in the future, and entrapped in a present where nightmares and flashbacks still affect their daily life. This is why several people report their need for *"reposer l'esprit"* ("to rest the mind"). *"Il faut que tu te calme d'abord"* ("you have to calm down first"): this is the first thing to do. It means basically to regain possession of one's head. Return migrants experience is linked to a whole anatomic conception of feelings and emotions as well as to the ethics of masculinity. It is typical of an honourable man to always be in control of his "head": the expression *jeyaal hoore mun* (to have his/her own head) conveys a sense of autonomy, independence, and self-mastery (Bellagamba 2017, p.72) that in the past was considered typical of freeborn men. Moreover, learning to control "one's head" is one of the first things children are educated to: a reproach that is often addressed to children is *"Règle hoore ma!"* (namely, "Control your head!"; "Be in control of what you do!"). The (controlled) head is the

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[274] Alassane and Lamine, Tongya, 11/03/2020

place where a man suffers, while women feel their sufferings in the belly, as they are conceived as (and are allowed to be) more instinctual. Whereas the head is the place of self-mastery, the belly is the place of vital instincts.

In the management of shame and also of grief, cultural representations of gender also come into play as it is evident form the conversation, I had with an old couple who lost their son along the *laawol ley*:

Father: *"The difference is that a woman is too sensitive. She cries while a man cannot: he has to really keep the pain in his head, without making it come out. He is the one who suffers the most."*

Mother: *"A man rarely cries to the point that you can see his tears. He cries inside, while women weep with sighs, and our friends come and often comfort us. When a moment of pain comes, women often give each other advice on how to overcome the pain. If a friend recognises that you are not finding relief, she comes and talks to you, trying to cheer you up. But for men it is different."*[275]

Fulɓe Fulakunda also refers to the heart (*ɓernde*)[276] not only as the place of courage but also as the space a man can find the moral strength to withstand all the pains and humiliations. It is the place where both sadness and happiness are intimately experienced, without socially exposing one's own weakness. The harsh experience of the backway can leave a heavy physical and psychological aftermath, as well as real handicaps which can totally compromise the possibility of reintegration. The suffered tortures and violence are an *"attack on the social and cultural foundations of body boundaries and temporal experience"* (Beneduce 2019, p.209). The trauma of the backway *"is not* [only] *constituted by the destructive force of the event but from the very fact of survival"* (Beneduce 2019, pp. 212-213). It stretches like a shadow into a *habitus* that was intimately acquired to survive in the always potentially dangerous and life-threatening world of the *laawol ley*: a never calm and always restless spirit becomes the way to *"accommodate the permanent presence of fear"* (Vium 2014, p.236). Touré and Diallo reported this kind of feelings clearly even after almost two years from their return:

> *"When we came back from Libya, it was a problem for us because we always hid from others, as we used to do in Libya. We were always in a room. Often our parents asked us to come out and stay with the people, and to be happy with having had the chance to come back. Well, it*

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[275] Diallo, Velingara, 9/11/2019

[276] Heart and chest are expressed by the same word in Fulfulde. The meaning of courage is explicit in the verb *ɓernogol,* which means "to be brave". Moreover, the heart is also the place of sadness and happiness as these two expressions confirm: *ɓernde makko hino metti* (he is sad), *ɓernde makko hino weltii* (he is happy).

is true, we were lucky because we left and we are back, and some people will never come back anymore".[277]

"I still sleep outside, even at home. I never sleep in the room because after Morocco I cannot. We used to sleep in the hills near Ceuta, but you never slept completely because you always had to be careful that the police did not arrive, raiding to repatriate you. Even today I dream those things and then I wake up. I need to check that everything is fine and that it is not like that any more. Besides, I also sleep outside to make sure no thief comes stealing the chickens, you know there are a lot of thieves here."[278]

Travellers' bodies become a constant witness and reminder of the pain suffered. Scars of bullets and rifle butts, which several return migrants showed me, are embodied memories that could be used to prove their experience, but also represent a constant address to abuses and humiliations. They are an indelible mark that prevents from not showing one's story. Indeed, if scars ideally connect the modern adventurer with the warrior's body of the oral epic tradition[279], they also remind fragility, violation and defeat. The psychologist Cissé of the Red Cross, having also given psychological support directly to return migrants when needed between 2018-2019, explained to me his perspective saying:

"The body eternally bears witness to all the suffering that you have gone through, and it will remind you of the failure you had. It is a daily and permanent reminder. Even if you have succeeded, it reminds you of where you went through to get there. However, what you went through can also be something to explain to your children or to others. It is an excuse for telling your story and to demonstrate that you were trying to do your best to get there, that you have given yourself and your soul to succeed, but, in the end, God did not want it. So, it is not your fault. Scars can be your witness for good and for bad. It is also a proof to show to the family that you had really tried everything because there are cases where people do not believe what the migrant says. There were even cases in which the jarga *said publicly: "He wants us to believe that he was in Libya when we know that he did not go there!" Now the body becomes a real witness of what he had experienced: 'This is a bullet; this is a gun that left a sign ...'[280]*

Those who returned either with severe mental or physical disabilities compromise their possibility of an effective reintegration. These individuals and their families experience the dramatic turn of their hope into an irrecoverable burden. Among the few interviews I conducted with these subjects, the meeting with Mamadou, during a group conversation in the village of Linkering, is the most effective

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[277] Touré, Velingara, 17/02/2020
[278] Diallo, Velingara, 10/02/2020
[279] Wane (1980) reports as signs of the valiant body: hair on the legs, thick skin, protruding neck muscles and the lack of folds on the belly
[280] Cissé, Velingara, 1/03/2020

example. I remember his attitude: an always low gaze, the right arm held up by the other hand, the difficulty in telling his story, the stuttering, and then, halfway through the interview, the decision to give up and go away, sadly, as, probably, dredging up was too hard to stand. In my eyes, S. is still the most vivid image of what really the experience of the backway is. The untreated fracture in his arm prevents him from moving it, making him unable to work in agriculture. Lack of money prevents his desire to start a new business.

In his and in his family's eyes, he is a real *nafara,* someone who is worth nothing. This is how he told me his story:

> *"In 2016, there were a lot of people leaving from here, around 24 people in a single month. My friend called me from there, he told me there was work. I only talked with my mother. I asked her for her permission because I was the oldest brother, so I had to take care of the needs of the whole family since my father died. I had to rescue the family [...] When they were embarking me to cross the sea, it was there that the police attacked us and I received a big blow, and since then my arm has not recovered yet.* [He takes off his shirt. On his arm, there is a gris-gris (amulet) tied around several scars, but he cannot move it.] *When I was in prison, they did not even give me food, they just left me with this fracture... instead of treating my arm, they put me in prison, and the fracture went bad and I had an infection. In Senegal, when they saw me like that, they took me to the hospital for treatment. My father* [the brother of my father] *helped me with some money to start treatment in Tamba, but it does not seem effective. It continues to hurt."[281]*

Conclusions

Moments of crisis constitute an opportunity to study how human societies and cultures are immersed in history and how they change within it. This chapter claims that the spreading phenomenon of returns from the *laawol ley* (which exploded locally in the last ten years due, in part, to the mass departures in the years 2012-2015) represents a real moment of crisis in Velingara. Historically, Fulɓe have always imagined their lives in relation to the possibility of a place "elsewhere", where to search for the means for a new *heɓtaare.* The contemporary generation of travellers of the *laawol ley* has grown up in a context completely overturned by the migratory successes in the 1980s and 1990s, which completely changed the local social order, putting the families of successful migrants on a higher economic and social level. Moreover, this generation, living in the shadow of the withdrawal of the state, structural adjustment plans and the 1994 devaluation of the CFA, strongly feel the need to build

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[281] Mamadou, Linkering, 23/11/2019

larger geographical capital for securing one's family, while a *"constriction and disintegration of social support network"* (Vigh 2010, p.142) is widely experienced. As migrating became more and more a necessary source of income for the whole family network, new symbols of the social competition (motorcycles, cars, appliances, brick houses) have appeared, while land, brides and cattle have become more expensive. Moreover, the present perception of climate change and environmental unpredictability makes the success through the *laawol ley* still the most desirable solution. The constant relationship with the elsewhere, as well as with the "otherness" of the different people who moved to Velingara, ended up creating a new moral and ethical horizon, clearly observed in the analysis of homecomings. Return migrants are the image of a crisis: the crisis of private and collective hope, but also of cultural pillars which Fulakunda society has long been based on. Ultimately, return migrants represent the need of individuals and their networks for new meanings and perspectives in the current social, economic, political and environmental situation. The analysis of return from migration must go beyond the public denunciation of the inhuman experiences African travellers had to suffer. Return migrants represent the urgency of imagining collectively new ways for building a future from the margins.

The realities of reintegration and IOM's AVRR programme in Velingara

Return is a process. Coming back is understandable as a pivotal point in a person's life. Finding a source of income is crucial to start building new future perspectives, and new spaces of autonomy, and to regain what has been lost along the backway.

In this chapter, I try to analyse the figure of the unsuccessful return migrant in a context shaped by more than 30 years of aid and development projects. The IOM's AVRR programme is a good example. The ethnographic observation reveals the ambiguity of the effort to try to turn the adventurer into a businessman: return migrants' dreams are translated into the rational language of the modern economy, which is supposed to guarantee a better chance of success. The analysis of three stories of return migrants who have started a new activity thanks to IOM funding – ideally constituting the continuation of retrospective narratives on the laawol ley *– shows how other and more important factors which shape the trajectory of a process that unfolds through the legacies of the past, the conditions of the present, and the hope of a better future should be taken into consideration.*

The importance of being back to work

The money spent and the material goods sold to finance the migratory attempt are always difficult to regain. Return migrants are back in a context where money is often mobilised to deal with daily extraordinary expenses, such as ceremonies, medical or school expenses, and other problems which might happen to the members of a family group. Therefore, they soon have to step out from isolation and start to *knuckle down*. Analysing the Soninke milieu in Sabi, Paolo Gaibazzi developed the concept of *hustling*, a male-gendered social skill which includes a diverse set of *"tactical practices taking place in an uncertain political economy of work, trade and travel"* (Gaibazzi 2015, p.107). *Hustling* is the attitude that prevails during the time of travel, based on an ethos learnt through agricultural work. While the term gives the idea of hasty movement and jostling which are better suited to the chaotic experience of the route, the dynamic of the return is different, as it takes place on a different spatial and temporal horizon, a safer setting but conditioned by the gaze of others. Several years of absence create a disorienting effect in many returning migrants: life in Velingara has gone on, children and brothers have grown up, someone has died, friends of the past have often arranged their lives by finding an economic activity, getting married and setting up their households. Being faced11 with those who stayed is often accompanied by the feeling of having wasted time and the

urgency of having to catch up. Nevertheless, it is a different urgency from that of the route, less marked by improvising actions, and more by a slow and silent struggle in which "*you have to cover your ears and eyes*", as several returned people told me. Most of the return migrants, in order to *socially navigate* (Vigh 2010, p.158-159), try "knuckling down", guided by the same "*kinetic notion of destiny*" of the route which sees "*human existence as a space of potentialities set out by God*" but which must be actively sought by men (Gaibazzi 2015, p.1).

The *laawol ley* left adventurers feeling fit for building their success in Velingara too: they learnt patience, frugality, the capacity to endure hardships, self-resilience, and a hard-working mentality. Once they are back, they claim to embody the attitude of a *jambaar*[282], the hero who honourably faces all twists and turns. *Knuckling down* is both a way to face the "*spectre of bare immobility*" which lies in the defeat of homecoming and a way to re-establish one's own "*reputation [...] as a worthy man*" (Gaibazzi 2015, p.116). The stress that the return migrants I interviewed put on the fact that asking for someone else's help is not a solution is a clear example of this:

> *"I have never thought about doing a project with others: I want to work by myself. If I work alone, I can earn a lot, and I have to rely only on myself. Even working with a member of my family would bring problems here. We are now in a world of competition and business. If you have the opportunity to run your own business, you have to do it, because otherwise other people will try to hinder or betray you. So, it is better to work alone. After the backway, I have completely lost trust in others."*[283]

Rebuilding a small economic capital sum with which to start again is a complex task, especially in villages where people often complain that a lack of agricultural inputs prevents them from making the fields profitable the whole year round. Lost cattle – which were sold either to prepare for the route or to deal with difficult situations along the route – are almost impossible to regain, due to the naturally slow rate of reproduction of cows, cyclical epidemics, and also the rise of prices in the local market. The conception of cattle as an "*épargne sur pied*" (savings on foot) – which may be drawn on in case of need – makes it even more vulnerable when economic difficulties are created by the lack of migratory success. The whole family network must employ new strategies, such as asking the help of siblings or relatives living abroad, investing in the education or the migratory attempt of another family member, or looking for new opportunities through local mobilities.

