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MIGRATION, SONINKE YOUNG MEN AND THE DYNAMICS OF STAYING BEHIND (THE GAMBIA)

PAOLO GAIBAZZI

Under the Supervision of Prof. Alice Bellagamba

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Abbreviations

APRC	Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction
Dalasi	Currency of The Gambia (For the period Oct 2006-May 2008, the Euro was worth about 34.2 Dalasi on average, but fluctuated between 27.6 and 37.6)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GCU	Gambian Cooperative Union
GGU	Gambia Groundnut Corporation
GOMB	Gambia Oilseed Marketing Board
GPMB	Gambia Produce Marketing Board
PPP	People's Progressive Party
SYC	Sabi Youth Committee
URR	Upper River Region (formerly Upper River Division)
VDC	Village Development Committee
YWAM	Youth With A Mission

Notes on Spelling

In transcribing Soninke terms, I follow the spelling convention in Dantioko's (2003) lexicon, except for the "*ñ*", which will be substituted by "*ny*".

The names of all people and places are spelled according to this convention, except when these are more widely recognised by another designation, or when people explicitly asked that a different spelling be used for their name.

Particular cases of Soninke consonants are:

c- Pronounced as *ch* in 'church'

x- Pronounced as a sort of guttural *r* (or *kh*), when preceded by *n*, it pronounced as *k*.

ŋ- Nasal and guttural sound, approximately as in *ng*

ny- Pronounced as the *ñ* in Spanish (e.g. España)

Please note that some Soninke words in this thesis are spelled in a slightly different way from Dantioko's (2003) lexicon, which is based on the Soninke spoken in Mali; differences reflect Gambian variations as I understood them. The Gambian Soninke tend to pronounce the *f* as a *h*, yet I did not write *h* in place of *f* unless specific words require an *h* (e.g. *hoore*).

Introduction

Caroline Brettell has written that today "anthropologists can hardly avoid some consideration of migrants and the migratory process" (Brettell 2003:x). Arriving in The Gambia in 2006, I could hardly avoid some consideration of would-be-migrants and immobility. Even before I reached the country, there had been abundant media coverage of undocumented boat migrants leaving Senegalese and, increasingly, Gambian shores for the Canary Islands, the first point of entry to Europe. Thousands of unemployed and disenfranchised young men with no chance of obtaining a valid visa risked their lives to secure a better future for their families and for themselves. As I strolled along the streets of urban Gambia, I met groups of young men sitting idly in groups at the road side or a little inside the compounds, brewing tea, listening to music and chatting among themselves. Years of stagnation and neoliberal reforms in a weak national economy had left them with no job and growing inflation. Most youths showed scant interest in the idea of boarding a boat and risking their life; yet they talked about migration only minutes after starting a conversation with me. Being a European I could not avoid becoming involved in the topic with them: I was asked to help with an invitation letter or with the maze of bureaucratic and financial requirements at whatever embassy my new acquaintances were thinking of applying to. Leaving the country and finding a job or pursuing higher education were seen as the solution to their uncertainties in Gambia. After all, many of their friends and brothers had left and now they sent money for their families, constructed large mansions and drove nice vehicles around town when they came back on holiday.

When I moved to Sabi village—about 400km to the interior—some weeks later, conversation topics did not change much. I had not expected they would. This was a Soninke (or Serahule) village, a group known as having a long tradition of migration. For the village young men, emigrating was nothing new. Their grandfathers and fathers had been in West Africa to trade diamonds, African art and other goods; their brothers and friends were in Europe or in the US, or still doing business in West and Central Africa. Most young men had at least one household member abroad, and some were even born in a foreign country. Some had had migratory experiences abroad, and most travelled every season to the city to find work as soon as their agricultural tasks were over. Besides a migratory heritage, what these young men seemed to share was a common ambition to be abroad in the near future. They were waiting for the right

opportunity to travel, make money and acquire new experiences. Some of them were waiting for their migrant relatives to arrange papers for them to leave, many others were complaining that they did not have enough support to get out of the country. It was as if these young men were surrounded by and drawn to a universe of migration, but could not physically reach it; and this frustrated them.

Weaned on scholarly debates focusing predominantly on migrants and transnational movements and connections throughout my academic training, I was forced to realise that things could be much less fluid and interconnected for those who stayed on the sending side of migration. I was coming to terms with what has been defined as 'involuntary immobility' (Carling 2002): aspiring to migrate, but being unable to do so. It is a condition that Soninke young men seemed to share with many other youths on the continent, who longed for migration but were forced to postpone their departure for months, years or even indefinitely (Horst 2006a; Jónsson 2007; Pandolfo 2007; Willems 2008; Vigh 2009). I was thus prepared to change my perspective on migration and become ready to investigate this particular aspect of the migratory process and the poignant experience of young men excluded from the swirl of global mobility.

As I spent time with the young men and other Sabinko, however, my view on Soninke young men shifted further. I realised that in order to understand young men's relation with migration, I had to understand not only the significance of travel in their lives but also what else they did at home and how this was understood locally. I became increasingly uncomfortable with describing young men as just would-be-migrants or involuntary immobile. While young men were very concerned about emigration and their inability to emigrate, I became progressively aware of the fact that their stay was no less important or problematic. Whether they stayed willingly or unwillingly, and whether they just aspired to emigrate or were about to do so, young men engaged *and* were asked to engage in activities and relations as 'stayers'. In their households, young men were expected to farm and replenish the granaries, ensuring that bundles of home-grown millet spikes sat next to bags of rice bought with remittances. They had to look after their family in the absence of migrant brothers, keep an eye on (some of) their wives and help in rearing their children. They had to liaise with brothers abroad and elicit their assistance, or make an extra effort at home when things abroad were hard and remittances dwindled. Some of them were busy making bricks for the house that their migrant brother was financing, or were coordinating the work for the construction. In many cases, there seemed to be little contradiction between becoming involved with local activities and cultivating an ambition to travel. Those who went to the city during the dry season would sometimes find work in a migrant relative's enterprise and hope he would take them abroad or set them up in business if they showed

themselves to be hard working youths. Much of what young men did at home could not be simply described as 'non-migrant' activity, as if it were outside and apart from the domain of migration. Cultivating a field or working for an enterprise immediately involved relationships, resources and forms of organization between 'here' and 'there', between movers and stayers. By staying behind, young men lived and actively shaped migration, and it seemed they did so in a variety of ways and with a variety of outcomes.

This thesis, therefore, is an attempt to understand how Soninke young men can and do stay behind. It suggests that Soninke young men's relation with migration cannot be characterised only in terms of an absence (of mobility), disregarding all those activities that qualify what 'immobility' means to them. Immobility can be an integral aspect of the migration process, not just the result of legal obstacles to international migration, nor of the lack of social and economic resources to leave the country. In a milieu where international migration is a long-standing feature of social life, the process of migration is not confined to movement and movers. Precisely because mobility is so central to the Soninke, the dynamics of staying behind are equally significant. People deliberately discuss the role of those who stay, their duties and entitlements vis-à-vis the migrants, the solidarities and the frictions, the activities and conditions that make their stay a positive experience, or that make it possible at all. People can explicitly organize settings and positions which require the presence of someone at home in order for migrants to carry on their migratory project. Although risks and fears of being abandoned by migrants do surface in daily conversations, the Soninke also think of staying behind as a necessary and enabling element of migration. It is as if they employed the obsolete transitive form of the verb to stay: "to support, sustain, strengthen, comfort"[1]. To stay behind is thus to look after migrants' interests and relations, to weave relations with distant people, to act as stakeholders of migration, to sustain morally, socially and culturally the migratory venture.

Staying behind is an active process; it does not follow automatically from non-migrating, as a way of passively filling positions left blank by those who have migrated. To stay put implies to shape and legitimate the place one assumes at home, especially if this involves claiming rights to migrant resources, social and economic ones; and this can be fraught with conflicts, failures and contradictory requirements. What we can learn from the Soninke case is that problems can be caused by exclusion from migration as much as by inclusion. In a context plagued by socio-economic stagnation, migratory processes have, on the one hand, included stayers and created positions that accrue resources and respectability to them, and undermined these positions, on the

[1] Oxford English Dictionary Online (http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl, accessed 4 July 2009).

other. This is particularly true for young men. Young men are the most mobile people in Soninke society, and to some extent they are expected to be so. They are expected to be self-reliant and find the means to sustain their households, even though they live in economically depressed villages and find it difficult to match the achievements of their migrant fathers, brothers and peers. They feel the pressure to travel and demonstrate that they can be equally successful. Yet their family members may ask them to stay and manage their domestic affairs, or they may have to become established as stayers prior to being helped to find the moneys and the visas to travel out of the country. Although there are sections of Soninke society which are more clearly identified as stayers—women, children and elders—by paying attention to the most mobile people I was able to explore the dynamic and tense interplay between moving and staying, and thus appreciate the constructed nature of staying behind. After shedding light on this often marginal aspect in migration research, it was possible to contextualise and better understand the pervasiveness of young men's discourses on emigration. This thesis will show that not only do young men suffer from being unable to travel, but their uncertainty or inability to organize their staying behind in a migratory setting can increase the pressure to emigrate.

THE SONINKE, MIGRATION AND THE YOUNG MEN WHO 'SIT'

My first contact with the Soninke was not in Gambia but through the academic literature about them. I became interested in this ethnic group because of their long standing history of migration. Indeed, it was apparent that before myself there was an equally established tradition of Europeans who had been struck by this feature of Soninke society. The Soninke belonged to the pre-colonial indigenous Muslim merchants (*jula*), who travelled across the whole region, from the Guinean forest to the Sahel, and from Eastern Mali to the Atlantic coast. They traded in slaves, textiles, gold, salt, cattle, kola and other items back and forth the Senegambia and the Mande Plateau (Curtin 1975; Bathily 1989). Since the end of the 18th century, British and French travellers have spilt a lot of ink celebrating the merchant and mobile spirit of the Soninke, which they took as a sign of greater civilisation. "The Serawoollies [Soninke] are habitually a trading people" wrote Mungo Park (1816:62) about his journey through the kingdom of Gajaaga (Upper Senegal River Valley) at the end of the 18th century. The Soninke were subsequently defined as a 'nation commerçante', 'les colporteurs de l'Afrique Occidentale'[2] and even as 'the Jews of West

[2] 'trading nation', 'the peddlers of West Africa'.

Africa' (see Pollet and Winter 1971:111-3), the last one being a label which has certainly endured over time and is occasionally used by contemporary Gambian Soninke as well[3]. In the face of the fact that the Soninke were also agriculturalists, European observers, especially the colonial ones, tended to draw attention to mobility, and even reified it as an ethnic specificity—an 'ethnie migratrice' (cf. Amselle 1976:19; Jónsson 2007:9).

Although anthropologists have contested essentialist representations of Soninke migration, mobility has remained at the centre of scholarly attention. This has largely to do with the fact that the Soninke have been one of the first groups in sub-Saharan Africa to migrate to Europe. While there is very little written on the Gambian Soninke, the Soninke living on the borderland between Mauritania, Senegal and Mali are known to be one of the first and largest immigrant communities in France (see among others: Quiminal 1991; Timera 1996). The historical work of François Manchuelle (1997), who has brilliantly shown that Soninke labour migrations had a century long history prior to reaching France (from the 1950s), has also contributed to making the Soninke a well known case in migration literature.

As I later became interested in people who stay behind, the academic literature seemed to be less forthcoming about this aspect of Soninke migration. It suffered from the fact that immigration and migrants have claimed the lion's share of scholars' work, while emigration and those who remain home have been more marginal in the studies on the Soninke; moreover, studies on emigration tend to focus on the economic aspects of migration (Weigel 1982; Findley and Sow 1998). Only a few, though significant, academic studies have analysed the socio-cultural dimensions of Soninke mobility from the point of view of the sending society (Adams 1977; Timera 2001a; Whitehouse 2003; Jónsson 2007).

What has been particularly overlooked is how, in a context where staying put is not taken for granted, people understand the fact of not migrating. In the first place, it is necessary to clarify that non-migrating does not mean being outside the realm of migration. It is not possible to understand how Soninke villagers organize their subsistence, their everyday and ritual life without taking migration into account. Gambian Soninke migration is characterised by a high

[3] It is possible that the Soninke have made their own some of the tropes used by Europeans (such as 'Jews of West Africa') or by their neighbours depicting them, for instance, as 'ethnie migratrice' (Jónsson 2007:9). As Amselle (1998:18) has shown, colonial ethnological discourse has tended to classify Mande populations as ethnicities corresponding to archetypical social form and culture, and some of their taxonomies have gained social currency in society now. Such considerations invite us to recognise the constructed nature of Soninke ethnicity, and especially warns us against assigning essential characteristics to this category, whose significance has assumed highly ideological hues throughout history.

degree of transnationality[4], with migrants circulating back and forth between their villages and their destinations, and keeping strong ties with their communities. Children grow up in households where grandparents, parents and brothers have been or still are dispersed across three continents (Africa, Europe and North America), and yet they know their whereabouts and play with their children who have been sent home to be reared in a 'traditional' way. Migration is a daily matter: from the rice the villagers buy with remittances, to the brick houses in which they sleep, to the schools and clinics that migrant associations have (co)developed. The declining rural economy over the last forty years has made it indispensable for villagers to relate to this wider diasporic universe and actively shape their inclusion in migratory dynamics and resources.

In the Soninke language, when talking about migration, *nan taaxu* means to stay or to stop 'travelling' (*tere*), where travelling can be approximated as international migration. Literally, *nan taaxu* means to sit down or to take a seat; by semantic extrapolation, it can also mean to settle down, to become emplaced or be founded (of a village, a household, etc.), and to take office as chief, imam, household head, president, and so on. Even the physical act of sitting can convey this sense of becoming established and achieving social recognition. Offering a seat to a visitor is an act of hospitality and respect, the acknowledgment of the social presence of the guest and the first step towards establishing or continuing a social relation with him or her. In this thesis I will refer to this broader and multivocal meaning of the verb *taaxu*, or 'sitting', as 'becoming established' and 'being acknowledged' to evoke the dynamic and socially significant act of staying in a migratory place. To 'sit' is to establish relations with both close and distant people, and to strive to be socially recognised as someone who is staying legitimately and purposefully.

How do young men 'sit' in their place? Apparently, 'sitting' is an oxymoron when speaking of young men. Historically and culturally, migration is a male domain. Women are thought to be prototypical stayers or to migrate only in order to join their husbands abroad. Although reality can be significantly more nuanced, travel (*terende*) is certainly at the core of young men's lives. As in other parts of the region (e.g. Lambert 2002:138), it is an accepted stage in men's life course, almost an expected one. By travelling, young men can find the money for their marriage and become self-reliant; they can provide for their parents and their households, thus enabling them to 'sit' in their place. Emigration is also about cosmopolitan

[4] The transnational approach to migration views migrants as 'grassroots' agents of globalisation who forge links to their homelands and construct social fields across national boundaries (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Such an approach has questioned the analytical division between the contexts of sending and receiving, bringing both within the same unit of analysis. Transnational or translocal relations involve the lives of those who stay at home in wider networks and fields of interaction, and have a repercussion on how they organize and live their lives (Golbert 2001; Vertovec 2004).

discovery and personal accomplishment (Timera 2001a). In Gambia, Soninke young men have to come to terms with many success stories around them. Since the 1950s, a number of Soninke men have become millionaires by dealing in diamonds in Sierra Leone and Angola, by exporting African art crafts or, more recently, by importing containers of goods from the Middle and Far East. Starting from the 1970s, European and North American salaries have allowed many rural households to survive and to maintain and/or increase their social status in the face of a retrenching rural economy. In contrast, very few rural Soninke youths have occupational alternatives in Gambia except for farming and commerce. Raised as farmers and Quranic students, they have no hopes, and often no ambition, of joining the civil service or doing white collar jobs.

Because of the close association between migration, male emancipation and life course it has become common, though often just in passing, to refer to Soninke migration as a 'rite of passage' by which male youths achieve adulthood (Konate 1997:8; Timera 2001a:41; Jónsson 2007:50). In this perspective it is not difficult to realise that immobility can be perceived as a threat to masculinity, as a liminal period in which young men wait to move out of their place in order to move up the socio-generational scale. Gunvor Jónsson (2007, 2008) has shown that in a Malian Soninke village, young men weaned on a 'culture of migration' suffer from being stuck, due to the heavy restrictions imposed on emigration to desirable destinations, particularly to France, where the village men have been migrating to for more than fifty years. Immobile youths cannot experience progress and can even be stigmatised as lazy or worthless people.

Following on from such considerations, how can one possibly speak of staying behind as a dynamic and active engagement, as a way of becoming established and achieving recognition? Indeed, it is hardly possible to ignore young men's grievances about their inability to travel. For them, 'sitting' is often 'just sitting' (*nan taaxu tan*), that is, being inactive and thus unable to experience progress by staying in a place offering so limited economic opportunities to them. Yet this is not the only experience of staying behind. Having taken stock of the centrality of migration for young men, we must avoid the pitfall of focusing all attention on out-migration once again. Young men's migratory aspirations tell us what they want to achieve, and eventually what they want to leave behind; but not what else they actually do and attain at home.

Immobility can be a dynamic condition. Jónsson (2007) herself has shown that young men adapt to immobility by resorting to particular socialising patterns and youth cultures. In addition, although the barriers to international emigration constitute an important challenge to Soninke livelihoods, it seems that the Gambian Soninke are not completely unprepared to cope with such a situation. Besides diversifying migratory routes and circumventing legal obstacles to

mobility, this study shows that the Soninke have crafted alternatives to migration. Transnational enterprises and commercial ventures financed by migrants are being organized both as an adaptation to forced immobility and as a genuine opportunity to make money at home; this creates a job market and business opportunities for those who stay in their country.

Speaking of adaptation, however, may be misleading, for it conveys the sense that immobility is solely produced by exogenous forces. Much as migration (as movement) cannot be divorced from the rest of the society and culture in which it takes place (Brettell 2000), understanding Soninke young men's immobility means understanding how this is embedded in the local socio-cultural context. In particular, it is useful to observe how the Soninke have integrated mobility and sedentariness. As I began my research in Sabi, this became almost an obligatory nexus to explore, if I wanted to understand Soninke migration. Time and again my interlocutors pointed out to me that the 'essence' of Soninke society (*Soninkaaxu*) was a combination of three elements: farming, trading and studying Islam (*soxeye, julaaxu, xaranŋe*). Perhaps the dyad farming-trading[5] best captures the way that the Soninke think of themselves as simultaneously 'rooted' and 'routed' (Clifford 1997). Far from being a matter of self-representation alone, this linkage has a historical foundation. Claude Meillassoux (1971) was probably the first anthropologist to demystify mobility as an essential trait of the Soninke. He analysed the nexus between long-distance trade and agriculture and showed that Soninke precolonial trading expeditions depended on local production and on the exploitation of slave labour as well as on the fact of occupying a geo-ecologically strategic position along the Sahara-Sahel frontier, which favoured exchanges between products from the north (cattle, salt) and products from the south (cotton, grain, slaves, salt, kola). Manchuelle (1997:esp. 102-6) has also drawn on Meillassoux's insights and has mentioned that commercial production remained an important basis for Eastern Soninke migration even when this shifted from trade to labour (late 19th century).

With respect to contemporary migrations, scholars have pointed out that the agricultural base of Soninke mobility has deteriorated over the last forty years, forcing farmers to 'uproot' themselves in order to subsidize their rural livelihoods (Weigel 1982; Quiminal 1991; Findley and Sow 1998). Although it is certainly the case that in Gambia as in the Sahel agricultural and migrant livelihoods have stretched apart (see Chapter 1), the interrelation between these two aspects seems to have been enduring. Not only do many Gambian Soninke young men farm and migrate according to the agricultural cycle, but there are still socio-cultural connections between

[5] As I shall show in Chapter 1, contemporary migrations (including labour migrations) are an offshoot of regional trade migration.

mobility and sedentariness. In one of the few works dealing with this topic, Bruce Whitehouse (2003) has underlined the importance of agriculture and other village-based activities in the reproduction of cultural identity, in the maintenance of transnational relations and as a pedagogic element in the career of the traveller (see also Whitehouse 2009).

While the Gambian Soninke have put a premium on male emigration over the last half century, they have simultaneously and deliberately cultivated activities linked to the sedentary side of Soninke society. By building big houses and by sending money home, migrants do not simply make a name for themselves and leave young men in the shade; theirs are also 'sociological investments', as George Balandier (1961:19) would have called them: investments that both accrue status to the investor and contribute to legitimising and reproducing the social relations and institutions on which status is based. To put it in plain words: buildings are not built in just any place, but in domestic compounds and for household members; and money is not simply spent on a grand wedding, but on the institution of marriage and on the alliance with another family of the village. This is not to deny that migration has also been a transformative force in village society; what I want to stress is that migrants' ties and investments have also underscored the importance of sedentary activities and of an agrarian identity. In a way, migration has allowed rural Soninke not only to offset declining agricultural production, but also to continue to stay in their villages and be farmers.