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[282] I chose the Wolof word "*jambaar*" here as it was the one most used in the local rap songs dedicated to migrants. The term in Fulfulde is *fariijo* or *ŋanaajo*.
[283] Cheick, Velingara, 07/03/2020

Return migrants are called to be part of this new effort "with the sweat of their brow", as they often report:

> *"In the first few months, I was ashamed of myself. I had a friend who often came to my house to talk with me. He said I had to accept God's will. I realised that nothing is impossible in life: if you have not earned any money, you have to work hard and, by working, you can earn."*[284]

> *"My idea was to find a job straight away because I always have in mind that I have a debt to pay. First of all, I must pay it off, and then I can continue to work to see whether there is the possibility of being independent in the future. You need to work hard so that the family gets the impression that you are trying to get back what you made them lose."*[285]

Finding it difficult to rely on the *"networks of support"* which characterise the *"local economy of affection"* (Hyden 1983, p.8), return migrants have to find ways to get the means to knuckle down. The ability to access either NGOs' or international organisations' programmes is part of the ability to successfully "socially navigate" (Vigh 2010, p. 142) the scarce opportunities offered by the context, as is the opinion of Alassane, a return migrant from Sare Mandi:

> *"The solution is only projects. If you have no materials, you do not work. Here, there are lands, there is rain, you can grow a lot of products, you can do market gardening, and you will certainly earn something. But if you have no financial means, earning something is practically impossible."*[286]

Mostly, return migrants tend to return to the activity they carried out before leaving because it appears them an easier way to rebuild self-confidence and re-activate the social relations that were interrupted with their departure. Some return migrants decide to open small shops or to trade informally on a small scale using the opportunities presented by weekly markets. Some of them quit their villages to move to Velingara in order to create a wider client base. In most rural areas, the only solution appears to be going back and working in the family *maaru*, surrendering to a more or less temporary economic and social marginalisation and dependency.

Sometimes return migrants manage to use skills learnt through the informal job market along the route, mostly as bakers or bricklayers. Several people declared they started by working in an acquaintance's workshop, or by borrowing a motorcycle to enter the taxi moto circle; someone else

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[284] Camara, Velingara, 10/03/2020
[285] Samba, Velingara, 17/02/2020
[286] Alassane, Sare Mandi, 1/11/2019

restarted by breeding hens or rams at home, others went to Dakar, St. Louis, or other areas of Senegal, to escape from the social pressure too.

Some activities, such as poultry, small-scale trade and market gardening were historically women's prerogative. And, even though the monetisation of these activities has reduced negative moral judgement, this *economic feminisation* still testifies to how the experience of return often implies a temporary social dependence, a step backwards in the search for *heɓtaare* and the construction of an adult male identity corresponding to local cultural models. The search for self-employment, without partners or external financial aid, is part of the attempt to reaffirm a more complete male identity, as well as the reconceptualisation of these activities in terms of profit and business. Several return migrants express the desire to do market gardening to undertake an income-generating activity which has nothing to do with the traditionally female rice cultivation of small plots. Their inspiration comes either from the agricultural models they saw in Richard-Toll (Northern Senegal) or North Africa, or from local successful experiences, such as that of G., former mayor of Diaobé-Kabendou and successful transnational migrant, which are broadcast on television or on Youtube. Regrettably, the lack of means often prevents unsuccessful return migrants embarking on such expensive projects: marketing gardening requires money to buy land and water pumps, to dig wells and for channel maintenance, as well as constant surveillance due to possible theft of motor pumps and agricultural materials.

The local moral hierarchy of breeding (poultry, rams, cows) is still a valid framework to culturally analyse the life trajectory of return migrants. All the people I met consider chicken farming a temporary solution to earn enough money in order to invest in something "more serious" or "more honourable" for a man. The breeding of sheep, goats and rams, on the other hand, represents a middle way, an urban and more democratic form of "saving on the hoof", which several families have started to implement within their own households as a parallel source of income.

In all these cases, mobility remains a possibility to gain independence, economic means and hope for a better future. To imagine returning migrants as static subjects would be really wrong: being mobile throughout the department, and also trying to benefit from family connections to find temporary jobs or support in other parts of the country or the subregion, is indeed part of their daily *knuckling down*. Travelling the *laawol ley* again always remains an option. During my fieldwork, I met several return migrants who had travelled the backway twice, but I never found anyone who did it more than three times, regardless of the duration of each journey. Sometimes adventurers might try to change the itinerary, sometimes they took the same one, believing that it might be easier as they already knew

the route. Usually, among the people I met, those who had left just once were less than 30 years old, they had been away from home for more than three years, and they were mainly those who left after 2015 and returned after 2018. It is probable that these men had not had enough time either to prepare new departures or to have concluded that their reintegration had been unsuccessful.

In contrast to their stories, the data collected from people who travelled the backway more than once suggest different approaches for the first attempt and the following ones: it was rarer that they left again using the resources of the whole family. The resources for a second, or a third, attempt were often sought individually, either through the sale of one's part of the harvest or using money earned through temporary labour carried out in Velingara or somewhere else in the country.

Even though having further anchored the family to poverty may appear to be a limiting factor for a new attempt, in the long run, the lack of a solid perspective to imagine and concretely build a new life trajectory could lead return migrants (or other members of the same family) to leave again. A new journey can be taken into consideration when they perceive their situation as still precarious and fragile, when their earnings are not enough to build a good life, but still sufficient to organise travelling. Indeed, as soon as they manage to earn something, return migrants may carefully evaluate their options: whether to use this income as a basis for reintegration or for trying their luck again in transnational migratory paths:

> *"I cannot say that I have regrets: I had to try to leave since I had nothing. I do not know other people, but I decided that if I wanted to earn something, I would have had to try another route. I could not stay like this, I had to go and search. And so now."[287]*

> *"There is a need that remains in the family. I do not want to go back on the road, but if the needs behind remain ... if I had the possibility of investing here, at home, and of providing for my family, I would not even think about leaving. But if the family puts pressure on me – because everything is on me (from food to health) – I cannot stand it just staying here. I have to go and look somewhere else."[288]*

Most of the economic activities in Velingara allow people to accumulate resources only (or mostly) at a specific time of the year, and the impossibility of employment during the dry season favours internal migration as a source of small income and social networks which, in turn, constitute a push factor towards a new attempt. Other activities, such as the cultivation of groundnuts (whose price variation during the year can be used as an earning strategy), do not correspond to young people's

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[287] Sane, Medina Dinguirai, 03/11/2019
[288] Demba, Kansantang, 30/10/2019

aspirations to modern ways of living. These aspirations are a powerful motivation to prefer the *laawol ley* rather than the hard work of the fields. More efficient retention factors are marriage and children, even though being unable to live up to the role of the breadwinner can be an equally strong push factor.

Eventually, it is only when a return migrant is fully convinced that his fate is not to arrive in Europe that the *laawol ley* ceases to be considered as a possibility, as was well expressed by a return migrant:

Me: *"Why did you decide to invest in poultry now, and not before migration?"*
Younusa : *"Because it is the destiny, the inevitable. When I hoped to go somewhere else, I was young, younger than now. I had some financial means, and I could go even for two years without the need to work. But now, even if I am going for six months, what am I leaving here for my children and wife?"*[289]

Most of the return migrants claimed the experience of the backway had completely changed their mindset: in accepting having to start again from below, they also shifted from a *joni joni* (fast) perspective of success through migration, to a *seeda seeda* (slow) perspective through hard work where *"there is not even time for sitting with friends and drinking tea, and there is no weekend or day for resting."*[290] Several people report this change to be due to the experience of the journey, which has made them more patient and purposeful:

> *"Sometimes when you come back you are hurt: you left, you did not earn any money, you are back home, and you cannot even be happy like you were before. You have to hide and to work because when you have nothing, you are nothing in the eyes of people. When you are* dimo *(honourable) and you come back empty-handed, you cannot steal, you cannot go begging, saying: "Give me, please!" You have to try to do* kolopan kolopan *(little by little) ... [...] If we had the means that I saw there* (in North Africa)*, we would work. I had to start from chicken, but I will not stop here, this is just the beginning. If everything goes well, one day I will be able to run a cattle farm and to have fields to cultivate… chicken is just a way to start."*[291]

Even when they restart the activities they used to do before departing, return migrants express harsh criticism of the working methods used by their parents or older employers. They often claim to have a more modern way of seeing and doing things that comes from what they have seen and experienced along the route, to be more aware of what happens beyond the limited horizon of Velingara, and to

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[289] Younusa, Velingara, 10/02/2020
[290] Mamadou, Velingara, 03/09/2021
[291] Demba, Velingara, 07/02/2020

know how work has to be done to make money. Parents are blamed for their inability to understand the changes in the world, as well as for having squandered family assets, without earning enough to guarantee the future of their children.

Returning to the (same) arena?

The return does not always mean the abandonment of one's own migratory project, as it does not mean exiting from the local and multi-situated arena composed of different subjects, discourses, interests, and ambitions. Especially in the last twenty years, African transnational mobility has often been the target of various international aid programmes, which consider repatriated and unsuccessful return migrants as individuals who must be re-anchored to their own territory through the creation of new job opportunities, often accusing them of having been unable to see the plentiful opportunities offered by their own land. They might also become the public face of a work of propaganda that is part of the *"diffusion of EU external migration policies"* (Lavenex 2016, p.2): helping an unsuccessful traveller to succeed in Velingara may show that success can be achieved locally, instead of through the Central Mediterranean Route. Funded economic activities enact the work of "*externalisation of the borders between the Global North and the South*" (Stock et al. 2019, online), while travellers of the *laawol ley* are depicted as ill-advised and vulnerable subjects who have gone towards the unknown, ending up as victims of trafficking. This rhetoric completely overshadows other important drivers of the migratory experience, such as the modern desire to travel the world, to broaden one's horizons and knowledge, as well as structural issues, such as the manifest economic and monetary disparity between Europe and Africa. This vision has started to be questioned in the last years, as demonstrated by several publications and reports by important international organisations.[292]

Aid programmes for return migrants are based on a basic ambivalence. They go beyond the concept of saving the migrant's "bare life" and "the state of exception" of refugee camps and Libyan prisons (Agamben 2005, p.1; Owens 2010, pp.568-570), giving those people back the possibility of being

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[292] An example is "S*caling Fences. Voices of Irregular African Migrants to Europe*" published by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) in 2019. In this publication, irregular migration is recognised as "*an investment in a better future, embraced by individuals whose development trajectory is already in ascendance, enabling a radical rejection of the constraining circumstances at home in order to scale metaphorical and even physical fences to personal fulfilment and better opportunities*" (UNDP 2019, p. 5). The findings of the study have disproved the vision of migrants as not aware of the dangers of the route (56% of interviewed people expected dangers, and 46% declared the actual dangers to be less than or equal to the expected dangers), recognising the multifaceted reasoning behind irregular migration to Europe (94% of people declared two or more reasons that led them to depart). These and other data led the study to conclude that *"the notion that migration can be prevented or significantly reduced through programmatic and policy responses designed to stop it is thrown into question by this analysis"* (UNDP 2019, p. 6)

politically and economically active within their own territory. At the same time, however, they end up accentuating their marginality within a globalised mobility regime (Schiller and Salazar 2013, p.189). An ambivalence specific to the Senegalese case is that while developmentalist discourses continue to enhance the role of the diaspora – which is the historical result of "successful" migration attempts – they aim to limit the mobility of those who are considered too late to enter circuits of international mobility, crystallising a new power asymmetry (Gaibazzi 2012, pp. 215-216). This has significant effects in the Fulakunda society where honour is historically linked to a social stratification based on ability to access some symbolic elements.

To tackle how these discourses are intertwined with the life trajectories of return migrants, I analysed the way the IOM's AVRR programme was carried out in Velingara to help the reintegration of migrants repatriated after 2018. The first part of the chapter is based on direct observation of four training weeks carried out by local trainers between November 2019 and March 2020. Each training group included more or less twenty migrants and took place in a prefabricated building installed in the garden of the professional training centre in Samba 15 Ans. Then, I analyse the stories of three return migrants who each opened a small grocery store in different neighbourhoods of Velingara, after having been funded.

The IOM's vision on assisted voluntary return

The Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) is a large-scale programme set up in December 2016 with the aim of supporting repatriation from transit countries, especially Libya and Niger. It is part of the EU–IOM Joint Initiative for the Protection and Reintegration of Migrants in the Sahel and Lake Chad and was implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the support of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), according to their vision of *"bringing together African countries, IOM and the EU around the shared aim of ensuring that migration is safer, more informed and better governed for both migrants and their communities"* (IOM 2021, p.3).

IOM's AVRR programmes have been run worldwide since 1979, supporting more than 1.6 million people (IOM 2019b, p.10) *"who need to return home but lack the means to do so"*, such as *"individuals whose application for asylum was rejected or withdrawn, stranded migrants, victims of trafficking, and other vulnerable groups, including unaccompanied migrant children, or those with health-related needs"* (IOM 2021, p.3).

Following the IOM's glossary of migration, assisted voluntary return (AVR) is defined as an *"administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin"* (IOM 2019, p.12). Voluntariness is the first principle of AVRR (IOM 2018, p.6) and it is based on the conditions of freedom of choice (*"defined as the absence of physical or psychological pressure to enrol in an AVRR programme"*), and an informed decision (*"which requires the availability of timely, unbiased and reliable information upon which to base the decision"*). Given the difficulties of defining the "voluntariness" of the choice in such insecure and chaotic contexts as Libya (Brachet 2016, p.276; Mensah 2016, pp. 303-304; Kleist 2017b, p.273) and *"in order to stress the humanitarian nature of this operation"* (IOM 2021, p. 3), the IOM's AVRR procedures in the Central Mediterranean route have been named "Voluntary Humanitarian Repatriation" (VHR). All the interviewed repatriated migrants who joined the IOM's programme reported having freely chosen to enrol. Some say they got in touch with the IOM in Tripoli or Niamey after two or three failed attempts to cross the sea, having run out of money or having been pushed out of the country by the police. Others came in contact with the AVRR programmes while being held in a Libyan prison where they were suffering violence and abuse. At the moment of their decision, IOM was their only way to escape from this unfortunate situation, as they could no longer rely on their families to pay the ransom to set them free. Furthermore, as we read in Labi's story, the arrest of the Senegalese diplomat forced several return migrants to pretend to be citizens of Guinea Conakry, without knowing that this would lead to it being impossible to receive any funding from the Senegalese IOM office. In these cases, the voluntariness of return is put into question.