The point I will try to make in this thesis is not simply that there is more to young men's lives than migration, but that there is more to Soninke migration too. Sustaining sedentary activities in a migratory context means mobilising resources, relations, organizational strategies and discourses. It also means that someone has to carry out sedentary activities. Those who stay in the village are not passive onlookers and receivers of remittances. 'Sitters' have to cultivate (physically, socially and morally) the home side of migration, and do so also on behalf of and for the benefit of the migrants, with all the problems that this may imply. I thus suggest that to analyze sedentary activities does not necessarily mean to turn the attention away from migration, but to look at one aspect of it from a particular perspective, namely staying behind. It invites us to reconsider what we normally think of as non-migratory activities—farming, managing the household, and so on—in the light of migration and of the relations between stayers and movers (cf. Toyota, Yeoh and Nguyen 2007).

This perspective, I argue, is central to understanding how Soninke young men 'sit' in their home place. Firstly, it would be reductive to dismiss what non-migrant young men do in their villages as activities and roles which they were simply born into and raised in, or as the left-overs of the selective emigration process. To do so would not allow us to understand why the

Soninke still place so much emphasis on agrarian life, and why, for instance, so many migrants prefer their children to grow up in the village, and think that the best way for them to become travellers in the future is to become farmers in the first place (see Chapters 2 and 3). Staying in a village household and farm can be a way of participating in migratory processes, for migrants too need people who stay behind and look after their children and their parents, or simply to preside over those social and cultural institutions that make their investments meaningful. The young men who are unable to emigrate are both encouraged and forced to actively 'sit' and play their part in migration dynamics by staying at home. Secondly, making an effort or being pressurised to become established as stayers is not necessarily in contrast with travelling. Although there can be a tension between staying and going, young men's practices often blur a neat distinction between the two. International emigration is today heavily dependent on the support of migrant relatives willing to make arrangements for work contracts and papers. What the young men do at home can become their best social passport to emigration. Growing up as hard-working farmers, acting as responsible householders or working as trustworthy business partners in Gambia can be a way of convincing a close relative that they can be just as hard-working and responsible when they go abroad and work to send money home.

In sum, it is not sufficient to note that young men cannot access the forms of masculinity available to international migrants. The problem for young men is not immobility per se, but how far and in what terms immobility is recognised and made possible within an overarching migratory project that envisages both people who move and people who stay. This thesis shows that there is not only one solution to this problem; young men both face constraints and take advantage of, and actively construct, opportunities to stay and achieve recognition. They are both included in migratory dynamics and excluded from them; they can have an important role in the household and their migrant householders may socially and economically recognise it; yet they may feel the pressure to leave and become autonomous. The dynamics of staying behind are thus complex and diverse, and this makes it problematic to describe young men's experiences as an equation between geographical and social immobility. The chapters of this thesis begin from what young men do at home and how this is relevant to the migratory context in which they live, and eventually explain why and how their position as 'sitters' is not viable or fully acknowledged, thus causing frustration and possibly exacerbating their longing to travel.

Although this study focuses on a specific case study and on migratory processes, exploring the dynamics of staying behind among Soninke young men evokes issues that have a wide resonance in Africa and in Africanist scholarship on youth. In many gerontocratic African societies, youth is seen as a transitory phase to adulthood, and its elongation, in contrast to the

Western view, is not perceived as a desirable outcome (see Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Alber, Van der Geest and Reynolds-Whyte 2008). With increasing socio-economic restraints in neoliberal Africa and the decay of post-colonial states, African youths have progressively faced difficulties in securing the means to fulfil the moral and financial requirements with respect to their parents and their households, and thus be considered adults (Cruise O'Brien 1996; Masquelier 2005; Vigh 2006; Roth 2008). This impasse has determined a relative marginalisation of youth in several contexts, particularly in urban Africa, and it has been a key factor in a number of violent conflicts in which young people have been the protagonists (Richards 1996; Utas 2005; Vigh 2006).

Migration seems to be one of the main ways in which African youths have chosen to change their situation, or to abandon it altogether. Besides the fact that migration might be a well entrenched livelihood strategy in many African contexts, African youths' compelling aspiration to travel (out of Africa) is thus symptomatic of an actual or imagined exit option from situations marked by abjection and by a lack of perspective in relation to self-realisation at home (Horst 2006a; Mains 2007; Pandolfo 2007; Capello 2008; Willems 2008; Vigh 2009). Gambia does not seem to be an exception. By the late 1980s, Gambians' hopes in postcolonial modernization had vanished in the face of socio-economic stagnation and political immobilism. Many rural and urban youths began to follow the example of the Soninke and invest in the prospect of migrating particularly to the West, whether to still pursue education or to work. A regime change in 1994 gave new hope to youths staying in their country, but by the turn of the millennium the hope had vanished once again, while economic hardship remained (see Chapters 1 and 5). As I showed above, it is hardly possible to go anywhere in Gambia today and avoid the topic of emigration.

This thesis therefore confirms that African youths' fascination with migration is symptomatic of their malaise; it further shows that immobility too can be an element of this malaise. On the other hand, by arguing that staying behind implies an active participation in migratory processes as much as an exclusion from them, this study tries to address the call for a perspective on youth that moves beyond the image of loss, despair and crisis (De Boeck and Honwana 2005:8ff).

It is notoriously difficult to define youth (Durham 2000:116-117). Among the Soninke, marriage and begetting children are generally thought to signal the transition to adulthood. Young men usually marry between their early twenties and their mid thirties, but married men in

their forties can still define themselves as 'youth', according to the situation[6]. Marital responsibilities, household management and self-reliance are also important aspects in the discourse on masculinity, and this immediately makes both emigration and staying behind relevant to men's trajectory (see Chapters 4 and 5). I have found that married men in their forties or fifties may still engage in emigration or aspire to do so, and that the dynamics of staying behind are not the prerogative of older men. Thus, while the reference to rites of passage is useful for singling out the cultural aspects of migration, it risks concealing more than it reveals. For the purpose of the present study, the term 'young men' will refer to a loose and broad category of males aged between late teenage and the mid forties. In other words, the study is not concerned with either children or the elders—i.e. either the males who have not reached the age of travel yet or those who have earned the right to 'sit' and legitimately demand that others should work, travel and give money to them. Young men between the age of 25 and 35 are slightly more represented here. This a particularly interesting period from the point of view of staying behind. It is when youths usually marry and assume household functions, and when the pressure to become established either at home or abroad often increases.

The Soninke young men in this study can be defined as 'rural' only if 'rural' is regarded as a flexible semantic category (cf. Chauveau 2005). Young men who do not travel internationally can have mobile lives within their nation. Many of them move between village and city on a seasonal basis. Young men's trajectories can also be complex, and the village might be a recent and temporary station in their lives. Although most of my interlocutors were born and brought up in Sabi, a number of the young men I encountered in Sabi have had migratory experiences in other countries. Some returned from abroad and did not have a chance to re-migrate; a few were deported from Europe, Angola or the US; some grew up in West and Central African countries and then had to come back when war broke out in those countries; still others were born abroad but have grown up in the village, while their father remained abroad. Whether in the village or abroad, most of them have grown up with a strong sense of kinship and extended family ties, of senior-junior relations and norms, and of belonging to their village of origin. In contrast to some other places in Africa, these are all dimensions that still very much structure the position of youth in local society.

[6] 'Young man' literally translates as *maxanbaane* in Soninke. This term, however, applies usually to the very young, the 'boys' (late teenage, early twenties). *Lenmine* means child; *yugo* means both male and man; *xirise* means elder or senior, according to context. All such terms are semantically elastic depending on the situation. For instance, a group of elders may refer to the village youths as *lenminu* (sing. *lenmine*), as in 'our children'. The Sabi Youth Committee (see Chapter 5) includes people roughly aged between twenty and forty five. The Gambian government's youth policy defines youth as people aged between 18 and 30 (Government of The Gambia 1998).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND POSITIONS

Immobility

Investigating the situation of Soninke youths who stay behind requires some clarification of the concept of immobility. I will first return on the point that migration scholars have paid only scant attention to the fact that people do not move, and have focused instead on out-migration as the element to analyse and explain. This has affected our theoretical understanding of the migratory process. Secondly and consequentially, the case of the Soninke young men problematises a static view of immobility as a natural or residual condition (that which does not move or fails to move), and calls for an analysis of how immobility is socially constructed and inhabited.

In the introduction to the first and, to my knowledge, only multidisciplinary volume dedicated to immobility (Hammar, et al. 1997), Hammar and Tamas made it clear that, although international migration has produced much scholarly work, the percentage of the population that moves is far smaller than that of those who remain in their place of ordinary residence. They argued that studies of migration must account for this fact and try to capture the lack of attention to immobility through an analogy:

> In studies of the causes of international migration, almost all attention has up to now been given to those who actually migrate, although their behaviour under most circumstances is not the normal one, but the deviant case. A parallel might be helpful, although it must not be misunderstood and taken for a value judgement. Just as more attention has recently been paid in medicine to those who are healthy, or in traffic studies to the absence of accidents, we suggest studies not only of those who have migrated but also of those stayed in their country of origin. In other words, we include in our study both those who take part in international migration and those who do not, but stay on, those who are in this sense the *immobile*. (Hammar and Tamas 1997:1)

Ten years later, Toyota, Yeoh and Nguyen (2007:158) remarked once more that "given the focus on migrants and the somewhat narrow ways in which migration processes have been defined, the migration literature can be said to have thus far 'left behind' the 'left behind'". As a consequence, migration studies have not developed systematic frameworks to analyse immobility (Hammar and Tamas 1997:1; Carling 2002:5-6).

Over the last two to three decades theoretical exploration has rather focused on mobility as a foundational element of contemporary society and as a lever to challenge established

assumptions in social theory. There has been a 'mobility turn' in the social sciences (Sheller and Urry 2006:208). At the beginning of the 1990s, Liisa Malkki (1992) denounced a 'sedentarist metaphysics', which made use of arboreal metaphors of rootedness to represent people as naturally connected to a place. The refugees whom she studied were consequently portrayed by governance actors as uprooted, out of place, and hence in need of being reconnected to their allegedly more authentic place identity. A number of studies have subsequently shown that people do not necessarily organise and perceive their lives in a sedentary way, and that places themselves may be founded on mobility (Augé 1995; Hannerz 1996; Urry 2007). The intensification of movements and connections on a global scale has readily provided empirical evidence of mobile livelihoods and long-distance social interaction mediated by modern means of communication (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994; Miller and Slater 2000). Anthropologists interested in migration have especially contributed to the debate by developing a transnational approach that takes into account social formations and forms of identification spanning local and national borders, particularly between migrant destination and homeland (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1992).

In the light of the current theoretical debate, Hammar and Tamas' medical analogy equating migration with pathology is particularly misleading, notwithstanding their disclaimer: the mobile person would be seen as just as 'healthy' as the one who stays, if not more. Sedentariness is not to be opposed in a dichotomous manner to mobility, for many societies like the Soninke have cultivated both roots and routes (Clifford 1997). Somehow paradoxically, however, having become aware of the assumption of sedentariness in migration studies has not resulted in more studies of people staying in their places in spite of the thrust of contemporary mobility. The attempt to overcome the sedentary and bounded view of society and culture has effectively shifted attention to whatever moves across borders, dislocates, deterritorialises and becomes nomadic, often in an attempt to assess and theorise the potential of mobility to yield a less centralised, more fluid social order[7]. What has emerged is the opposite danger of 'nomadist metaphysics' (Cresswell 2002:15), whereby mobility is perceived as liberating and migrants are celebrated as transgressing the caging system of modernity, above all the nation-state. Africanists too have sometimes used celebratory words to describe African mobility. For instance, while correctly drawing attention to internal migrations occurring in the shadow of more studied trans-continental migration, the volume *Mobile Africa* (Bruijn, Dijk and Foeken

[7] The influence of such photospheres as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and Bauman (2000) should be acknowledged in this respect. Diverging views on nomadism and fluidification of society have animated the scholarly debate and caused much ink to flow over the last two decades (see Kaufmann 2002 for an critical appraisal of the debate).

2001b) precisely identified mobility as one of the fundamental characteristics of the continent, oblivious of the fact that the discourse on mobile African people was one of the tropes of colonial discourse (Bilger and Kraler 2005:10-1). The legacy of (pre-)colonial representation of the Soninke as a 'migratory ethnicity' illustrates well the risk of overemphasising the discourse on mobility to the detriment of immobility. Certainly, by focusing on mobility alone we cannot understand how young men conduct and organize their social lives at home.

There is reason to doubt the centrality of nomadism too. In the first place, neoliberal globalization has resulted not just in intensified inter-connection, but also in selective disconnection and marginalization, particularly in Africa (Ferguson 2006). While some paths are wide open, others are firmly closed, something which is blatantly evident to many Soninke and African youths who try to apply, or are even just thinking of applying, for a visa to Europe, North America and other desirable destinations. In contrast to much literature on migration, the geographer Jørgen Carling (2002) has argued, therefore, that impediments to mobility are not only a counterpoint to the voluminous academic production on mobility and fluidity, but a real marker of contemporary global society. He has described the present as an age of 'involuntary immobility', emerging since at least the 1973-4 oil crisis, when European countries began to curtail the entry of immigrant labour from many developing countries.

On the whole, therefore, Hammar and Tamas' objective of explaining why so many people stay in their country remains a useful endeavour. Theirs is representative of an approach that focuses on the 'causes' of immobility. Like many young Soninke, people may be willing to move, but face impediments to the fulfilment of their aspiration. The political and legal barriers to international mobility are precisely a major cause of immobility. Migration scholars have also identified other 'obstacles' to migration, whether these are institutional (Xiang 2007), economic (e.g. poverty, infrastructures) (Kothari 2003), social (e.g. access to social networks) (e.g. Cohen 2004:125ff), cultural (e.g. gender ideologies confining women to the domestic realm) (Bjerén 1997), and so on.

By relying on, and systematizing, the available migration literature on immobility, Carling (2002) has provided probably the most comprehensive framework to analyse the situation in many areas in the world where international migration has been a normal and desirable outcome in the life course of the people concerned, but where it can hardly be practised.. Carling's model of 'involuntary immobility' is representative of the studies that try to explain the causes of immobility, though it takes into account the 'consequences' or implications of migration by drawing attention to the discourses and socio-cultural practices that make emigration more desirable and predictable. He distinguishes between the aspiration and the

ability to migrate: the contrast between the aspiration and the inability to migrate results in 'involuntary immobility'. The ability to migrate is influenced by different macro-level variables at the immigration level—legal and financial requirements, risks at border crossing, discrimination at destination, etc.—as well as by individual characteristics that influence the possibilities of overcoming these constraints and moving out of one's own context—employment status, socio-economic status, educational attainment, gender, social networks, etc. Carling's model proves useful for identifying the factors that explain Soninke young men's aspiration/inability to migrate. This is what Gunvor Jónsson (2007) has successfully done in her study of non-migrant Malian Soninke young men. In addition, she has supplemented the model with the experiential dimension of immobility, exploring how young men describe and adapt to their inability to emigrate. As I have already mentioned, her study offers important comparative material with the present one (see Chapter 5). I would argue, however, that the model of 'involuntary immobility' explains only one aspect of Gambian Soninke immobility, for it considers people as aspirant emigrants only, thus focusing on the obstacles and the disabling factors that restrict access to mobility. It makes little attempt to understand immobility as an inherent aspect of migration.

Although in common usage the term immobility is synonymous with non-migration, at the analytical level we should avoid defining immobility as absence of mobility or as sedentariness only. In the first place, immobility does not equal stasis. For the present study, immobility means international immobility; this does not exclude, however, forms of internal mobility (cf. Malberg 1997:21-2), such as between village and city, in which Soninke young men engage on a seasonal basis. Secondly, it is insufficient to see immobility as a residual category—that which does not move or fails to move—and explain it as either a natural condition or an anomaly in a migratory context. To go beyond the view of immobility as a by-product of emigration is to enlarge our conception of migratory processes and make room for the inclusion of immobility.

The Social Organization of Migration

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to the fact that mobility and immobility are mutually constituted, that is to say, they are two outcomes of the same process[8].

[8] For instance, at the 2008 EASA (European Association of Social Anthropologists) conference in Ljubljana, a plenary session was devoted to the mutuality of mobility and immobility.

Sociologist John Urry has proposed seeing immobility as a systemic element of mobility. Although his primary concern remains to explain mobility, Urry's 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006; Urry 2007) focuses on the socio-material infrastructure of contemporary mobilities (human, material, virtual, etc.). He speaks of *systems of mobility* that both presuppose and sustain movement, such as airports, roads, service stations and again: "ticketing, oil supply, addresses, safety, protocols, station interchanges, web sites, docks, money transfer, inclusive tours, luggage storage, air traffic control, barcodes, bridges, timetables, surveillance and so on"[9] (Urry 2007:13). As far as migration is concerned, systems like information technology, transport infrastructure, passports and visa systems are in fact patterning how people move or stay. The focus on socio-material systems bespeaks Urry's call for a 'sociology beyond societies' (Urry 2000). *Pace* Urry, in this study I still give priority to social relations and institutions, and how these shape and organize migration, where migration includes both (human) mobility and immobility. In addition, not all that which stays behind is functional to mobility. Among the Soninke, sedentary activities such as farming are integrated with migration, but they are not exclusively geared to sustaining movement. As I mentioned, the opposite can also be true. I thus prefer to speak of migration as a social construct, in which relations between mobile and immobile agents may take an organized form (cf. Brettell 2000:106-13).

The available literature on migration highlights different levels of organization of migration. At the macro political-economic level, one can observe that while labour mobility is at the core of contemporary capitalist production, capitalism has been preoccupied with ensuring that people are not totally 'uprooted' from their place, especially to avoid raising salaries in order to provide welfare to labourers and their dependents; therefore in several cases, migrants do not settle permanently but return to their communities in times of unemployment (Meillassoux 1981; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000). There seems to be a resurgence of similar approaches to migration in policy making (Castles 2006:119ff; Vertovec 2009). More generally, over the last ten years, mobility has become a mainstream subject in European policy making and international relations, in an attempt to manage the movement of people from Africa, including development initiatives that try to keep potential emigrants in their countries (Gabrielli 2007; de Haas 2008; Guiraudon 2009).

This thesis will be mainly concerned with the meso- and micro-level of social organization (cf. Brettell 2003:1-7). In their classic study on the Malian Soninke, Pollet and Winter hinted at the fact that the Soninke have ways of organizing migration:

[9] Hannerz (1996) and Clifford (1997) also discuss the importance of hotels and airports as hubs of mobility.

> Des familles comprenant plusieurs fils organisent volontiers un roulement de façon qu'il y ait à tout moment un ou deux travailleurs à l'étranger, tandis que le reste des fils et des frères cadets demeurent au village pour s'y occuper des cultures[10] (Pollet and Winter 1971:131).

Due to the distance of migrant destinations and the legal and economic barriers to human circulation, this rota system has now become obsolete or more complex. As I have mentioned, however, the household remains one of the main actors in organizing the activities and roles of young men who stay behind.

In the migration literature, household economics (see Bloom and Stark 1985) has been probably the most influential approach in the study of what I call the social organization of migration (Toyota, et al. 2007:157). This approach has looked at the decisional processes that select some members to migrate and others to stay in order to diversify income sources and ensure household socio-economic security. Even if household economics has had a controversial history[11], a household perspective on migration remains useful for analysing how domestic units manage migration and non-migration within the wider range of working activities, distribution of resources, consumption and reproduction (e.g. Rogaly 2003; Cohen 2004). For instance, in his study of Southern Mexico, Jeffrey Cohen adopts a household approach to look at the concerted process of emigration and how household members manage relations and resources across space; he also dedicates a chapter to non-migrant households. The problem with this approach to domestic relations, which is also apparent in Pollet and Winter's observation, is that it remains centred on decision-making about migration and on the consequent effects on household organization. In a context like the Gambian Soninke villages in which human and commercial mobility has always been central, it seems less appropriate to speak of the 'effects' of migration and of solely deciding about who can emigrate; rather, managing migration simultaneously implies organizing activities and roles in the household. People who stay behind preside over economic, social and moral assets that may be deliberately kept in place so as to make migration possible and meaningful (see Chapter 3).

[10] "Some families with several sons willingly organize a rota in such a way that there are one or two workers abroad at any time, while the rest of the sons or junior brothers stays in the village to farm" (author's translation).