The framework of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative builds upon IOM's integrated approach to reintegration, defined as *"a process which enables individuals to re-establish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and inclusion in civic life"* (IOM 2019, p.12). The vision of the AVRR programme is to assist *"migrants in need to return voluntarily, safely and in dignity, [who] are supported in achieving sustainable reintegration, in full respect for human rights, regardless of their status"* (Hall and IOM 2018, p.6). This is "*anchored in international law"*, referring both to *"protection of the rights of migrants during the return and reintegration process"* and to the respect of *"state sovereignty"* (Hall and IOM 2018, p.4), as well as

the MiGOF framework[293], and the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[294]. Voluntary Humanitarian Repatriation along the Central Mediterranean Route follows different steps, from outreach sessions set up in detention centres and urban areas of Libya to the identification and registration of people wanting to join the programme, consular facilitation, exit visa processing, travel agreements, distribution of non-food items, return flights, and reintegration.

AVRR "*was not originally conceived as a tool to generate development in countries of origin*" (IOM 2019b, p.10). The reintegration support *"has been progressively added to AVR interventions, first in the form of limited cash assistance and then as more comprehensive packages to support returning individuals"* (IOM 2019b, p.11).

IOM frames reintegration from three different angles: social reintegration, which "*implies the access by a returning migrant to public services and infrastructures in his or her country of origin, including access to health, education, housing, justice and social protection schemes*"; psychosocial reintegration, which includes "*the reinsertion of a returning migrant into personal support networks [...], civil society structures*" as well as *"the re-engagement with the values, mores, way of living, language, moral principles, ideology, and traditions of the country of origin's society"*; and economic reintegration, namely the "*process by which a returning migrant re-enters the economic life of his or her country of origin and is able to sustain a livelihood*" (IOM 2019, p.176). The goal is to cultivate a process of sustainable reintegration through which return migrants can manage to reach *"levels of*

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[293] IOM's MiGOF is a short document that presents the ideal version of migration governance, setting out a framework in which States and IOM can work together to address migration issues. MiGOF is composed of three principles and three objectives

- Good migration governance would require adherence to international standards and the fulfilment of migrants' rights (Principle 1).
- Migration and related policies are best formulated using evidence and whole of government approaches (Principle 2).
- Good migration governance relies on strong partnerships (Principle 3).
- Good migration governance and related policy should seek to advance the socioeconomic well-being of migrants and society (Objective 1).
- Good migration governance is based on effective responses to the mobility dimensions of crises (Objective 2).
- Migration should take place in a safe, orderly and dignified manner (Objective 3).

The MiGOF is available online https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl486/files/about-iom/migof_brochure_a4 _en.pdf [last viewed on 31/01/2022]

[294] The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development relates the concept of "sustainable development" with the necessity of building an international migration management system as a way to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people (target 10.7). Sustainable reintegration is necessary to achieve the target 10.2 ("*to empower/promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status*"). Finally, IOM recognizes the relevance of AVRR programmes in "*achieving Target 17.17, which is to encourage and promote effective public, public–private and civil society partnership*", and Target 17.9, which aims at enhancing "*international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North–South, South–South and triangular cooperation*" (IOM 2016, p.5)

economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with possible (re)migration drivers" (IOM 2019, p.211). *"Having achieved sustainable reintegration"* return migrants are then considered able *"to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than a necessity"* (IOM 2018, p.6). To meet these objectives, IOM's integrated approach aims to give individual support, community support (addressing families and the non-migrant population), and structural support (engaging with local and national authorities and other stakeholders) (Hall and IOM 2017, p.12). The sustainability of reintegration is fully achieved when return migrants *"are able to overcome individual challenges impacting their reintegration"*, communities *"have the capacity to provide an enabling environment for reintegration"*, and adequate policies and public services *"are in place to address the specific needs of returnees and communities alike"* (IOM 2016, p. 3). Hence, IOM recognises the complexity of each individual process of reintegration, and that it *"largely relies on the combined efforts and engagement of a variety of actors – governmental and non-governmental, public and private, local and international – with different mandates and areas of expertise"* (IOM 2018, p. 11).

Another characteristic of the EU-IOM joint programmes is that "*systematic and continuous data collection, monitoring and evaluation have to be established throughout the entire AVRR process to understand the impact of AVRR interventions and inform ongoing and future programme design*" (IOM 2019, p.6), which has led to numerous reports and publications. The MEASURE report (Hall and IOM 2017) indicated 15 field-tested indicators for quantitative measurement of reintegration on an individual level and 25 indicators on the community level. Those indicators were also used for the quantitative research "*Cartographie et Profil Socioéconomique des Communautés de Retour au Sénégal*" in 2018 (Hall 2018), which investigated reintegration in five different communities in Senegal: Goudiry, Kolda, Pikine, Tambacounda,Velingara).

Velingara scored well on the economic indicators, as 63% of return migrants declared that they had an income-generating activity, despite the decline of the cotton industry, and widespread underemployment during the rainy season in the agricultural sector. However, the department scored last in the social dimension and second last in the psycho-social dimension, due to the inadequate quality of basic services (such as health care), the incidence of discrimination towards returned migrants and the absence of psychosocial care.

The intervention of IOM in Senegal and Velingara

The history of IOM in Senegal began in 1998 and is about assistance and awareness programmes linked to irregular migration. The role of IOM became especially relevant after the years of the Libyan migration crisis from February 2011 (Sheean 2012, p.5), with the creation of repatriation centres in Dakar and Tambacounda. Since then, the International Organization for Migration has often co-financed various projects: MOTUSE (a programme to support a long-term solution for the re-integration of migrants returning from the European Union to Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal) also funded by the European Union and the Italian Ministry of the Interior in 2015; the edition of CinemArena 2018-2020, a convoy travelling through the most remote African routes bringing outdoor cinema events to more than 200 villages, promoting information about the risks of irregular migration, also financed by MAECI (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation) and AICS (Italian Agency for Development Cooperation); and the programme "*Engagement des communautés frontalières dans la gestion et la sécurité des frontières*" (engagement of border communities in border management and security) (IOM 2018).

IOM's intervention has pursued three main goals: supporting Senegal in improving the reintegration of return migrants and in strengthening its national structures and resources to facilitate their reintegration; enabling "potential migrants" to make informed decisions about their migratory journey, while sensitising communities to the topic; collecting data on migratory flows, routes and trends, as well as on the migrants' needs and vulnerabilities.

The notion of "potential migrants" is problematic in itself. In a context where the "elsewhere" and international mobility have pervasively structured daily life, every man (and in a different way also woman) aged between 16 to 35 (not exclusively) can consider moving transnationally a fundamental means to design a possible life trajectory. Almost everyone at a certain point in his life can be considered as a "potential (irregular) migrant", except those who have access to means and political connections and have "legal" access to the "elsewhere" through the *laawol dow* (the route that passes from above).

Moreover, the concept of "reinsertion" often fails to grasp how the travellers of the backway never cease to be part of a multi-situated social arena where they try (or are forced to) reformulate and redefine their and their family's positioning. In these times of telecommunication and international money transfer, the heroes of the backway never cease to be part of a collective effort to find ways to get by amidst the difficulties of daily life.

IOM set up a regional office in Kolda in 2017, due to the increasing numbers of return migrants from the region[295]. Over time, IOM defined a standard procedure of assistance and reintegration. At the moment of return migrants' arrival in Senegal, they identify and take care of those who require medical and/or psychological support in collaboration with local authorities, collect personal data and give pocket money to facilitate homecoming. If necessary, return migrants are hosted at the repatriation centre in Dakar, or Tambacounda, for a few days. The AVRR programme in Velingara is based on a migrant-centred and tailored intervention that *"puts the rights and needs of the migrant at the forefront"* (IOM 2016, p.6). After some time, return migrants are contacted for listening, speaking, and training sessions where they formalise their request for financial aid for their desired work project. These requests are examined by IOM's central office and financed with a sum of CFA 650,000[296], not given directly to return migrants but used to cover only the cost of materials, rents and documents relating to the proposed activity. IOM also trains local trainers, who run the sessions and help the migrants to draw up business plans and find materials and local partners, and who follow the migrants' activities once they are in operation, collecting data for the statistical validation of the project.

Return migrants are also asked to fill in a 66-multiple-choice-question questionnaire, whose general results are published in a dedicated summary report (Hall 2018). Due to the bureaucratic difficulties posed by the organisation in terms of accessing the questionnaires, I only had the chance to compare IOM's general data with 22 questionnaires I observed during a listening and speaking session in Velingara.

The questionnaires I had access to were filled in by people between 18 and 40 years of age, who were from different villages within the department, mainly outside Velingara, and with a level of education clearly below the 54% regional average of migrants with a *bac*: 5 report being illiterate or having only attended religious school, 8 did not finish primary school, and only 2 attended high school, but without getting the baccalaureate. Scrolling through the questionnaire, I noted that after the first part dedicated to personal data, reasons for departure, and the experience of the journey, the survey investigates some economic aspects of the return. Only 5 declared themselves satisfied with their current economic condition, and they were often the youngest; 5 declared they had to reduce their diet due to their economic situation (counting the 4 who declared "occasionally", the number is in line with the

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[295] IOM takes charge only of those who decide to join the AVRR programme. From 2017 to June 2021, the 35% of the Senegalese repatriates by the programme were from the Kolda region (IOM 2021, p.27)

[296] Among the reintegration hypotheses, IOM programmes also includes the possibility of orienting migrants towards government programmes financed by EUTF, such as PARERBA, AICS or AECID; towards state and non-state partners, such as GIZ, ANIDA or other NGOs; or towards medical and psychological assistance programmes

regional 39%); 50% (above the regional average of 44%) reported they were able to borrow money, while 8 declared having debts, of which 4 were owed to family, 3 to community members and 1 to a smuggler. Within one year after their return, 15 reported working, but 8 of these were working without being paid, since they were employed in their family's activities (compared to the 49% who declared that they had a paid job in the region). The majority of these current jobs concerned livestock and agriculture (12), while at the regional level the most common activity was trade (5 in the analysed group). This could be also explained by the fact that the vast majority of return migrants I met on the training courses came from small villages which still nowadays constitute a very active basin of departures. The high percentage of satisfaction about housing and drinking water met the regional level, as well as problems obtaining official identification documents, while they were more satisfied with school access (19 compared to the regional average of 43%).

The data also indicate that 16 regularly participated in the activities of their community, and 15 considered themselves active members. The same number of people declared that they did not suffer situations of conflict or discrimination, while 11 reported having no psychological or physical problems. Only 2 declared that they would have liked to have psychological support (compared to 43% at the regional level). The data also highlight that those who declared that they had suffered discrimination at the community and/or family level also reported suffering trauma and handicap caused by the migratory experience. Symptoms included stress, nervousness and depression. This proves the connection between physical and psychological traumas and difficulties in reintegration. Finally, 100% of the analysed group declared on the questionnaires that they were looking for a job, with the idea of opening an independent business (a percentage of 92% is reported at the regional level).

IOM training sessions and some misunderstandings

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend four training weeks, held by four IOM trainers of local origin, each with about 21-22 participants, invited from the lists of return migrants provided by the IOM central offices in Dakar and Kolda. The first I attended was the ninth training group of the whole project, in November 2019. At that time there was growing discontent amongst the return migrants in Velingara because although training courses continued to be organised, funding for the first groups had not arrived yet. At the end of May 2020, the ninth group was still far from receiving funding, as were several others. A first instalment of CFA 150,000 was distributed to them as a help

for the economic consequences of Covid-19 pandemic, and the balance of CFA 500.000 had been delivered to all by summer 2021.

Every training week was divided into two days of dialogue and exchange of experiences, two days of one-to-one interviews in order to define the business plans, and a final day for issues related to proforma invoices. The latter was probably the most difficult part for participants. According to the business plan, they had to contact a provider to agree on future supplies. For example, if someone wanted to start cattle farming, he should contact a *tefanké* (cattle dealer) to sign a pre-agreement certifying that he would sell the cows at an agreed price when the money arrived. The unusual nature of the proforma invoice in the local economic context – as well as the delay in funding already evident from the beginning – often made it quite hard to find people who would agree to this kind of arrangement. The proforma invoice is not the only example of the difficulty of applying the bureaucratic mentality envisaged by the IOM project to the local reality. Another instance is the consent form every migrant had to sign on the first day. The form was written in a language they could not understand (English) and required a signature at the bottom of the page. Although this request could be seen as legitimate from an international legal point of view, I observed reticence and uncertainty in the migrants asked to sign these incomprehensible papers. Hence, a mixture of hope and lack of trust featured the first day of the week.

An important part of the training week was dedicated to motivational videos with the aim of conveying the positive attitude of commitment and resilience necessary for reintegration. The videos were in French and showed Western people, landscapes, and movies – such as the American actor Will Smith or the computer scientist Steve Jobs – connected by the motivational speech of a voiceover. The message conveyed was ambiguous. Through these videos, IOM's intention was to convince participants that to be successful in Velingara was only possible if they showed the right attitude to overcome the suffering and the failure they had gone through. However, the words of the voiceover closely resembled the words used by return migrants explaining their decision to leave, as shown by this quote from one of the videos, available on Youtube channel "H5 Motivation":

> *You are tormented, you are fed up with this life, tortured by the fear of dying. You suffer because of the anguish that the world makes you live, and you can no longer even look at yourself in the mirror. You have a head full of bad ideas because your soul is colonised by despair [...] You have the right to suffer but you do not have the right to complain. You do not have the right to complain when you know that the first action to face your suffering has to come from you, not from someone else.*

You are small when you decide to be small; you are weak when you decide to be weak; you lose, when you decide to lose; you are great when you decide to be great; you are strong when you decide to be strong [...] If you believe in yourself, if your desire is really in your heart, no one will be able to stop you, no one will be able to prevent you from living the life you always wanted to live. You can overcome all difficulties, no matter the circumstances. If others have succeeded, you can do it: the one who succeeded before you is the proof that it is possible to overcome any ordeal.

Death is the second essential test through which every living being must pass. You do not have to look for it, it will come to you by itself. [...] What matters is not to die: what matters is the way of dying. I do not want to die as a victim of my own life, I want to die with dignity and pride, like a warrior or a lion fighting with the weapons that life has given to him. I didn't choose my weapons, I want to face death, I want to confront it by telling it that I will not let go. I want to look death eye-to-eye, and say that I have lived the dreams I wanted to live, that I have lived without regrets. [...] We cannot have everything in this world, but we can have what we deserve, and we deserve to have a happy life, we all have the right to happiness. Even you. However, to reach that, you have to wake up, you have to be aware, you have to be strong, you have to take the steps to change your mind. I believe in you. I know you can do it: you are the one who can change things.

Sentences like *"the first action against your suffering must come from you"*, *"if someone has done it before you, you can do it too"* and the final call to die with dignity are the same discourses orienting people towards the *laawol ley*. They are an apology for the "*Barça walla Barzak*" way that undocumented transnational mobility has been conceived since the "fools of the sea" disaster of the Canary Islands in 2006. The backway, after all, is about the attempt to pursue a modern idea of happiness, despite one's disadvantaged position in the local and global landscape, despite the risk of dying. It is, as the video states, a way of confronting death in order not to be a victim of one's own life. These videos suggest a universal idea of suffering through which we can understand both the suffering of Will Smith's character in "The Pursuit of Happyness", the movie directed by Gabriele Muccino in 2006, and the suffering of a person who returned to the Senegalese rural periphery after having passed through the dramatic experience of the Central Mediterranean route. This rhetoric of *"you have no right to complain because your success depends only on you",* reproduces that "*geography of blame*" masterfully analysed by Paul Farmer in Haiti (2006, p.58), which superficially glosses over structural analysis to blame the individual for his or her condition. Using the same arguments about the *laawol ley* adventurers, in order to persuade them to act in the opposite way, also highlights how there are "correct" and "incorrect" ways of fighting for one's own happiness, defined by a hegemonic discourse that "*attempts to produce consensus and shared conceptions of the world"* (Ciavolella 2017, p.177). On a discursive level, the adventure through the Central Mediterranean route

is in tune with the individual right to pursue one's happiness. On a practical level, however, it does not respect the forms allowed by the asymmetry of power within which the subjects live.

Training weeks also included other kinds of videos concerning the *laawol ley* and the places return migrants had gone through in Libya and Morocco. These videos were meant to stimulate a debate around the migratory experiences within the group. In the images of the "*bosa*"[297] in Melilla, of the prisons and IOM volunteers in Libya, return migrants often seemed very involved with the action, yelling phrases like: *"I know him!"* and *"I have been there too!"* These videos, often followed by moments of discussion among participants, seemed to be effective in creating a climate of trust and dialogue. Nevertheless, as shown by the individuality of the business plans, these moments of sharing did not lead to the creation of connections capable of stimulating a collaborative approach for future economic activities: WhatsApp groups soon became quiet and almost all the people I met reported having lost all contact with the other return migrants who had joined the same listening and speaking session. From the decision whether to join the programme to the funding of business ideas, IOM's AVRR programme adopts an individual-centred approach. Returning migrants are considered in relation to their wishes, their families, communities and institutions, but never in relation to each other.

Translating dreams into bureaucracy: filling up the business plan

The central part of each training session was dedicated to the face-to-face conversation between an IOM trainer and a return migrant and to drawing up the business plan, a document in which each personal project was translated into the bureaucratic language of the international organisation. Business plans are a medium to teach participants about a new kind of liberal "*sociability based on two lodestones: the free market and the rational individual*" (Harrison 2007, p.3), ideally free from the burden of social ties.

The form was divided into 10 parts, which were filled in directly by each trainer on his laptop, often copying and pasting from pre-filled texts, not always following return migrants' words but more according to IOM's requirements to make the project acceptable and fundable. When an applicant expressed the desire, for example, to start a cattle farm, the trainer opened an already pre-filled form on his computer, which he used as a model, guiding the applicant through the questionnaire and

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[297] This is the name given by migrants to the attempt to break through the barriers separating Morocco from the Spanish enclaves

choosing the words more in accordance with what he considered to be most acceptable for the organisation, than with the actual ideas expressed by the person.

The first three sections of the business plan concerned personal data, the type of activity (including the place where it would be set, and whether it was a new project, the resurrection of an old one, or an already ongoing scheme), the applicant's level of education, and whether he had identity documents or certifications for the activity he had in mind. The fourth part was dedicated to the applicant's previous working experience, mostly emphasising informal experience gained through family activities (*"I underwent an informal apprenticeship with my father who is a great shopkeeper"*[298]; *"our older brother has been a shopkeeper for over eight years, and we underwent an informal apprenticeship with him"*), through mobility (*"I have experience in this area having practised for over 10 years in the Saint Louis area since 2004"*; *"I had practised for more than 5 years in the north of Senegal before attempting to immigrate"*), or during the backway. When the applicant had no experience in the kind of activity he wanted to run, a sentence was added about the goodwill and passion that he was willing to put into the future activity:

> *"I used to work with my dad who ran a traditional bakery. I was in charge of delivering the bread to the various shops in my and the surrounding villages. It was through this experience that I developed the desire to work in the food business and I have learned sales techniques."*

> *"I do not have great experience in selling food products, but I am ready to practise this job because I am passionate about it."*

The filling in of the fifth part required a brief description of the activity, while the subsequent section required a detailed description of the proposed use of the 650,000 CFA budget. The role of the OM facilitators was fundamental in reformulating the often-fragmented intentions of returning migrants, producing texts such as the following:

Cattle farming:
The project consists of setting up a beef fattening activity. It is about buying animals, fattening them up before selling them after six months and reinvesting the profits afterwards. Demand is very strong in this area, especially during religious events such as Gamou, Korité, and the annual Ziaras (visitations) *organised in many surrounding villages. Weekly markets are another occasion for selling. Setting up this type of project could be a great opportunity in this area both for myself and for clients, as they will not have to travel far to find good livestock. I will offer my clients very well fed*

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[298] All the quotes in this paragraph comes from the direct observation of the business plan filling sessions

and groomed oxen. The project requires the purchase of oxen, some materials and equipment as well as prophylaxis and food.

Food shop:
I intend to set up a general food store to meet the needs of the local population in terms of basic food products such as rice, millet, sugar. As the actual stores do not offer a variety of products, the local population is sometimes forced to travel to larger urban centres for shopping.

During the face-to-face interview that I attended, the process of translating migrants' words into developmentalist language appeared evident: final texts were written following a certain model to emphasise liberal factors more familiar to IOM discourses than to the knowledge and conceptions of return migrants. Words such as location, customer satisfaction, the analysis of the local demand, self-sustainability and reinvesting express not their vision, but the way they should start to think if they want to succeed.

The same happened in the three following sections focusing on marketing strategy, competition and risk analysis. These concepts were presented as self-evident, easy to learn. They were the basis of a new rational economic way of thinking to turn return migrants from maladjusted subjects into individuals who fit with a general liberal idea of economy and local market. Questions such as *"who are your business's main competitors?"* and *"what are the advantages of your business over those of your competitors?"* imply the acquisition of an individualistic and competitive attitude which ends up also fostering the agonistic society behind departures and the weakening of solidarity networks. The paternalistic attitude is also visible in these two examples regarding cattle breeding (the most customary Fulɓe activity), and taxi moto (a symbol of Velingara's urban transformation in recent years). To better understand how the idea behind those documents works, one should read every "I" as "I promise that I will":

(Breeding)

Marketing: I intend to find an agreement with local butchers. As holidays and other annual religious events approach, I will approach important religious families. I will present documents to potential clients to reassure them about the medical follow-up. Finally, I will display my cattle for sale during the weekly markets.

Competition: Unlike the téfankés*, I will pay attention to the health condition of my cattle. I am going to offer livestock in a better condition to beat any possible competition.*

Risk: The risks I would face are cattle theft and epizootic diseases. I will set up a secure enclosure, I will illuminate the surroundings and I will strengthen surveillance by involving

other members of my family. Concerning epizootic diseases, I plan to consult *a veterinary technician for health prophylaxis and to always ensure the health of the cattle.*

(Taxi-moto)

Marketing: I will inform my relatives, friends, neighbours about my activity. Then I will go to the surrounding markets and construction sites to spread the word and I will leave people my phone number so that they can call me, if necessary. In addition to that, I will find subscribers for regular rides.

Competition: I will make sure that my prices are reasonable according to the distances. I will grant benefits to my subscribers. Finally, I intend to ensure the safety of my clients by offering them helmets to wear.

Risk: Major risks are motorcycle breakdowns and accidents. To prevent them, I will ensure that my motorcycle is serviced after every long trip. Moreover, every two weeks, I will go to a mechanic for a full diagnosis. Then I will set up a savings system for the depreciation of the motorcycle. Finally, I will look for all the administrative papers requested.

Not only do these guidelines not consider as rentable the local ways and knowledge, but they often propose solutions which return migrants do not consider cost-effective or sustainable, relying only on the one-off financing proposed by the IOM and, therefore, are often disregarded.

The last point of the questionnaire was about future individual objectives. Despite return migrants often declaring that they see these projects as individual opportunities and that family involvement would be an impediment to their success rather than a help, sentences such as the following may be added to business plans: *"I expect to make someone else in my family work"; "I will employ family members in my business"*; *"I will employ as many young people as possible to allow them to have a job"*; *"I will create a large-scale enterprise"*; *"I will contribute to the employment of young people, to the development of my territory, and of my country".*

Eventually, OIM's programme helps the return migrants' effort to reposition themselves in their social networks, as they become again the centre of the collective hope. Paradoxically, the chance to be financed for a project is still a success which is only achievable thanks to the decision to travel the *laawol ley,* in a context where other sources of financing are hardly accessible to unschooled people, without significant connections with local politics and migratory networks, as the most of the people I observed taking part in the IOM programme are. Moreover, declaring that they agree with the guidelines proposed by the IOM does not mean they will embrace a new way of seeing things, but rather expresses the ability to socially navigate a context of scarce opportunity.

Three experiences funded by IOM

IOM's financing represents a new starting point to rebuild a path to the *heƃtaare*. The prototype of this path remains the individual effort which already characterised the backway. Family networks maintain the "*ambivalence of solidarity*" (Marie et al. p.295), being both a security net and a constraint in terms of duty of assistance. Three ethnographic cases could serve as examples of what the experience of setting up a business after having completed the AVRR process means.

The first one is Ibrahima's[299]. Having been abroad for five years, from 2013 to 2018, he travelled both the south route as far as Benin and Nigeria, where he worked as a peddler, and the Central Mediterranean route, as far as Libya where he injured his right leg, which still makes him limp since he says he has not *"yet earned enough money to go and get it fixed"*. He said that his departure was not due to a feeling of jealousy towards his brother (same father, different mother) who arrived in Europe the year before his departure, but simply to the fact that the desire to travel had always been *"in his heart"*. In spite of this, the comparison with his brother remains a constant reference while he talks about his current activity. The grocery shop project gave Ibrahima the opportunity to re-evaluate his "being here", compared to his brother's "being there":

> *"My brother built a house. He has been abroad for a long time. I do not know what he does or how he lives. He calls me on WhatsApp, but if I ask him how he makes money, he does not answer. There are tensions in the family because he succeeded. Before his departure, we used to work together, but now if I ask him for something, he says: 'You have to work. You do not work enough!' He has forgotten what it means to live here. I cannot ask him to give me something, it would be shameful. Besides, I explained my project to him, even before I got financed by IOM. He told me he would have helped me, but until now he just says 'later… later…'. I think he has the money, but he does not want to help me [...] What I earn here is for my whole family, even if it is only 10 francs. He is there, and I am here. He sends some money and says: 'Do this, do that for me', while I am here and I am not asking anyone to do anything for me. If anyone is sick, I am here to support him. Without IOM, I would have never had the money to open this shop. But if my brother had helped me, I would never even have left Senegal to travel the backway."*

For Ibrahima, IOM funds represented an important step for his post-backway life. IOM training coincided with his marriage and his first child, more or less one year after his homecoming. Despite this, he feels his social rehabilitation is not complete: he is still forced to live apart from his family

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[299] Ibrahima, Velingara, 18/02/2020

and wife, who live at his father's house in Sare Toro, while he sleeps in the small room at the back of his shop in the Thiankang 1 neighbourhood in Velingara.