[11] A household approach has been useful in identifying the multiple dimensions and organizational strategies in domestic groups: cooperation, labour activities, domestic work, child rearing, etc. (Fortes 1958; Yanagisako 1979; Guyer 1981; Netting, Wilk and Arnould 1984). The pitfall of this approach has been that "in a [large] body of literature of the household, the migrant household is portrayed as a 'black box', with its structure and strategies purportedly determined by the maximization principles of supply and demand rooted in the larger capitalist economy" (Pessar 1988:195). Using the notion of household, therefore, does not mean eliding the internal variations and contradictions but establishing a starting point to begin describing and analysing some of the principles of social organizations that mediate the discourses and practices of staying behind (cf. Yanagisako 1979).

Apart from domestic relations, the ethnography of West Africa has also provided us with examples of the social organization of migration (cf. Amselle 1976:24-8). Commenting on the nomadic livelihood of the Fulbe in the Sahel, Bruijn, Dijk and Dijk (2001a) draw an interesting parallel, in my view, with Urry and other authors writing along similar lines:

> Their hotel lounges and airports, to paraphrase Clifford, are local and regional markets or watering points for the livestock. They do not communicate by mobile phone or e-mail but through an immense network of kinsmen, acquaintances, hosts and traders who transmit messages in code (Bruijn, et al. 2001a:72).

Although the authors are interested in highlighting nomadism as opposed to sedentariness, their words actually reveal that mobility is organized socially and culturally. They also hint at the fact that sedentariness may be an enabling factor of mobility; since they mention hosts and traders, it is useful to recall Michel Agier's (1983:159) comment about migrant merchants and hosts in Lomé (Togo): "[the] mobility of some is made possible by the sedentariness of others." The role of landlords and the idiom of hospitality in sustaining human and commercial mobility is well known in West African history (Agier 1981; Brooks 1993; Pellow 2002), including the Gambia, where the commercial groundnut cultivation has been a migrant driven economy sustained by host-guest relations between Gambian hosts and seasonal immigrants known as 'strange(r) farmers' (Swindell 1981; Swindell and Jeng 2006).

It is equally useful to draw on other classic studies of commercial mobility in West Africa (e.g. Cohen 1969; Amselle 1977) that provide insights into the social organization of migration. For instance, Amselle's (1977) work on the Koroko (Mali) long-distance trade showed how their enterprises were controlled by a chief trader staying in place while his junior kinsmen travelled through the help of networks of hosts and partners. Kinship provided an idiom to control junior traders, who were often trained in business management through particular forms of apprenticeship. Since the Soninke have been one the main trading groups in this region, such organizational strategies and institutions have played an important part in the development of Soninke trade and subsequent migrations as well. Today these organizational templates are still deployed, though by inverting (im)mobility positions, to organise transnational enterprises between migrants in the diaspora and business partners in Gambia, in which young men act as local partners or apprentices, thus framing their position as stayers within a collectively organised setting based on migration and trade (see Chapter 4).

By speaking of the social organization of migration I do not mean to say that all migrants and non-migrants are entirely subsumed within an overarching institution or social order. Nor do

I wish to revert back to structural-functionalist concepts of social structure. The organization of (im)mobility changes over time, it adapts to the wider political economy, and involves flexibility, tension and improvisation. Rather, I wish to underline that the social construction of migration concerns not only the relations, resources and discourses that shape movement and movers, but also those that concomitantly shape immobility and stayers. The dynamics of staying behind can, but do not necessarily, reveal a systematic pattern, which presupposes people abroad and people at home sustaining, and being sustained by, travel and transnational relations. Positions and relations associated with staying behind may be normatively sanctioned, but they are fundamentally brought into being by human action (cf. Giddens 1984:17). The actual experience of staying behind may be fraught with ambivalence, contradiction and tension (see Chapter 5).

How People Stay Behind

If immobility is the product of a migratory process, it seems insufficient to view the dynamics of staying behind as the mechanical result of the fact that some people emigrate and some remain at home. Staying behind is also a process in which those who stay have to mobilise assets and discourses, they have to actively assume or organize a position at home by networking and participating in spheres of social interaction stretching between distant localities. At the analytical level, paying attention to the dynamics of staying behind requires a shift from the question 'Why do people stay?' to the one of 'How do people stay?' Focusing on the 'why' question means identifying the *cause* of movement or of staying put, thus leading us back to the assumption that either of these is an abnormal condition that must be accounted for. In dropping the assumption of sedentariness, I make no claim that Soninke immobility must be seen as an exceptional condition. Rather, a focus on staying behind implies looking at how young men become established in a context polarised and at least partially organized by migratory processes.

A corollary of regarding staying behind as an active process is that people may, as it were, 'fail' to stay behind. Or to be more precise, they may not achieve a socially recognised position as stayers in an organized setting, or they may perceive that their position is not fully acknowledged or made possible by other social agents, including the migrants. Bearing this in mind, we can return to Carling's aspiration/ability model in the study of involuntary immobility. Maintaining the aspiration to emigrate as a constant parameter, it may be argued that household commitments or employment in a transnational enterprise, to name but two ways of organized

staying behind among the Soninke, could be listed as the individual factors that affect one's ability to emigrate. This would be, however, to maintain a narrow focus on migration, disregarding the fact that such 'factors' can effectively be outcomes of the migratory process, ways of participating in migration rather than being excluded from it. Involuntary immobility, in this respect, appears to be a multifaceted phenomenon. Not only may people be unable to move out of the country, but they may also be unable to secure a place at home, as if they were suspended between moving and staying (see Chapter 5).

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I arrived in Gambia in 2006 with the intention of studying Soninke migration, and I did. As I have pointed out, my choice was dictated by a pre-fieldwork academic consideration. The choice of the ethnic dimension was a more difficult one. Ethnicity has become a dubious analytical term in ethnographic research, and a politically sensitive one in the African context (Amselle and M'Bokolo 1985; Amselle 1998; Fabietti 1998). I have already illustrated the dangers of the essentialist discourse on Soninke ethnicity. Choosing ethnicity to define the object of study cannot be done on the assumption that ethnic groups are natural units lending themselves to ethno-graphic research (Riccio 2001; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003; Vertovec 2009:21). In addition, the Upper River Region is a patchwork of different ethnicities (Soninke, Mandinka and Fula being the main ones), and several villages are ethnically mixed (see Chapter 2). After taking stock of the methodological caveats, of the local ethnic diversity and of the other dimensions that define group identity (kinship, locality, religion, nationality, status, etc.), I would say that the choice of the ethnic lens still proved useful. Gambians tend to represent the Soninke as a cohesive and bounded group, and while ethnic boundaries are certainly situational and porous, it is equally safe to say that the Soninke have contributed to constructing and patrolling them, often by choosing a low profile and a non-hegemonic attitude towards other groups. The Soninke seem very selective about marriage and do not easily give their daughters away in marriage to members of other ethnic groups. Soninke is also a minority language, which is widespread in the Upper River Region, but not necessarily a lingua franca. Ethnicity was clearly one dimension that mattered to the people I spoke to, whether they emphasised cultural distinction and inner solidarity compared to other groups, or whether they complained about the suffocating, inward looking environment that surrounded them. Perhaps the most important point

was that I spoke to them in the Soninke language, a social passport to everyday interaction in the village and to the most intimate circles in the city[12].

Although I decided on the people with whom I should conduct the fieldwork, I quickly realised that doing ethnographic research is a negotiated process in which the ethnographer is only one party (Davies 1999:5ff; DeWalt and DeWalt 2002:25ff). What and how I could learn about Soninke migrations has been the result of several personal characteristics and contextual contingencies, particularly 'race' and gender (cf. Loftsdóttir 2003). In the first place, as a *tubab*—a white man—I both epitomised foreignness and held a privileged place in the eyes of young men as an allegedly wealthy man and as a potential warrant in visa applications. In Sabi, I was 'adopted' by the Sumbundu family and given a local name. This removed some of the foreignness and located me, via my host, in local society; of course it did not made a me Soninke and did not remove the fact that I was basically like a temporary and unusual occurrence in their lives.

The most important factor that impinged on my research, however, is directly reflected in the topic of this thesis. As a young man around thirty years of age, I was expected to share my views and leisure time with my age mates. My closest friends and collaborators were also young men in their late twenties or in their thirties. I could often disregard age, and became acquainted with teenagers and with men in their late forties. The fact of being a man was, in contrast, not negotiable. Sociality and every day life is, to a large extent, segregated between the genders, and I could hardly share in domestic work or spend much time with (young) women without arising puzzlement and suspicions of promiscuity. When I began to master the Soninke language well enough to keep up with a conversation (some seven months into the field), I began to establish, within limits and restricted circles, meaningful relationships with women without the need of male interpreters. Though refining a gendered perspective on staying behind proved enormously useful, my material on young men has always remained qualitatively and quantitatively richer.

My original plan for fieldwork was to conduct a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995; Hannerz 1998; Falzon 2009), inverting the usual sequential order of field sites in transnational research by beginning to do fieldwork in the sending context. My aim was to gain the perspective of home and thus determine inductively the most relevant boundaries and the foreign

[12] Since the great majority of urban dwellers in Serekunda-Banjul do not speak Soninke, switching to the Soninke language in conversations and business transactions is a common way of drawing boundaries and preserving secrecy.

destination accordingly[13]. Hannerz (1998) has argued that multi-sited fieldwork must strike a balance between breath and depth, between the willingness to include geographically distant locations within a single unit of analysis, and the time spent in each location to build rapport with interlocutors. I ended up giving depth precedence over breadth. As I 'sat' in Sabi and worked to recover the history of the little-studied Gambian branch of the Soninke, I was drawn to some of the 'classic' themes in anthropology (histories of settlement, family histories, kinship, etc.), which I felt were important to my understanding of migration dynamics. Inevitably this led me to stay longer rather than moving to another country. At the same time, this did not confine me to a 'village study'. In many ways, an inductive approach to multi-sited fieldwork proved useful. By following the stayers (cf. Marcus 1995) I could not ignore the fact that not migrating internationally often means staying in more than one locality at once: the city is a second home to many villagers and to young men in particular.

My fieldwork in Gambia lasted fourteen months in total: October 2006 to March 2007, September 2007 to May 2008. I spent some six weeks in Serekunda at the beginning of my fieldwork, where I made contacts with some Soninke and eventually followed their advice to go to the 'Soninke homelands' in the Upper River Region. Among the contacts I made, I finally chose those that led me to Sabi, a border village about 9 km south of the regional capital Basse Santa Su[14]. This is where I did most of my field research (about 9 months). Although I visited Serekunda now and then, I actually moved to the city only at the end of my second sojourn (February-May 2008). This was during the dry season, when many rural young men go to town to find work. By this time, my perspective was heavily 'rural', and this thesis looks at the 'urban' part from this perspective. Doing urban fieldwork meant following a dispersed minority group in a spread-out metropolitan area. It meant moving through networks of people, compounds, shops, gathering places and *Sunpu do Xati* (the Soninke association in Serekunda). Compared to Sabi, my fieldwork was necessarily more itinerant, and the breadth of my itineraries inevitably impinged on the depth of some interactions, so readily available just from the door step in Sabi. My hosts in the city were a Mandinka family, and even though this gave me a useful comparative insight, it also meant a less than total immersion in urban Soninke everyday life.

[13] Rather than assuming that the national boundary is the most relevant one to trans-migrants, Karen Fog Olwig (2003) has shown the usefulness of inductively reconstructing the social boundaries that matter most to people (cf. also Marcus 1995).

[14] At the beginning of my fieldwork I was very interested in trans-border dynamics. Being a border village on a main road and commercial route, Sabi appeared to be the perfect destination. Trans-border issues became more secondary, though not marginal, in the following months.

Such considerations reveal the centrality of participant observation in my ethnography. Since, as I have suggested, emigration and staying behind are not exceptional events but daily matters, my investigation necessarily relied on observing and participating in daily life. Knowledge may lie in non-verbal, everyday actions and may not be always collected through formal interviewing; understanding a social context may require long term commitment to the subject matter (Dresch and James 2000:8-9). I thus made an effort to participate in young men's lives: I farmed when labour bottlenecks at harvest required an extra pair of hands in my adoptive household; I engaged in small material exchanges and favours with acquaintances; I took part in the long tea drinking sessions at youth gatherings, apparently little informative events which wasted a lot of time and where taking out the field book or the tape recorder was not always appropriate, yet which were occasions that led me to an experiential understanding of both the importance of leisure and the problematic abundance of unstructured time in young men's lives (see Chapter 5). Without such daily participation and observation, I could barely have gone beyond narratives of emigration among young men or appreciated the complexities of being and becoming a stayer. This led me serendipitously (Pieke 2000) to re-orient my attention and perspective towards staying behind and stayers rather than focusing on out-migration. Indeed, as an inductive science, anthropology is open to invalidation and re-elaboration of premises and working hypotheses (Bernard 1994).

Participant observation was complemented by a variety of methods and sources. At the beginning and end of my fieldwork I did some archival research at the Gambian Records Office (Banjul) on the colonial period in the Upper River Region. Shortly after I arrived in Sabi and collected my first field observations, I worked on a survey of the socio-economic incidence of migration in the village households. I interviewed household heads (I selected 20 interviews), using a questionnaire adapted from one of those used by Sibert and Sidibe's (1992) survey in the Upper River Region (Appendix). Throughout my fieldwork, I used recorded, semi-structured interviews with the help of male collaborators, especially when gathering biographies of migration among returnees and historical information on Sabi and the Gambian Soninke.

Finally, having trained as a visual anthropologist (MSc Oxford) at the theoretical and methodological level, visual methods (Banks 2001, 2007) played an important role in my research. In particular, I used photographs, both taken by me and owned by informants, to elicit narratives and explore their relational world beyond the village and beyond Gambia[15], and I used both photography and a video-camera to document parts of my fieldwork. My experience

[15] Photo-elicitation does more than recover data within the image. It triggers emotions and memories which embed images into wider social narratives and cultural meanings (Niessen 1991; Banks 2001:87-96; Bell 2003).

confirmed that the various types of visual technology are doing more than just recording 'reality'. They are active participants. The presence of the camera catalysed events, discussions and behaviours, as remarked on and advocated by filmmaker Jean Rouch (see Grimshaw 2001:77-81). For instance, seeing me with a camera and willing to take a picture (for free) some women invited me to take pictures of them in their best clothes inside their nuptial rooms (see Fig. 3.7). I can say that photography was part and parcel of mediating my access to the women's world[16]. I had planned to make a video documentary on 'immobile young men' to produce a more experience-near, phenomenological document of their daily life (MacDougall 1998:246ff). The documentary was meant to accompany the textual ethnography. Due to a lack of practical training and especially to major problems with my equipment during the shooting, I had to abort the project. The still images I have used in this thesis try nonetheless to go in the same direction—that is, to go beyond the visual exemplification of text-based analysis—even if I cannot say they have sufficient strength to 'stand on their own'; the overwhelming presence of text in this thesis anchors and overdetermines their interpretation (Barthes 1977:39). Although I could do little justice to the visuals in the final version of this thesis, this should not detract from the methodological importance of (audio)visual exploration in ethnographic research (cf. Henley 2004). On several occasions the insights I gained and subsequently wrote up as text are the result of such exploring and adjusting the focus visually to young men's social reality.

THE CHAPTERS

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The first two chapters reconstruct the historical and socio-cultural foundation of the dynamics of staying behind among the rural Soninke and in Sabi village particularly. Chapter 1 traces the history of Soninke migration in the Upper River valley, from settlement to worldwide diasporization. It shows that young men's immobility cannot be understood by making exclusive reference to the legal-political barriers to international mobility, and hence disregarding the *long durée* of the relation between mobile and immobile livelihoods. Until the 1960-70s, the prevalent pattern of migration among the Soninke was one of seasonal complementariness, based on alternating agriculture and trade, and on investing the surplus of one activity into the other. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that mobility and immobility became set apart, as it were, by the progressive elongation

[16] In general, the girls and women tend to take, keep and circulate photographs to a greater extent than the men do.

of migratory phases, the distancing of migrant destinations, and the contraction of the agricultural base of mobility. Emigration has remained a mode of accumulation and, increasingly, a necessary complement to declining rural incomes. The growing distance and barriers between home and away, and the flows and relations between those who travel and those who do not have made it evident that staying in the village is to stay behind. Chapter 2 describes the practices and discourses that confer meaning on the experience of staying behind. It shows that in the shade of international migration, villagers are mobile between village and city, and this has become a dynamic of staying behind, movement within a homely space rather than 'travelling' proper. While the city hosts affluent returnees and businessmen, the village experiences an enduring period of socio-economic stagnation, which migrant remittances and investments are to some extent ameliorating. In spite of economic dire straits, the village continues to be a point of reference for the diaspora. Villagers thus maintain a strong sense that to stay behind is to cultivate an agrarian ethos and socio-moral order, which constitute the migrants' anchor of identity.

Chapters 3 and 4 analyze young men's process of organizing and becoming established as stayers. Chapter 3 describes the household (*ka*) as a system of inter-dependencies between travellers and stayers. Households rely on remittances to offset deficiencies in agricultural production, but at the same time strive to ensure that young men continue to farm, to manage the household and to supervise migrants' wives and children. As householders invested with functions and roles, young men describe their home stay as a purposeful activity, though they can feel threatened by the potential disaggregation of domestic organization and solidarity. Many young men thus prefer to become established as householders by finding money and becoming self-reliant. Chapter 4 describes how young men look for money in their country between difficulties and opportunities. Their quest for money is characterised by flexibility and adaptation. While they search for a possibility to leave the country and hence make money, young men may actually end up working and doing business at home. Transnational family enterprises and social networks provide some of them with the possibility of constructing and organizing their position as stayers in the remittance economy. As for the household, however, combining the quest for money with staying behind can be fraught with uncertainties and may lead to dead ends.

Therefore, staying behind is an ambivalent experience, sometimes a contradictory one. Chapter 5 finally returns to young men's aspirations to migrate, and shows that their lure of emigration can be fully understood only in the light of these contrasting experiences of staying behind. A number of young men find it difficult to secure a place in the organized dynamics of

staying behind. They fail to experience progress, and thus invest emigration with the power of leading them out of stasis and accelerating their course of emancipation and success. Life in the socio-temporal limbo between 'sitting' and 'travelling' is, however, characterised not only by existential suffering, but also by discourses and coping strategies that reformulate youth men's prospects for a possible future at home. The chapter describes some of the different cultural, religious and political discourses and activities through which young men dynamically find and revise ways of staying behind and achieve social recognition in their communities.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE GAMBIA

Sabi is the fourth largest village (5,035 people) in the Upper River Region, the easternmost Local Government Area (LGA) of the Republic of The Gambia. It is located in Fuladu East district (Basse constituency) near the border with Senegal, on the main road connecting the regional capital Basse Santa Su (11,000 inhabitants, about 9 km away) and the Senegalese town of Vélingara (21,000 inhabitants, about 15 km away) (Maps 1-4). According to the 2003 national census, the Upper River Region (URR) hosts the majority of the Gambian Soninke (known as Serahule in Gambia[17]), who constitute the largest ethnic group here (39%), followed by the Mandinka (31%) and the Fula (27%) (Republic of The Gambia 2006). In contrast, the Soninke account for only 8% of the overall Gambian population[18], comprising a recent and small community originating from Guinea Conakry (the Badagulanko), with which upcountry Soninke (the Kambianko) have few relations[19]. The Badagulanko settled in Kanifing Municipality, known as Serekunda, the main metropolitan area of Gambia, spreading south and west of the bridge head to the island hosting Banjul (the capital), as far as the Atlantic coast. The present thesis deals with the Kambianke branch only.

[17] The Soninke are known by a plethora of ethnonyms by the regional ethnic groups. Serahule (from Wolof) is a common one in Gambia, and was adopted (as Serahuli) by the colonial and then postcolonial administration. Gambian Soninke are also used to referring to themselves as Seranxulle or Saranxulle, the Soninke version of Serahule. In Gambian history the term Soninke applied to precolonial pagan rulers. In this thesis I have chosen to follow the convention of the academic literature and adopt the term Soninke to refer both to the language and to the ethnic group.

[18] Out of a population of about 1,2430,00 citizens the main ethnicities are thus distributed: 35% Mandinka, 22% Fula, 14% Wolof, 11% Jola (Republic of The Gambia 2006).

[19] The Badagulanko trace their origins from Badougoula in the Dinguiraye region (Guinea-Conakry), to the west of Futa Jallon. They settled in The Gambia starting from the 1950s, and are concentrated in Dippakunda, a settlement actually founded by a lone Malian Soninke immigrant (Dippa Dukure). They are known for their tie-and-die textile industry.