Ibrahima compares the way he manages his grocery store with the way his father's generation used to work. A certain fascination with pursuing the modernity that older generations did not understand connects the experience of the backway with that of reintegration. The grocery shop becomes the attempt to patiently rebuild a dignified and independent life, making the most of what he has lived and learnt:

> *"After I came back, I worked in my father's fields in Sare Toro. I remember I came to Velingara to see whether someone was looking for a bricklayer or groundnut cultivation [worker] […] Today's life is different. Before, we only thought about the fields, and when we needed something, we just needed to sell something else. Fields are what our parents left to us. We grew up with these ideas, and our parents used to work and work, without earning anything... They used to have cows, but now they are gone because it is by selling them that they used to face their problems. When I was a child, most of our cows died. My brother's father lost 200 cows in a year: some say it was a disease, others witchcraft, we do not know. However, only my brother could finance his journey by selling the few cows that were left. I had none. I had to work along the route."*

Ibrahima had the idea of opening a grocery store along the *laawol ley*. However, the structural economic conditions in Velingara made it more difficult than he thought. The difficulties were linked to obtaining administrative documents as well as, by the way, the local community interacting with IOM's intervention. For instance, as soon as he knew about the IOM's funding, the owner of the little room where Ibrahima had opened his shop raised the rent. This way of acting represents a claim to redistribution of resources and is a clear example of how the external intervention of the IOM itself can create difficulties in the local arena:

> *"Until I get Macky Sall's new ID card[300], I cannot go asking the bank for money. I would like to, but I do not even have enough money right now. The rent is CFA 15,000 per month, including the room in which I sleep, here in the back. Plus, the electricity and all other expenses. There are days when I manage to earn even more than CFA 10,000. I am not looking for a big profit for now, because I have just started. I am content with providing for the needs of the family."*

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[300] The ECOWAS Biometric ID card was officially launched by the president Macky Sall on 4 October 2016 with the aim of facilitating mobility in the ECOWAS area, and as a voter's card in Senegal

The *seeda seeda* mentality left by the experience of the backway characterises Ibrahima's effort to actively design a different future:

> *"After the shop, I have other projects: to take a motorbike and do the taxi moto. I want to bring my wife here to manage the shop, while I work on the motorbike. For the moment, I can live in this small room back here, but it will not always be like that."*

The second story is Demba's[301]. His grocery shop is located not far from Ibrahima's, in Samba 15 Ans district. His experience of the backway was much shorter and lasted from 2016 to the end of 2017, mostly in Libya where he did some peddling to finance his only – unsuccessful – attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea. The difficulty of sending money back home and the condition of living in Northern Africa convinced Demba to accept the IOM's repatriation proposal:

> *"IOM took us to Dakar and then gave us CFA 90,000. I lost money, but I managed to come back from Libya with something. As soon as I got back, I told myself that I had to get back to work to earn some more money because there was no way to get to Europe for me. Now I want to work here. I think that everyone who has seen what happens there would prefer to work here."*

The story of Demba's return involved several temporary jobs:

> *"I went to Sodefitex to work, but it is not easy: they pay you well, but it is too dangerous a job. I started there just to earn some money, but sleeping at night was a problem because of the products they use. There was no other solution. I have no brother living abroad, and I am the only child of my mother and father, and now I have only my mother. IOM called because I had given them my number. So, I subscribed for the training."*

When he was funded by IOM, Demba used to make a living by washing motorcycles and working as a security guard in front of the pharmacy at the main crossroads in Velingara. He attributes his firm desire for social rehabilitation to what he learned during the journey: once again, the backway appears as a transformative experience, a "school of life" which helps the person to understand "how the world works":

"Now I know what I want, and what is good for me too. Before, I did not know how to manage and save money, but now I know. Before, you are here, you work, then you leave, and you throw away all the money you have earned. You do not know whether tomorrow will come or not. But since I got back, I only spend time thinking about how to succeed."

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[301] Demba, Velingara, 02/03/2020

Demba believes that the determination and the skills he acquired during the journey have made his shop "*the project that works the best amongst the ones financed by IOM*", along with being able to reactivate his local social network and having chosen the same activity that he was doing before leaving:

> *"Difficulties are related to the fact that if you do not have many products and you cannot satisfy your customers, they go somewhere else. But there is a big merchant at the main market, he knows me, and he gives me products on credit. He is a person I already knew before I left when I used to work for another shop. I chose to open a small grocery shop because they told us they would not give us too much money, and a chicken farm project was more complicated. [...] But the idea of the shop is really good: even the IOM agents told me there is no project which is going better than mine. It is because I have already worked in the trade, I knew how to do it and I already knew someone to help me."*

The ability to get back on track changes return migrants' perspectives on their future. It restores hope, as *"sustenance of the possibility of a (desired) alternative to a (currently live) reality"* which *"offers a particular take on (the) uncertainty"* of the future, emphasising *"potentiality and anticipation, rather than fear and doubt"* (Thorsen and Kleist 2017, pp.14-15). This hope has new models. As successful migrants inspired Demba's choice to take the route, now he says he wants to be like Touré, the wholesaler from Tivaouane who owns the storehouse where he gets all the supplies, as do most of the grocery shops in town. The individual way he pictures achieving his dream results from a general sense of mistrust and the will to break free from his family ties:

> *"During the training, I thought about doing a collective project with someone else, but, you know, working together is a bit complicated here: if I tell you that I want to work with you, then you will try to direct me a bit, and then you will try to get it all for you, while, instead, it belongs to both of us."*

At the moment of our first encounter, Demba was facing some difficulties due to the lack of follow-up by the AVRR programme. The one-off limited capital, the economic situation of the family after his unsuccessful migratory attempt, the shame of asking for help, as well as the IOM's inability to create a network among the funded projects to guarantee future loans and to create and negotiate more favourable conditions compared to the surrounding context, have made his project vulnerable to sudden drawbacks. Demba's words echo those of Ibrahima:

> *"I have a credit of CFA 100-150,000 with the wholesaler, but I do not know how to get credit from the bank: they did not show me the way to get credit there [...] The shop is now for rent, it costs CFA 10,000 per month, plus electricity. I told the owner it is expensive. When I came here, he told me CFA 10,000 for the whole shop, but when he knew that I was funded by the IOM, he split the building in two and gave me half for the same price. Usually, a room like this should not be more than CFA 5,000. But IOM decided to pay anyway for the first five months. But now I said to the owner, either you lower the price, or I will leave!"*

The last story is Samba's[302]. His adventure started from Mboro, north of Dakar, where he moved from Gimini, his birth village, in 2015, to earn some money. There he found some travel companions and left for Bamako and Niamey in 2016, by bus. Finally, he reached Agadez and then Libya, where he was captured and served in prison for more than a month. He was set free thanks to the payment of the ransom by a friend on the spot, and he found a job as a welder. After having been captured for the second time, he decided to accept the IOM repatriation proposal. Back in Senegal, like many return migrants who do not want to face immediately the shame of their homecoming, postponing the return to the village, he found work in Dakar, also due to his brother's request. For Samba, coming back also means to reposition oneself in the family network, accepting the decision of his older brother:

> *"I called my brother to tell him I was back, but he said: "No! Stay there and work!" I worked in a fish processing company. Then I left for another village called Ngorom, where I worked in a brick factory. But even if I had worked a lifetime, I would have never got back the money I had lost. It was all my money."*

Despite initially attempting not to give up continuing the adventure even once back in Senegal, Samba ended up surrendering to his need to return home and rest. He doesn't see the period of isolation he went through negatively, but as a necessary time to recover from the very harsh experience he went through:

> *"Since I came back, I used to stay at home all day long, and I tried to be patient because I had lost a lot of money, and I did not reach Europe....and then prisons, and so on... This touched me a lot. What I lived there cannot be fully told: they beat me up, they did everything to me ...* [he lowered his eyes, his shoulders close as if the body was still experiencing those sensations]. *When I came back, I was not in good health. I had a lot of pain in my whole body. If I blew my nose, there was still blood coming out. They beat me on the head so badly that when I was back, I still felt the head on fire. Now, luckily, it is over."*

For Samba, the decision to open a small shop seemed to be the most feasible, due to the capital lost during the backway and the situation of poverty the family was coping with. The decision to set it far

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[302] Samba, Velingara, 01/03/2020

from his village was the expression of his search for a place where he could shelter from family's requests and constraints:

> "This grocery shop was my first job since I got back here. In the beginning, I wanted to go in for market gardening but my brother had to sell a plot of land to resolve family problems, so at that moment there was no land for me. Since my father died, my brother is the one who tries to decide for the whole family. But he just sells everything without earning anything. So, I decided to open this grocery shop in Velingara, because there are more people living here, compared to my village, but also because I can stay away from my family. It is just me working here, and I do not think I will ask anyone else's help. This is just for me."

As for Demba and Ibrahima, the chance offered to Samba by IOM represented an opportunity for more individual autonomy, which requires the ability to balance both the need to maintain solidarity networks and the desire for individual autonomy. Samba claimed a space *"just for him"* and *"away from the family"* where he could manage the money he earned, protecting his project from his brother, who was capable only of *"selling everything"*. He was convinced that, since we all live in a *"world of competition and business"*, the economy of affection (Hydén 1983, p.8) must be replaced with the ability to *"do it by yourself"*:

> "I have never thought of doing a project with anyone because I wanted to work alone. It is a need that I felt after my return. We are in a world of competition and business: if you can do business on your own, you have to do it, because otherwise others will try to hinder you or betray you. I tell you, if you are lucky enough to have a project, it is better just to do it by yourself."

In Samba's dream to set up an international trade, we could see a clear desire for revenge, that is to establish a level of equality with the "elsewhere" which refused him. Indeed, the elsewhere and a condition of free mobility remain the goals for his life trajectory:

> "If the shop goes well, I will hire someone to work in it and I will do other businesses. One day, I will go to Dakar, look for documents, and I will go to Europe to look for some merchandise and do international trade."

In order to succeed, it is necessary to demonstrate having acquired the right mentality, namely a modern way of thinking which is completely different from that of Samba's parents. To know how to do business is to live up to contemporary changes. The opportunity to open his shop gave Samba the feeling of now being more capable of understanding and mastering these changes than those who had always remained in his village. The *laawol ley* made him more than his brother, who is capable only

of squandering the family's wealth, while Samba had learned how to do business properly, as he demonstrated to me by perfectly calculating the prices of his merchandise. This feeling of superiority gives him back a sense of masculine honour and the hope for a better future:

> *"There are days when I make CFA 4,000, some others CFA 10,000 [...] To earn more money, I took these sacks of charcoal through an agreement with a gentleman in the village. I sell them for CFA 3,000 per sack, so I earn CFA 1,500 each. If the cost of the sack is only CFA 500, then I make a net gain of CFA 1,000. And charcoal runs out every two days. I did the calculation before starting. I saw it was profitable and so I set up this business."*

Conclusions

Return migrants often face the same social, economic and moral conditions that led them to depart. Their reintegration happens within the perimeter of the local society of getting by where the possibility of being funded represents a rare chance. Nevertheless, the "elsewhere" continues to be part of an ideal future that foresees the possibility of still reaching Europe as a rich trader or a tourist. Freedom of movement remains the benchmark to evaluate individual success (Bauman 1992, p.27; 2000, p.149). The great paradox of programmes such as the one run by IOM is that while they try to prevent irregular mobilities, they keep feeding the imagination of a better elsewhere which remains inaccessible. To paraphrase the title of an ethnography by Jean-Pierre Dozon (2017), OIM's AVRR programme reinforces the perception that "*the truth is elsewhere*". Videos, images, business plans, proforma invoices and all the other concepts (such as marketing, investment and self-confidence) come from another cultural reality and are used as tools of a paternalistic education based on several neoliberal[303] assumptions. Return migrants are individuals to be empowered through a rational way of thinking suitable for the autonomous, independent and responsible subject. If they want to succeed, they have to learn how to plan and calculate what they need and where to allocate a limited budget, to deal with suppliers and landowners, to stipulate written agreements and apply a market-oriented attitude. IOM provides a ready-made recipe, conceiving individual empowerment as a possible driving force for wider social development. In implying a naive understanding of the *"traditional African social solidarity"* (Geschiere 2003, p.43), this view overlooks how individualism fosters social

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[303] The use of the concept of "neoliberalism" is widely criticised for having become so ubiquitous that it has become *"an obstacle to the anthropological understanding of the twenty-first century"* (Venkatesan et al. 2015). The use I make of it here, however, does not intend to identify the reality of an empirical model of subjectivity, but a deployment of culturally-defined concepts such as responsibility, autonomy, self-employment, and individualism to deal with the expansion of neoliberal economic conditions.

agonism, which is also an important driver of the *laawol ley.* The overlapping of concepts such as competition and risk with the emic ones of *ndimaaku, hersa* and *heɓtaare* ends up amplifying the same cultural configuration that is behind the *laawol ley*: an individual competitive effort to emancipate oneself from the marginal periphery of the global world. Moreover, return migrants encounter heavy claims on their income and do a great deal of *"negotiating, contesting, and sometimes evading the social and affective claims that can be made on* [their] *meagre streams of income and sources of wealth"* (Ferguson 2015, p.96). For instance, Samba's choice to move to Velingara in order to open his shop is a clear strategy of sheltering from possible conflicts and claims which are a constituent part of the *wondugol.* Moreover, projects such as taxi moto or cattle farming appear vulnerable, as motorbikes and cows can be easily sold to finance a new migratory attempt or to deal with family problems, as well as to deal with the costs of social ceremonies such as baptisms, weddings and funerals when the honour of the family is at stake.