The Gambia is a small country (11,300 km^2), almost an enclave of Senegal, were it not for the Atlantic coast. It is basically made up of narrow strips of land on each bank of the river Gambia for about 460km from the river mouth to the Eastern border. The climate is tropical and marked by a wet season (June-October) and a dry one (November-May). Gambia is mostly flat with only the gentle slopes of the laterite hills rising at some distance from the river banks. The environment becomes drier as one moves from the Atlantic coast to the Upper River, where the average rainfall does not go beyond above 850-900mm per annum. Sparse baobabs and other large, tall trees stand out in the savannah panorama, which is covered mostly by cultivated fields or low scrub vegetation and bushy areas left to grow back after many years of farming. Most villages are located within walking distance from the Gambia river or its tributaries—year round or seasonal streams. During the rainy season, streams swell and form swamps or small lakes, which may last for some of the dry months. Along the banks of the streams or on recession swampland, more flourishing vegetation appears, and inhabitants also take advantage of the availability of water and wetlands to grow orchards of mango, palm and papaya trees, as well as horticultural gardens.

The Gambia river has been one of the most important commercial axes in the whole region. During the Atlantic slave trade, European slavers would navigate the river throughout the year in order to transact with African traders (the *jula*) bringing slaves and other goods from the interior. With the demise of the slave trade in the first half of the 19th century, trade continued in other goods and the valley became a groundnut exporting area. Gambia has continued to export groundnuts up to the present, although commercial agriculture has suffered from climatic and marketing constraints over the last three decades.

Before colonisation, the north and south banks of the river were divided between a number of Mandinka kingdoms—an offshoot of the Mali Empire—which ruled the valley from the 14th century (Quinn 1972). The Gambia river valley reached colonisation in turmoil, with Mandinka (pagan) rulers fighting against Islamic movements (the so called 'Soninke'-Marabouts wars), and the southern banks of the upper river valley changing to Fula rule with the advent of the Fuladu kingdom (1867). The 1889 Anglo-French agreement established the boundaries of contemporary Gambia, even though the Colony of The Gambia proper consisted of little more than two islands, St. Mary (Bathurst) at the mouth of the river, and MacCarthy in the Central River valley. The rest of Gambia became a British Protectorate in 1894 (after 1901 in the URR). Colonial presence in the rural areas was scarce and had limited budgetary resources, especially in the first three decades of administration (Gailey 1964; Bellagamba 2000). The colonial economy thrived on commercial groundnut cultivation, which expanded thanks to entrepreneurial

Gambian and migrant farmers, and to European merchant capital (Swindell and Jeng 2006). After World War II, a series of constitutional changes paved the way for independence, which Gambia achieved in 1965 under the leadership of Dawda Jawara, the colony's leading veterinary officer. His party—the PPP—was mainly constituted of Mandinka people, though it soon proved able to include other groups and to patronize rural dignitaries (Hughes and Perfect 2006). State patronage and tactical alliances allowed the Jawara regime to hold sway for thirty years and survive a coup in 1981. Gambian politics remained, however, a relatively plural democracy.

In 1994, four young soldiers turned a protest for a pay rise and mistreatment into a coup, thereby toppling one of the longest serving Presidents in Africa; Jawara fled the country (Saine 1996; Wiseman 1996). Military uniforms provoked some anxiety among Gambians, but the bloodless overthrow bred hopes for change in a population plagued by economic hardship and grown disaffected with politicians and their self-serving interests. Two years later, elections turned the military junta into a civilian government, giving birth to the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) under former lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, a thirty year old man from the Jola ethnic minority[20]. Until the end of the decade, Patriotic Reorientation consisted of boosting youths' morale and hopes for political participation, and mobilising them under the banner of the *22nd July Movement*. The movement consolidated the new regime and delegitimized the old guard, fomenting tensions between youths and elders in some localities (Bellagamba 2008:256-8). The disruption was more limited in Soninke villages, which have long been used to adapting to the regime of the day in order to maintain a degree of local autonomy.

Orienting the population has also involved a degree of authoritarian rule, with the suppression of civil liberties and freedom of the press, as well as withdrawal of development aid in constituencies voting for the opposition[21] (Saine 2009). Due to the external constraints and to internal fragmentation, the opposition was not able to prevent Jammeh from winning the presidential elections in 2001 and 2006. Since then, he has continued to work for greater centralisation of decisional power. At the local level, however, the state relies on local institutions and traditional forms of government, such as chiefs, influential people and elders.

According to international standards, Gambia represents one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2009, the Human Development Index ranked the country in the 168th position out of 182 countries (UNDP 2009). Development policies have historically focused on the urban

[20] The ban on political activity imposed after the coup was lifted only shortly before elections were held, so that parties had difficulties in organizing themselves and the campaign.

[21] The government created the National Intelligence Agency in 1995, a secret service agency formally controlling anti-state activities (Wiseman 1996:928). The NIA, thanks also to a network of informants, keeps the populace and opinion makers under close scrutiny, and informal pro-government groups such as the so-called Green Boys are also suspected of informal repression and killings (Vincent 2005).

areas, with the Upper River Region being one of the most marginalised areas in the country. In the past fifteen years, however, the APRC government has invested in infrastructural development in the rural areas too. The national economy is mainly based on agriculture, the re-export trade and the tourist industry (mainly along the Atlantic Coast). Agriculture is the largest employer (about 60% of the active population) (IMF 2009), but it has suffered from droughts and marketing problems since the late 1960s. Unemployment rates appear to be high, both among the educated and the uneducated[22]. Gambian international emigrants are estimated to be less than 4% of the population and migrant remittances constitute only a minor part of the GDP (UNDP 2009); however, qualitative research and survey work suggest there are in fact substantially higher emigration rates and greater reliance on remittances at the household level, at least within the Soninke milieu (see Table 3.1). In contrast to neighbouring Senegal, Gambia has not developed an ad hoc ministry or institution to reach out to the expatriate nationals and favour their political inclusion[23], and in the media there is much less debate on migration related issues.

[22] To my knowledge, there are no reliable statistics on unemployment.
[23] This is also due to the success of the opposition parties in rallying support in the diaspora, particularly in the US.

I

Change and Continuity in Gambian Soninke (Im)mobility

Immobility as Gambian Soninke young men know it today is the product of important transformations in migratory patterns. It is not only the distance, the cost and the political-legal framework of emigration that have changed, but also the interplay between mobility and immobility. The Soninke engaged in long-distance mobility before, during and after they settled in the Gambian valley, the settlement itself being the result of displacement and diversification of economic activities in the second half of the 19th century. In the Upper River valley, they combined trade and labour migration with agriculture in a synergic manner. After the Second World War, regional trading networks provided the basis for a rapid expansion of international travel. While this ongoing phase of migration reveals continuity with the past ones, this chapter will show that it is characterised by a discontinuity in the relation between mobility and immobility. The trade-agriculture nexus has withered among Upper River Soninke, leading to a greater bifurcation of mobile and immobile livelihoods. The chapter describes the social, economic, political and environmental transformations that have shaped Soninke migration patterns over the last century.

1.1 NOTES ON THE SONINKE

The Soninke are a diverse and diasporic ethnic group. They identify themselves as a group by referring to a common descent and history of dispersal from the Wagadu or Ghana Empire (7th -12th century), the southern termini of the trans-Saharan medieval trade (Meillassoux, Doucouré and Simagha 1967). The core of the Soninke homeland is an 800 km belt of territory along the current Mali-Mauritania border, stretching from Eastern Mali to the upper Senegal river valley at the crossroads between Mauritania, Mali and Senegal. As we shall see, the Gambian branch was formed in the late 19th century as an appendix to the corridor between the Senegal and Gambia river valleys. There are Soninke communities in the Guineas as well. The

Soninke speak a markedly homogenous language—which belongs to the Mande group[1]—across their diaspora, even though they have always lived among other groups, whose languages they usually speak and whose terms they may borrow (Mandinka and Fula in the Upper River Region).

Like other groups in the region, Soninke society is hierarchically divided into endogamous status groups. These are: the 'nobles' or *hooro* (sing. *hoore*), their client groups of 'casted' artisans collectively known as *nyaxamalo* (sing. *nyaxamala*), and the bottom-ranking *komo* (sing. *kome*), the descendants of slaves[2] (Pollet and Winter 1971:205ff). At the village level, temporal and religious power are divided between two *hoore* families (*xabilanu*). The eldest agnatic man of the chiefly lineage inherits the village chieftaincy in one case, and the eldest agnatic man among those who have chosen a clerical career becomes an imam in the other. Other *hoore* families (the *moodinu*) have been historically very active in scholarly education and religious careers. The *nyaxamalo* have their own domains of expertise: as leatherworkers (*garanko*), black/gold/silver-smiths (*tago*), praise-singers (*jaaru*), Islamic praise-singers (*finanu*), oral genealogists (*geseru*), basket weavers and carpenters (*sakko*)[3]. At the practical level, an artisan profession is undertaken by fewer and fewer youths today, especially among the leatherworkers; being associated with a craft is however symbolically important for cultural identity. Several customs and exchanges link lineages of different status. These are most visible during life rituals, when the *nyaxamalo*, in accordance with their specialisation and relation with the family hosting the ceremony, perform particular tasks, from singing, playing instruments, dancing and praising, to escorting the bride to the groom's house or to sacrificing rams according to Islamic ritual. The *komo* are now thought to be a homologous status group, though the memory of their ancestors being born in bondage and working for freeborn masters constitutes an enduring stigma (Sy 2000; Klein 2005). They are freeborn but they perform

[1] Mande (also Manden) refers to a group of related languages and people distributed over a large area of Sahelian West Africa (the centre being Mali), and associated with the civilization of the medieval Empires of Ghana and Mali (13-17th century).

2 Scholars of Mande have pointed out that status identities and hierarchies were probably more fluid, and were reified under colonisation (see also Tamari 1991; Conrad and Frank 1995). Before abolition (1930 in Gambia), slavery was a heterogeneous institution which did not correspond to the image of chattel slaves as in European imagery (Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Meillassoux 1991). Nevertheless, slaves worked for the freeborn and depended on the decisions of the latter with respect to marriage and children. Acquired mainly through trade among the Soninke, second generation slaves generally enjoyed more rights and their sale was more difficult. After abolition, they became a freeborn social category. The literature on the area reveals that abolition in legal terms has not resulted in wholesale emancipation. In many societies, the social significance of slavery has persisted (Botte 1994; Klein 2005; Rossi 2009). Indeed, the maintenance of the status hierarchy and the persistence of slavery is a relevant issue in Soninke society even in the context of migration (e.g. Sy 2000).