The (apparent) acceptance of the guidelines dictated by the IOM is not a demonstration of the acquisition of a new mentality. It is the staging of the ability to socially navigate, a balance between saying what it takes to receive the money and trying to find new ways to solve the problem of living up to certain cultural values.

Undoubtedly, the IOM's AVRR programme has the merit of having brought real funding and given hope back to many return migrants. In the beginning, they do indeed often feel empowered to face the uncertainty of the post-migration situation. As Bala, the vice-president of the association of return migrants in Velingara, told me:

> *"Here only the IOM brought money. The others have only organised useless training courses. I have four, five certificates at home, but what do I do with them? We need more programmes like IOM. If another programme comes, I plan to expand my business. But here, it is only IOM that can help us. This is why we have set up the association of repatriated migrants, to get other fundings."*[304]

Still, OIM intervention contributes to perpetuating the local *habitus of development,* namely a socio-economic framework which continues to rely on external aid *"shifting the responsibility for social policy away from the state and towards the voluntary sector and the market"* (O'Manique 2004, p.63), without creating either employment opportunities or valuable chains of production. For a large portion

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[304] Bala, Velingara, 09/09/2021

of the population in Velingara, there are just two paths leading to the *heɓtaare*: the one going towards the elsewhere of the *laawol ley*, and the one coming from the elsewhere of the international aid programmes.

One year later

My return to Velingara between August and October 2021 (more than a year after the main fieldwork on which this work is mainly based) allowed me to observe the process of reintegration within different life trajectories. The IOM AVRR programme's approach – which aims to respond in a timely way to individual repatriation, and not for a lasting development – proves its limits in the local socio-economic reality. The price crisis – a consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic – along with another pandemic among sheep, enhanced the fragilities of reintegration projects. The possibility of accessing credit, a geographically distributed network (which I call "geographic capital"), return migrants' social reputation and the human and economic capital of their families emerge as essential factors of empowerment. From an emic point of view, however, luck – determined both by divine intervention and by human work – remains the pivotal element for succeeding.

Anthropological literature has already widely highlighted the limited impact of institutional assistance on reintegration. Programmes often overlook return migrants' agency and the social structures in which they are involved (Bakewell 2010, p.1689), the significant differences in the reintegration of those who manage to obtain legal residency in another country before returning and those who do not (Sinatti 2015a, p.285), the importance of concepts such as "free will" and "readiness" for a successful reintegration (Cassarino 2008, pp. 95-97; Flahaux 2017, pp. 3-4), and how these concepts could seldom be associated with migrants repatriated from Libya (Brachet 2016, p.279; Mensah 2016, pp. 303-304; Kleist 2017b, p.273). These theoretical considerations led me to organise a third journey to Velingara in August 2021, over a year after my main fieldwork which is the main basis of this work. Unlike in many countries in Europe, where lockdowns and severe restrictions were experienced by the population during winter between 2020 and 2021, life in Velingara continued more or less normally. The Covid-19 pandemic, however, kept on being part of the collective imagery and conversations, constantly reported by the French television news, telephone calls, and lockdown experiences of migrants abroad, as well as by the daily press conferences of the Senegalese Minister of Health. When I went back, people told me how the health emergency in Europe had reduced the amount of money sent via money transfer services, brought mobility-related issues such as periodic closures of the borders with Gambia and Guinea, and a decrease in projects run by international organisations and NGO. Locally, health problems were more linked to the delay of the anti-malaria campaign of summer 2020, while, economically, the worldwide augmentation of the prices of energy and commodities, such as sugar, palm oil, petrol and kitchen gas cylinders, created general concern.

Finally, a new epidemic among sheep caused the price of rams for the Muslim festivity of the *tabaski* to skyrocket in 2021.

Although this situation has certainly had an impact on the return migrants' process of reintegration, we must not be misled by the concept of "crisis". From the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s to structural adjustments, the 1994 currency devaluation and the Ebola epidemic of 2014, structural problems and environmental difficulties have always been part of everyday life in this part of the world, which is characterised by "*a politics of permanent crisis*" (Van der Walle 2001, pp.1-19). The particular situation in which I observed the unfolding of return migrants' life trajectories is not an exception, but an exacerbation of the difficulties which they constantly have to deal with. This chronicity, namely "*the experience of crisis as a constant*" (Vigh 2008, p.10) has shaped local habits and behaviours, also informing the background of international mobilities as a collective bet on the uncertainty of certainty ("I do not know if I can get to Europe, but if I do, I will surely have the means to build my independence and that of my family") against the certainty of uncertainty ("if I stay, I will always have to get by"). Homecoming is about returning to this state of certainty of uncertainty, to a dimension of "getting by", where the *habitus* of fatigue – learned by travelling the backway – is the essential skill to rebuild a new possible future.

Unintentional side effects

On my return to Velingara in August 2021, some activities had already failed, especially in the villages, while others were experiencing the constraints of an economic reality where *"savings (that is, keeping to oneself more money than one at present needs) is, in the midst of generalized deprivation, a very difficult thing to do"* (Ferguson 2017, p.96) in a period of a general price increase. The IOM programme achieved the aim of convincing the involved return migrants not to leave again, but several projects seemed to foster the social conditions which had led to departures in the past. A clear example is the analysis of the workforce employed in tailors' shops, mechanical workshops, and barbershops opened through the IOM's AVRR programme in Velingara. Because of both the need to economise and the widespread opinion that an apprentice should be paid only with the knowledge he learns, they employ young boys and girls sent by their parents who often cannot afford to pay for their studies. Souleymane's tailor's shop, for example, employs about twenty boys and girls aged from 10 to 17, often in shifts. Some have dropped out of school, the youngest are still enrolled but probably none of them will continue to the baccalaureate. They all come to the shop to learn how to sew, without

receiving a fixed salary, if not "*a small reward, when possible*"[305]. They are all a symbol of the difficulties the local school system has in granting a viable future, and are the perfect prototype of "potential migrants": with no possibility of accessing bank credit or financial help from the family, or saving enough money to open their own business, they seem bound to leave for the "elsewhere". These young apprentices were aware that the shop where they were working could open or grow larger only with the help of a funding programme, as well as realising that their "teacher" was not (and probably would not ever be) as rich as the migrants in Europe. Many of the travel stories I collected begin with the protagonist in the same situation: he is employed in a small workshop or shop and, failing to see a viable opportunity to free himself from the condition of employee-apprentice, decides to leave with the small sum which he has put aside over the months or years. The story of Souleymane is one such, and even though he did not make it to Europe, it was thanks to his courageous decision that he could now rely on otherwise unhoped-for economic aid. Bala's mechanic shop also worked like this:

> "*Once, the apprentice did not even dare to take money from the customer. You did the work, and your boss took the money. Today, you can no longer do it: you have to close your eyes and accept that your apprentices deal with the customers and, if they receive CFA 4,000 then you know that they will give you only CFA 3,000. But that is all they earn. After all, I pay them with the opportunity to learn a job.*"[306]

Sometimes projects reveal their weakness, as in the case of taxi moto in Velingara. On my return to Velingara, the number of tricycles in circulation had multiplied: some parents chose tricycles because they were safer to send their children to school on, as did women who could carry their groceries home more easily, and sharing the fare with others, too. As early as November 2019, tricycles already appeared to be a more profitable investment than motorcycles, partly due to the large number of motorbikes already employed in a still highly unregulated sector. While a motorcycle costs more or less CFA 300-350,000, the price of a tricycle was just over one million CFA, therefore beyond the budget of CFA 650,000 proposed by the IOM. Except for a single case in which two migrants presented a joint business plan for the purchase of a tricycle, instead of promoting synergy between the migrants, the IOM agreed to finance many small moto-taxi projects, many of which proved to be unsuccessful due to the existing competition, the lack of agreement with the municipal administration to regulate the profession, and the competitive edge of tricycles.

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[305] Souleyman, Velingara, 03/09/2021
[306] Bala, Velingara, 09/09/2021

When he filled in his business plan, Boubacar did not even have a driving licence and he had no experience as a driver. He chose the moto taxi for two reasons: it seemed to him the most profitable and feasible business, given the limited budget offered by IOM, and also it helped to diversify the sources of income for his family. Instead of choosing to invest in an activity in which one of his brothers was already engaged, Boubacar preferred a strategy widely used in the rural African context to face risk and vulnerability (Francis 2000, p.48; Barret et al. 2001, p.316; Alobo 2017, pp.119-120; Djurfedlt et al. 2018, pp. 43-45). Having lost his father and being the oldest brother, he also felt the responsibility and the urgency to provide for the needs of the whole family and, above all, to finance the studies of his youngest brother. So, while attending the course to obtain a driving licence, he was going back and forth to Gambia where he could find work as a bricklayer:

> "When I got back, I immediately left for Gambia because I knew people who needed bricklayers to work in construction. Still now, when there is not so much work here, I go there, since I know people who can find me a job easily. We are five brothers here in my house, and I am the eldest. One works in construction too, one breeds sheep, the other is a teacher, and the last one has just graduated. [...] In the end, I did not get my driving licence. I had to suspend the course because I did not have enough money. I did not ask my brothers for help because they are struggling like me. All the efforts I make now are addressed to allowing my youngest brother to study."[307]

Boubacar spent the money he should have used to get his driving licence to pay for his brother's last two years of school, giving up on his own project. The collective hope of the family is now on another member and Boubacar's strategy has therefore changed: he is sponsoring the success of the family, fulfilling his role as elder brother and hoping that his sacrifice will be repaid in the future when his little brother will be able to redistribute what he earns. Boubacar's choice was based on a different model of subjectivity and a different way of social navigation from the one proposed by IOM:

> "Nothing has changed since I left. The only thing is that I have got older. But now I have responsibility for my whole family. I have to provide for them. My goal is to help my brothers and educate my children, so they will become civil servants, and then I will be free."

Despite his family, Boubacar accesses adulthood and its responsibilities. The way he knuckles down, back and forth to Gambia is his way to "*yana himmo*" (to fall and get back up) as it is expected by the head of the family.

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[307] Boubacar, Velingara, 18/9/2021

Ultimately, an important critical aspect of the IOM project emerged when trainers turned themselves from development agents into development brokers who *"attempt, beyond their ideological declarations, to reinforce their position in the local arena"* (De Sardan 2005, p.174). At the moment of my return, I found only one facilitator who was still in post. This was due to the fact that an internal investigation had revealed how some trainers had used the bureaucratic steps of the programme to steal money destined for recipients' activities, by inflating the prices of the goods to be provided for return migrants to start their activities. According to several return migrants, similar events also occurred on their return, at the moment of the distribution of the pocket money in Dakar or Tambacounda which should have allowed migrants to come back home safely. Paradoxically, the lack of trust in recipients – which led to the decision to give no cash directly to return migrants – ended up clouding the issue of trust in intermediaries.

The importance of social and geographic capital

> *"I do the best I can* (on se débrouille) *but at the moment it is complicated. The increase in the price of goods makes everything more difficult because with what you earn you cannot buy the same merchandise from the wholesaler. Goods at the market are too expensive..."*[308]

I met Ibrahima again after more than a year in his small grocery shop in Thiankang 1 district in Velingara. It was almost the same as the previous year, apart from the fact that the owner had closed off and rented out the service room where Ibrahima used to sleep. However, Ibrahima still spends almost every night there, for the fear of thieves:

> *"It is not safe here. If they know that you do not sleep here, they come and steal everything from you. I leave this shop only for an hour per day when I go to my parents' house to eat: my father, then, comes here and stays here in my place."*

The extra effort Ibrahima puts into managing the shop is still conceived as the demonstration of a new work ethic he had acquired during the *laawol ley*. He also recognised the importance of the things he had learned while working as an apprentice before leaving, such as how to deal with local people, talk to them and understand their needs and requirements, without being trapped in the game of bargaining:

> *"I write all the prices. I do not want to do as it is done here that every time people try to bargain saying: "give me this for free", "come on we know each other for a long time..." It is*

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[308] Ibrahima, Velingara, 7/9/2021

not good for business. When people come to buy and have nothing to pay with, I give them credit only once, and at the most up to CFA 100-200. But until they give me back my money, I will not give them anything more."

The social environment appears to be the first problem preventing Ibrahima from developing his business. His story represents the attempt to embody new models of subjectivity promoted by developmentalist discourses as a way to cut himself off from the local economy of distribution and the dark side of social capital (Åkesson and Baez 2015, p.39). Just like when they were adventurers of the *laawol ley*, return migrants keep on trying to distance themselves from the social hard work of dependence (Ferguson 2015, p.94) which is considered by many one of the most severe constraints. In addition to the problem of security, mainly due to the proximity of the border with Gambia, Ibrahima has to deal with the economic context within which he operates:

> *"I cannot decide the prices: if everyone sells a product for CFA 400, I cannot sell it for more. Otherwise, no one will come here to buy things any more!"*

Velingara's economic fabric is ignored by the IOM programme when it comes to teaching return migrants how they should manage the activity. This fabric is made up of informal and unofficial activities and dynamics that must be known to run a successful business. For Ibrahima, learning how to source goods from the smuggling of products, which takes place using the kilometres of savannah separating the Kolda region from Gambia is fundamental. The knowledge of how to move in this context comes from the experience he had before leaving. Moreover, socially navigating the "*generalized informal functioning*" of *"everyday corruption"* (Blundo and De Sardan 2006, p.5) and the hidden economic connections, obstacles and opportunities requires *"a friend who shows you the entrance doors":*

> *"Now, as the prices increase, either you have someone bringing you the products from Gambia or you are out. I have a friend of mine who lives in Gambia. If I need something, I call him and he brings it to me. If they stop him or catch him, I have no problems because he is the one doing everything. But if they do not stop him, the merchandise arrives, and I can sell it at the same price as the others. All the traders here buy in Gambia."*

On a good business day, Ibrahima says he earns around CFA 15,000, CFA 2,000 of which is used to deal with daily household expenses and CFA 13,000 to get more merchandise. However, economic constraints (such as the price crisis, the seasonality of people's economic availability, increases in rent and parcel prices, a large number of shops selling the same products even within the same

neighbourhood) and family issues (such as facing medical expenses for elderly parents, being an only child, the need to rent a house to bring his wife to Velingara and to organise a proper wedding, the lack of financial support from a friend or a migrant abroad) have delayed Ibrahima's dreams to grow his business. The road to *heɓtaare* seems again to be blocked:

> *"Even if I am tired* ("mino tampi")*, I am the only one who can help my family: I have no one to replace me, neither an older brother, nor anyone else. My parents live in my uncle's house. My father is old, and my mother has no one but me. After my return, I married a woman from the village, but for now, she is still there: there is no place to bring her here, look where I sleep! And then there is no money for the wedding: if I had to pay for a wedding, I would go bankrupt and I would have to close the shop immediately! I would like to do a chicken farm, but I would need space. I found an empty plot of land at CFA 350,000 here in Thiankang 1. A gentleman came here three times to sell it to me. You can see he was in a hurry because he told me he wanted to sell it quickly. But at the moment I would need someone to lend me that amount, and I do not want to…"*

Ibrahima's story is much more significant when compared to Younusa's. Despite his return in 2018, today Younusa manages to be a good breadwinner: he supports his father and mother who live in his house in the Nasurullay neighbourhood with his two sisters, two wives and three children. Younusa was initially funded by IOM to open a small grocery store, too. The choice of this project comes from his social ties with Gambia, where part of his family lives: this geographic capital allowed Younusa to stock his shop easily at prices which were competitive for the local market. It is also through this perspective that he married his second wife in 2020, as her brother is a Gambian border policeman:

> *"Gambia and Senegal are the same thing for me. Part of my family does business in Gambia, so it seemed like the easiest thing to start doing."*[309]

Coming from a family of traders and knowing the limits of the seasonal economy in Velingara, Younusa decided to open another activity in parallel: he built a small house in the corner of his *gallé* (household) to be used as a shop, in order not to pay any rent, and he used the money he saved to buy agricultural materials and seeds to cultivate one hectare of groundnuts. In a situation where the political parcelling-up of Velingara led to the depletion of allocable plots – leaving the land issue in the hands of the private real estate market which sets the prices on the purchasing power of migrants – once again Younusa's geographical capital proves to be fundamental. Thanks to the help of part of

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[309] Younusa, Velingara, 13/9/2021

his family living in the municipality of Nemataba, he got a plot of land there for free, not far from the administrative border with the municipality of Velingara.

Younusa managed to start a virtuous circle: during the dry season, the shop – where Younusa put his two wives to work – guarantees him a good source of income that allows him to buy seeds and agricultural materials, while during the rainy season, the fields mean he can have another source of income to reinvest. With the money he earned during the previous year, Younussa also bought two horses and a donkey, which he feeds with the hay from the groundnuts that he grows. He uses them either for his own work in the fields or for renting to other peasants. The ability to generate a constant income and the security of such a large family network allow Younusa to confidently plan other activities for the future, such as chicken farming and breeding rams for his wives to manage, or the construction of a house to rent out.

The comparison between the stories of Ibrahima and Younusa more than a year after receiving IOM funding highlights both how social and geographical capital is fundamental to having greater flexibility and capacity for action within the local context. Income diversification is preferred over an investment in only one economic activity. Often, the projects financed by IOM are not the realisation of a desire, but the result of a choice made considering expectations, assumptions and interactions with the local context. The first goal for one's social rehabilitation remains to reposition oneself from being *"the one who is forced to ask"* to *"the one who is able to give".* This concept is well summed up by the words of two return migrants: Aliou, a shoe seller at the central market of Velingara, and Amadou, who owns a small hair salon, in both cases thanks to the IOM's funding:

> *"I do this job because my father and my older brother did it. When you come back, you do not have the means to support yourself, so you go to work for your brother to get some help. My brother still does the same business, but after IOM came, I started on my own. In life you cannot remain tied up with someone: if you want to do a great business, you have to go for it by yourself. Before, I could not do anything without asking. Today I am free."[310]*

> *"My brother has been in Italy for 10 years, and he built a house where I am living with my wife and his wife. I did not ask him for money for the barbershop because I wanted to do it by myself. Before, I did not have the opportunity to support anyone but now if I can help someone who needs something, I give him what I can. I put myself in the shoes of those people who come and ask because I know what they are going through. When I decided to leave, I did not have any support."[311]*

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[310] Aliou, Velingara, 10/9/2021
[311] Amadou, Velingara, 7/9/2021

Repositioning inside a family network requires great efforts: someone who really wants to have success should "*not let money sleep*"[312], he must reinvest what he can, diversify his activities and stubbornly try to do it by himself. Three years after his return, Aliou continues with the same *knuckling down*:

> *"Running your own business takes courage! I will work with my brain and my strengths, and I will open 2-3 shops. I am sure I can do it. All the money I make, I reinvest it. It is my money because here it is better not to borrow it: if you work with your own money, it will be much easier for you because you are free."[313]*

Unfunded return migrants

Even in Velingara, international agencies and NGOs *"create new circuits of power and hierarchy"* (O'Manique 2004, p.66) differentiating between eligible and non-eligible return migrants. The IOM's AVRR programme financed only those who had returned after 2017 through IOM, and excluded those who came back at a different time. The situation of return migrants who had no access to funds from any international organisation is an important benchmark for understanding the aid programme's impact on reintegration. The cases I could observe in Velingara demonstrated once again the importance of geographically distributed networks and migrants' social reputation. In particular, it is interesting, here, to analyse the story of El Hadji, the man who was chosen as the president of the newly created return migrant association founded in Velingara in spring 2021. The reason for his election lies in the particular success he had in running his new activity – the production and distribution of water bags – without having received any funding. After having come back empty-handed from his second migratory attempt in March 2020, like many others he "sat down" in his house for two months "just to rest":

> *"I was asking myself: what could I do? People looked at me and they thought I was crazy because I came back. They did not trust me, even in my family. It took courage to come out and start to look for something to do."[314]*

El Hadji is completely different from the IOM representation of the adventurer of the *laawol ley*, as his decision to travel was not caused by a misfitting to the economic-social context. He is also different

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[312] Amadou, Velingara, 7/9/2021

[313] Aliou, Velingara, 10/9/2021

[314] El Hadji, Velingara, 20/9/2021

from the image of an individual who can be empowered only by becoming independent from his social and family network. On the contrary, his empowerment came from the possibility of drawing resources from a redistributive network within which he could change his position of dependence. When he needed to come out from the first period of isolation, he started to work for a friend of his family who needed a salesperson for his mobile phone import business. El Hadji's social position in Velingara was essential for his reintegration: living in Sinthiang Houlata, the neighbourhood where there are several merchants who immigrated from Guinea, his family was able to develop good neighbourly relations. This allowed El Hadji to emerge from a position of dependence within his family, accepting the support of someone else. After El-Hadji had worked for him for a while, the Guinean merchant lent him money to buy a motorised tricycle. Counting on the social reputation he built before leaving – while working as a technician at Sonatel and Orange for more than ten years – El Hadji managed to be considered a trustworthy person by the local bank, which granted him a CFA 3 million loan. Another source of financial help was his younger brother, employed as a teacher in the state school system. As El Hadji had financed his brother's studies when he worked as a technician before leaving, he was now getting back the help he had given. His story underlines how social life, the story of an individual before departure and diversification of activities in the same family network are fundamental elements for shaping the differences in reintegration processes.

El Hadji's ability to understand the context in which he lives with an "entrepreneurial" mentality must be added to these conditions. This comes from his attitude, the working experience he had in a big electric company, his relationship with local merchants' families and the experience he had abroad:

> *"Ever since I started working again, I have been thinking about which business would work best here, and I decided to do water distribution. I saw it in Algeria and I decided to give it a try here. During the rainy season, I started to cultivate the fields of my family, groundnuts and corn, and I still do it this year. I used part of the money I earned to buy the machine to make water bags. But the machine cost CFA 1.5 million. Luckily, the bank knew me already because I had worked in a big company, and they knew my family and my overall situation, so they gave me the money I needed."*

What were (and are) the means of the family, how much was lost along the journey, and how many people live on this wealth are three parameters that change the extent to which each individual can be more or less "empowered". For El Hadji, individual decisions still refer to a collective strategy of income diversification:

"With the first money I earned, I also opened a money transfer shop with my brother. The goal, however, is always to expand the water distribution business, perhaps by buying another vehicle to bring water door to door, and to reach Kolda and Kaolack. Now, however, I prefer to wait because of the Covid. Today, I have two people who work for me to produce bags. I do not pay them by the hour, but according to objectives: a certain amount every 200 bags. This is how you should do it to make people work."

The payment by the piece he uses for his workers represents an attempt to build a working system which adapts to the experience of the local context. El Hadji considers his working attitude to be different. His mentality is shaped both by a new liberal approach coming from the "elsewhere" and by a local rational capacity to socially navigate. Considering water as a possible business is part of the process of monetisation and expansion of the market to the entire social sphere. However, his choice is not determined by what he happens to like, but from careful observation of the reality surrounding him and in relation to the economic activity of the whole family. His words attest to how the *laawol ley* contributed to creating his ability to read the local context in relation to a wider perspective:

"Everything is difficult at the beginning. If you do not face difficulties, you will not go anywhere. The problem is that what you earn here in a week, you earn it in Algeria in four hours. The difference is in the value of the currency."

Returns after failure reveal how the IOM rhetorics collide with the reality of a society where *"migration has become the organizing principle of the economy, due to the inability of the local labour market to offer an adequate demand for workers"* (Dia 2015, p. 244). Guided by the necessity to get by, people shape their actions according to financing opportunities, among other things. The change in the conditionalities of aid and development programmes – which are cheasing to finance individual projects, requiring that people form themselves into officially registered associations – has also pressed some return migrants to create an official association:

"We have created an official association of return migrants because this is the requirement for new projects. But the people here are not used to working together. However, requirements have changed, and now we are forced to group. We are 60 people for now, but they keep on calling me, so I think we will grow quickly."

Conclusions

El Hadji's story demonstrates how reintegration is not so much a question of acquiring a particular way of thinking; rather it is a matter of more practical issues, such as having the possibility of accessing credit or relying on a stable economic situation in the family. Boubacar's case, instead, shows how spending a large part of one's earnings to pay for a brother's schooling may appear not as an "irrational" choice but a part of a still-present collective way of social navigation, based partly on income diversification. In contrast, IOM AVRR's approach establishes an ideal model of self-determined subject who takes decisions following his desires, *"through which* he *learns to recognize and govern* himself*"* (De Beistegui 2018, p.8). The *"free expression of individuals' ends and desires"* appears in the IOM's conception as a powerful driver to *"generate order spontaneously"* through market and competition (De Beistegui 2018, p.66). Desire is an instrument of governmentality (De Beistegui 2018, p.31) in the framework of a wider objective to better manage international mobility, (partly) through the implementation of sustainable reintegration. IOM tries to replace the desire for social becoming (Christiansen et al. 2006, p.21) and for "*realizing masculine adulthood"* (Melly 2011, p.363) through migration (Vigh 2014, p.217) with the desire to be successful as a local businessman. However, in the long run, it often ends up replacing the hazard of the Central Mediterranean route with an entrepreneurial risk. The "uncertainty of certainty" of arriving in Europe is replaced by the "certainty of uncertainty" of the local society of getting by. The lack of follow-up, the inability to interconnect different projects or guarantee further access to credit or other funding contradicts the definition of return and reintegration as a process given by IOM itself (IOM 2019, p.176). IOM's high expectations of the individual's capacity to manage an independent economic activity trivialise the need for entrepreneurial skills as well as the difficulty of running a business in a social condition of scarcity, where recipients must deal with the daily claims of the family network. How many people in the contemporary global economy would be able to open a lasting and profitable business without the possibility of continuous access to more credit, with a minimal welfare state and in a social condition of constant precariousness?

Ultimately, the limit of the AVRR programme in Velingara is that of an approach based solely on the individuals. Its goal is to give return migrants the opportunity to return home safely and to provide the basis for rebuilding a good life trajectory. While in the short run this appeared to be achieved, in the long run, several issues became evident. AVRR has ended up reproducing the same conditions that led to the great migratory wave of the post-Libyan crisis years: the rhetorics of motivational

videos reproduce the same discourses as those of the travellers; the financed projects often employ underpaid young apprentices who often quit school, perpetuating generalised economic conditions and unpaid employment; competition fosters *social agonism* while entrepreneurial risk and lack of capital expose return migrants to the concrete possibility of failing again.

Some of these critical issues also emerged in a report published by IOM in 2020 which reflects on the high rate of indebtedness shown in the questionnaires filled in by return migrants (72%). The report acknowledges that the loans which migrants take out to *"finance their migratory journey or to cover personal and professional costs"* create *"financial and moral constraints that determine their ability to participate in economic and social life in their country of origin"* (IOM 2020b, p.6). Therefore, the document invites us to "*strengthen the consideration of the social, economic and psychological dimensions of indebtedness within reintegration projects*" by ensuring "*long-term monitoring within the framework of return and reintegration programs*", by providing "*financial and organizational support to associations and collectives of return migrants in order to ensure their sustainability and facilitate their creation*", making *"more flexible and accessible the conditions for borrowing from microfinance institutions and banks"*, and supporting *"returning migrants as they approach financial institutions for a loan and help them provide collateral"* (IOM 2020b, p. 7). The report recognises that reintegration cannot overlook the reasons that led to departure and the "*social environments that have been set in motion by myriad individual and collective acts and forces beyond our control*" (Vigh 2010, p.159). Returning means restarting from a partly old and partly new position in the multi-situated and interconnected village which migrants left, but never ceased to inhabit, "*simultaneously* acting *and* reacting *in relation to* their *current position within a social terrain, in response to current constraints, possibilities and configurations of power, as well as in relation to* their *perception of the future terrain and its unfolding*" (Vigh 2010, p.160). Return migrants are *"acutely aware of their position in the world today, of their "abjection" or expulsion from (or persistent non-inclusion in) European modernity [...] a modernity they hear spoken [of] but may never inhabit"* (Pitt 2010, p.166). Trying to reproduce locally the forms of agriculture, the ways of sowing or the attitudes to work they ecountered and experienced along the Central Mediterranean route, return migrants want to claim their "*rights of full membership in a wider society*" (Ferguson 2006, p.161). Their projects are not just about unblocking their path to the *heɓtaare*, but also about proudly demonstrating that they can measure up to a world that has rejected them and that they dream of visiting as tourists one day as an act of personal revenge.

Final conclusions: "E Yattere Allah!"

Return migrations should be analysed in relation to a specific historical, cultural and economic background, and as part of the total social fact (Sayad 1991, p. 15) that is international mobility. This thesis has shown also in Velingara *"the multiple constitutive relationships between migration and life that emerge in different migratory realities"* (Elliot 2021, p.163) that shape *"a contingent horizons of possibility"* as well as new social hierarchies (N'Gaïde 2003, p.737).

A homecoming from the Central Mediterranean route has marked a pivotal point in the life of thousands of local people in the last 10 years. According to this event, the lives of individuals have shifted and their family network have reorganised their trajectories, hopes, and daily choices. As already noted by Pauli, *"returning is always beginning. Returns are special kinds of beginnings, permeated with memories, hopes, desires, anxieties and longings about what has been left"* (Pauli 2021, p.104). *"Returning might appear as a socially and emotionally challenging endeavour, fraught with ambivalences and frustrations"* (Pauli 2021, p.101), which might come with a sense of "destinylessness" (Khosravi 2018, p.1).[315]

From the angle of Vélingara, terms such as "reintegration" or "reinsertion" (Cassarino 2004: PAGINA) often hide a fundamental consideration: the travellers of the *laawol ley* continue to be an integral part of the local context through different forms of communication, money transfer and the collective effort to sustain their journey, both mystically and financially. They shape socio-economic dynamics in Velingara through requesting or sending money, they feed collective hope and they make decisions based on cultural habits and moral attitudes belonging to their society of origin.

Return is a process that unfolds over time. Amongst the Fulɓe Fulakunda, coming back is about dealing with a change in one's social position, reactivating necessary social connections, rebuilding either personal or professional relationships, and cultivating the social attitude of *hersa*. It means to temporarily give up to the possibility of self-determination, accepting a condition of dependence. Subjects can nonetheless shape and profit from their situation of dependence (see Bayart 1999; Ferguson 2015), within the awareness of the social and cultural limits sanctioned by *ndimaaku*. Return is also about changing one's position in the global social space (Bourdieu 1994, p.32) where inherited

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[315] Taking inspiration from his fieldwork among people who have been deported to Afghanistan, Shahram Khosravi defines "destinylessness" as "*a feeling of uncertainty, suspension, and purposelessness, many experience after deportation*". Indeed, "*the term "destiny" coming from Latin is the root of the term 'destination'. For many deportees the sense of lacking destiny is intertwined with lacking destination [...] a feeling of being lost*" (Khosravi 2018, p.1).

cultural perspectives still work as compass to orient people's action. There is the set of moral values and rules of conduct originally associated with the ancient noble class (*ndimaaku*). The intrinsic fatigue (*tampere*) of living together with other human beings (*wondagol*) is accompanied by the desire to free oneself by achieving autonomy (*heɓtaare*). Envy and the desire to lower the level of the social competition the Islamic religious norms trigger the fear of mystical threatens (*bau*) while Islamic religious norms encourage virtues such as compassion and patience. The material signs of other people's success (houses, vehicles, new clothes, etc…) become also markers of individual delay. Returned travellers of the *lawol ley* are stuck "in between". Their age-mates who stayed put in Vélingara may have not the same first hand experience of the outside work, but they have often managed to organise their lives according to the image of a responsible adult man. And the travellers who reached Europe, although not necessarily stronger or cleverer than those who were compelled to return, can now do things that the latter migrants cannot equal. The claims to full membership of the global society, which they raised by adventuring on the *lawol ley*, are still there once back. For most of the unsuccessful return migrants, the travel has offered the chance to observe reality from another perspective. As "a school of life", the *laawol ley* has taught them how to measure up to the world.

In her multi-situated ethnography between Italy and Senegal, Giovanna Cavatorta as argued that defining empty-handed return as a failure does not grasp the local perspective, but it implies a neoliberal vision based on external categories of success and failure. Not having success does not mean failing, it means to *"define a migration which is gone wrong or that is not working and generates only fatigue"* (Cavatorta 2018, p.300). Emically, however, failure is precisely about generating additional *tampere* for oneself and others. It means being stuck in the search for the *heɓtaare* with the consequences of anchoring the family to *baasal.* For sure, migratory unsuccess is not the end of a life trajectory. The characteristics that together and simultaneously defines failure – i.e. no accumulation of mobility capital, wealth, and the inability to assume a role of prestige in the household – are turned into the drivers of the return migrants I met in Velingara. Coming back means to claim a change. As successful migrants come back overshowing the new acquired position through vehicles, outfits, houses, unsuccessful migrants underline their difference through their stories and discourses. They claim to having acquired new competences, perspectives and ethical approach to work and money that they can use to set new strategies to gain wealth, social prestige and the mobile capital they could not achieve through the *laawol ley*. The process of their social rehabilitation is about demonstrating their claim in the everyday effort to redesign a respectable future. But while they feel "empowered" in their

way of thinking, they are dis-empowered by the economic and social conditions they experience every day.

Episodes such as price rises or the spread of animal diseases remind them the chronicity of the crisis (Vigh 2008, p.15) within which they have to socially navigate. Local and global economic changes have made this social navigation more difficult in the peripheral area of "casino capitalism" where *"instead of offering some protection against the uncertainties of life, money has itself become the cause of new uncertainties"* (Strange 1997, p.86)[316]. How will things turn out for Ibrahima or Younusa with a bad rainy season? And if the Chinese will not return to buy groundnuts on the local market? What if the prices of essential goods continue to rise in the future? Far from speculative, these kinds of questions are the essence of the experience of global marginality in Vélingara. Without satisfactory (and concrete) answers, people will continue to prefer the uncertain certainty of the *laawol ley* to the certain uncertainty of their local predicament. On my return to Vélingara in 2021, I found that slot machines were spreading through the town for the first time. The owner of the barbershop where I saw one for the first time told me a man from Kolda had bought them from a Chinese enterprise and brought them in town. The game was designed using the logos of the most popular football teams, such as Real Madrid and Barcelona, whose matches are constantly broadcast all over the town via pirate connections to satellite TVs. Designed to capture a new image of the "*Barça walla Barzakh!*", these slot machines collected up to CFA 30,000 per week, a very large sum considering that each play cost CFA 100. The machines are the symbol of how luck (*arsike*) keeps on being seen as a fundamental strategy of social navigation. The *arsike* is a kind of luck which needs no hard work to obtain what a man or a woman desires (Camara 2008, p.53), quite the opposite of staying bent over for hours in the groundnut fields. It combines with an Islamic framework to explain misfortune and crisis. As for the Fulɓe in Mali, also for the Fulɓe Fulakunda in Velingara, *"it is one's destiny,* tagadje*, that decides, and only God can change that. This leads to fatalism in daily life because no-one may change one's* tagadje*"* (Birkeland 2007, p.147). In the space of potentialities established by God, men must then quest for luck through their actions. The contingency and unpredictability of economic life is a productive field of possibilities where *arsike* can happen suddenly (Gaibazzi 2015b, pp.227-240). God's will, destiny, luck are also conceptual tools to make sense of the unfolding of a life trajectory.

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[316] The expression "casino capitalims" was used by Susan Strange in her analysis of "*the Western financial system*" to indicate how it was rapidly coming "*to resemble nothing as much as a vast casino*" (Strange 1987, p.1). Strange's work is here used to underline how the success of the migration investment is increasingly read in terms of destiny and luck in Velingara, as it depends on variables that are too distant from the experience and possibility of understanding of the subjects.

From an emic perspective, the greatest capital that both adventurers and empty-handed return migrants can count on is God's will and one's luck, as cultural tools to face the local effect of a global conjuncture which spreads the idea and the promise of universal happiness while continuing to limit the material possibilities to attain it. Leaving for the *laawol ley* is a way to challenge one's destiny in a society that lost the capacity of self-determination. Coming back is to cope with what one's destiny is about.

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Aliou, Linkering, 23/11/2019
Mama Samba, Linkering, 23/11/2020
Mamadou, Linkering, 23/11/2019
Binta, Linkering, 24/11/2020
El Islam Jarga, El Islam, 24/11/2019
Abubakar, El Islam, 24/11/2019
Mariama, Linkering, 24/11/2020
Women participating in HLM tontine, Velingara, 25/11/2019
Thiam, Velingara, 26/11/2019
Madou Ba, Velingara, 28/11/2019
Assane, Sare Sukande, 22/01/2020
Demba, Dambirou, 22/01/2020

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[317] The names used were mostly fictional.

Sare Sukande Jarga, Sare Sukande, 23/01/2020
Souleymane, Sare Sukande, 23/01/2020
Sidi, Velingara, 24/01/2020
Bakary, Kandia, 25/01/2020
Souleyman Sow, Nemataba, 26/01/2020
Sare Nagge jarga, Sare Nagge, 27/01/2020
Tullay, Velingara, 28/01/2020
Mariama, Velingara, 30/01/2020
Fatou Djaite, Velingara, 31/01/2020
Hamadou Kande, Velingara, 2/02/2020
Madame Sidibe, Velingara, 3/02/2020
Aye Karidjatu Balde, Velingara, 4/02/2020
Coulibaly, Vélingara, 5/02/2020
Demba, Velingara, 07/02/2020
Fatou Bintou, Velingara, 09/02/2020
Alpha Yaya, Velingara, 10/02/2020
Younusa, Velingara, 10/02/2020
Kamara, Velingara, 10/02/2020
Diallo, Velingara, 10/02/2020
Touré, Velingara, 17/02/2020
Samba, Velingara, 17/02/2020
Demba Mballo, Sare Coly Salle, 18/02/2020
Ibrahima, Velingara, 18/02/2020
Samba, Velingara, 19/02/2020
Mamadu Yero, Velingara, 20/02/2020
Abdullahi, Velingara, 20/02/2020
Sadio, Velingara, 20/02/2020
Madame Cissoko, Velingara, 22/02/2020
Mamadou, Tambacounda, 23/02/2020
Moussa, Tambacounda, 23/02/2020
Ibrahima, Tambacounda, 23/02/2020
Diallo, Tambacounda, 24/02/2020
Mister Ba, Velingara, 25/02/2020
Saiku, Velingara, 26/02/2020
Mamadou Lamine, Velingara, 26/02/2020
Yusuff, Velingara, 27/02/2020
Diallo, Velingara, 28/02/2020
Alassane, Velingara, 28/02/2020
Touré, Velingara, 28/02/2020
Cissé, Velingara, 1/03/2020
Samba, Velingara, 01/03/2020
Demba, Velingara, 02/03/2020
Sidy, Suturé, 05/03/2020
Nova, Suturé, 05/03/2020
Madame Sidibé, Velingara, 06/03/2020
Madame Sidibé, Velingara, 07/03/2020
Cheick, Velingara, 07/03/2020
Boubacar, Yiri Koy, 8/03/2020
Samba Lala, Yiri Koy 8/03/2020
Madame Kante, Velingara, 09/03/2020
Camara, Velingara, 10/03/2020
Kamara, Tongya, 11/03/2020
Alassane and Lamine, Tongya, 11/03/2020
Mané, Velingara, 15/03/2020
Omar Diao, Velingara, 18/03/2020
Omar Balde, Velingara, 19/03/2020
Abdullahi, Velingara, 21/03/2020

Bala, Velingara, 25/03/2020
Mamadou, Velingara, 03/09/2021
Souleyman, Velingara, 03/09/2021
Ibrahima, Velingara, 7/9/2021
Amadou, Velingara, 7/9/2021
Bala, Velingara, 09/09/2021
Aliou, Velingara, 10/9/2021
Younusa, Velingara, 13/9/2021
Boubacar, Velingara, 18/9/2021
El Hadji, Velingara, 20/9/2021