[3] In Sabi, there is only a *gesere* household and a *sakko* household (who are Fula immigrants). *Jaaru* are absent, but it must be noted that people from other classes, especially among the leatherworkers, acting as praise-singers are also called *jaaru* (see also Frank 1995).

(playing drums, cooking, fetching firewood, etc.) at ceremonies by virtue of the genealogical memory linking them with their former masters. Some *komo* weave cotton as a craft, yet other groups tend(ed) to stigmatise them as people who only know and offer physical labour.

In spite of this rigid segmentation, Soninke society has to some extent envisaged avenues to social ascendancy through the accumulation of wealth. Precolonial Soninke kingdoms were not highly centralised and local communities allowed room for patronage. Historian François Manchuelle (1997) has seen this as a major enabling factor for Soninke migration. He argued that male migrants were not pushed by poverty or need, but were moved by a patriarchal ideal (Manchuelle 1989), whereby accumulating wealth abroad made sense in the future perspective of returning as a 'patriarch': marrying wives, having many children and founding an independent household, and eventually gifting dignitaries and distributing resources to clients so as to build up a large following. As mentioned in the Introduction, long-distance trade migration was one of the main forms of economic mobility among the precolonial Soninke. The powerful commercial communities in the pre-colonial kingdom of Gajaaga, along the upper Senegal river, are well known in the history of regional trade, including the Atlantic slave trade (Bathily 1989).

Commerce and Islam have been closely associated since the times of the trans-Saharan trade with the Arabs (Levtzion 2000; Schmitz 2000). Most of the Muslim traders (*jula*) came from 'clerical' *hoore* families (*moodinu*), which established long-lasting scholarly traditions in given localities (Levtzion 1987; Bathily 1989). The importance of religion for different kinds of migration dynamic continues today, even though the Soninke distinguish themselves from other well-known cases like the Senegalese Muriddiyya, where Sufi brotherhoods play a leading role in migrant networks (Schmidt di Friedberg 1994; Riccio 2004; Bava 2005). Although there are prominent marabouts (i.e. religious leaders/specialists) among the Gambian Soninke, these are not organized into brotherhoods.

1.2 SETTLING IN THE UPPER RIVER VALLEY

Sabi's founding families came from Sabi Xase ('Old Sabi'), a village in the pre-colonial kingdom of Bundu[4], an area stretching from the upper Gambia river to the upper Senegal river. Sabi Xase belonged to a cluster of villages in the Nieriko valley, a tributary of the Gambia, while other Soninke settlements were in the north-east of Bundu, close to the Senegal river and the

[4] The kingdom of Bundu was located in today's Tambacounda region (Senegal). It was founded at the end of the 17th century by a group of Fula conquerors led by the Sissibe (sing. Sy). Bundu was an Islamic theocracy, where the king was called *Alimami* (imam) (Clark 1996).

historical Soninke lands of Gajaaga. Across Bundu ran one of the most important commercial routes in the region (Map 4). The Soninke, among other indigenous Muslim traders (*julas*), led caravans of slaves, gold and other merchandise from the Senegal valley and the Western Sudan, and came back from Gambia with salt and European goods[5]. Sabi Xase would have constituted an outpost of the Soninke trading diaspora spreading towards the Gambian valley, and a transit place for traders and travellers crossing the zone of wilderness between Bundu and Wuli, the easternmost kingdom along the upper Gambia river (Curtin 1975:75).

Curtin (1975:68) described Sabi and other Bundu Soninke villages as clerical-commercial communities, places where scholarly work and commerce were closely associated. In 1810, the guide of the famous explorer Mungo Park—Isaaco—reported in his journal that he had spent a night in Sabi. He described it as a village of marabouts led by the Silla family (Park 1815:292). The Soninke probably shared much religious and commercial life with the numerous Jaxanke communities in Bundu[6] (Gomez 1992:26-9). Both Jaxanke and Soninke cleric-traders subscribed to a complementary relation between temporal and religious power, and between commerce and warfare, a typical institutional arrangement in this region[7]. They refrained from intervening overtly in the politics of Bundu, which was under the rule of an Islamised Fula dynasty, the Sissibe (Gomez 1992; Clark 1996).

Apart from trading and learning the Quran, people certainly farmed in Sabi Xase. Ten years after Isaaco, another British mission, led by Major William Gray, passed through Bundu. Gray (1825:102-3) stopped at Sabi, which he described as a village inhabited by Muslim 'Surrawoollies' (Serahule or Soninke). Gray took notice of the relative prosperity of this settlement. Villagers wore good clothes and cultivated maize, millet, cotton, indigo and some varieties of tobacco along the banks of the Nieriko river. Part of the agricultural surplus was probably meant for export[8].

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[5] Several items were traded along this route in pre-colonial times: slaves, gold, leather, beeswax and cloth were going west, while salt and European goods were heading east (Curtin 1975).

[6] The Jaxanke were a prominent trading diaspora in Senegambia, particularly in Eastern Senegal: Bundu, Tenda and Dentilia. They were linked with settlements in Niani (Gambia), Futa Jallon and the southern Mande plateau (Curtin 1971, 1975). The association between the Soninke and the Jaxanke in Bundu is present in the oral accounts I collected in Gambia, and currently exists in Sabi (E.g. Kau X. Kaba, 24 October 2007, Sabi).

[7] Most of the Jaxanke followed the ideology of Alh. Salimu Suware (16th century) of non-involvement in political affairs. This does not mean they did not wield influence on the rulers through their religious power. These arrangements were common in Gajaaga as well, where clerics acted as teachers and diplomats for the rulers, who, despite being Muslim, undertook a military career. Muslim traders would disapprove of warriors' and rulers' lifestyles because of these people's loose religious conduct, alcohol drinking and blood shedding (Bathily 1989:189ff).

[8] Bundu was an exporter of cotton, and the Soninke were able textile manufacturers. In particular, indigo was used for dying wrappers, which were then widely used in Senegambia and Sudan (Curtin 1975).

Starting from the mid 19th century, farming, trading and learning became more difficult in Bundu. The upper Senegal valley turned into a theatre of several internal and regional conflicts due to succession struggles, jihadist movements and expanding French colonial interests in the area. Warfare and raids, together with epidemics and droughts, meant considerable distress and harassment for the population of Bundu. Sources of the period report Soninke and other peoples leaving Bundu, with Wuli and the rest of the upper Gambia being one of the main destinations (Gomez 1992:122 and 149; Clark 1999:99-107). This time of trouble is still vividly impressed in the collective memory of contemporary Gambian Soninke, who associate the flight from Bundu with Bokar Saada Sy [9]. Bokar Saada became king of Bundu in 1855 in the midst of a succession feud between royal clans and of a regional confrontation between the French and the jihadist forces of Umar Tal[10]. He led reprisals on commercial communities which had supported Umar's jihad, and by the end of the 1860s he began to impose heavy taxation on his subjects and on caravans. Only two weeks after his death in 1885, Bundu was again in turmoil. A Soninke cleric named Sheik Mamadu Lamin Drame had channelled discontent among the masses into a jihadist movement, which he eventually led against the kingdom and the French. Being one of the heroes of anti-colonialist resistance, it is surprising how little Mamadu Lamin is mentioned in oral accounts about the arrival of the Soninke in the Gambian valley. It seems that many had abandoned the movement and returned to their communities before the Sheik fled to Gambia (Gomez 1992:166), where he was captured and killed in 1887. Nevertheless, Mamadu Lamin Drame left at least three of his warriors in friendly hands in Wuli and Sandu (north bank of Upper River), two of whom—Kandara Juwara and Batapa Drame—would give rise to important communities and chiefly dynasties during colonial times.

Although they fled persecutions and insecurity, most Bundu 'refugees' knew where to go and could count on support upon arrival. Entire villages were recomposing in the nearby Upper River valley, the wealthy would manage to take some slaves and cattle along, and some clerics were reported to have moved with their entire followings. On the north bank, long-standing commercial relations with *jula* families in the Mandinka kingdoms of Wuli and Niani turned into important safety and logistical networks in times of insecurity. They hosted waves of Soninke

[9] Among others: Kau X. Kaba, 14 December 2006, Sabi; Dae Sumbundu, 21 January 2008, Gambisara; NCAC Audio Archives 417A&B, Interview conducted by Winifred Galloway with Sabilo Sumbundu, Banjul, n.d.,.

[10] Umar Tal was an Islamic scholar who led one of the most important 'jihads' in the mid 19th century. He began in Futa Jallon (Guinea Conakry) and then fought against non-Muslim kingdoms and against the French, retreating (*fergo*) towards the interior regions of Mali, where his son continued to rule (Robinson 1985).

settlers and eventually helped them find new land for settlement[11]. The Silla and many other families from Sabi Xase thus moved to Darsilami, on the north bank. Around the 1860s an early group of Soninke migrants moved to the south bank and founded Sudowol (Kantora) and then Gambisara (Jimara), a village near today's Sabi. The Soninke had commercial relations on the south bank as well, but by 1867 the Fulas, led by Alfa Molo Egge, had conquered the Mandinka kingdoms of Jimara, Tumana and Kantora and established the kingdom of Fuladu. Oral sources say that, despite the political instability, the Soninke successfully entrusted themselves to the Fula king[12]. There were few classes of warriors among the Soninke, while Alfa Molo, and from 1881 his son Musa Molo, kept good relations with men of religion and traders (Bellagamba 2000:51), and probably encouraged new settlements, hence tributors, in this scarcely populated area. For instance, Malamin Kamara, the marabout of Bundu Numuyell, travelled to Fuladu beforehand to agree to the foundation of new Numuyell, a village near Gambisara, with king Musa Molo Balde, and later he became his marabout[13].

Not all Soninke came to Gambia as refugees, however. The arrival of the Soninke in the Upper River is also linked to the advent of peanut cultivation from the 1830s. In 1848, Governor MacDonnell of Gambia observed that:

> The Sera-Woolies [Serahule or Soninke] and Tilli-bunkas ['people of the east' in Gambian Mandinka, i.e. Manding-speaking people] often visit the countries near the Gambia, frequently coming from distances of not less than 500 or 600 miles in the interior, and paying a small amount to the chief of the country in which they settle, are permitted to cultivate under his protection, for one or more years […] and to sell the produce to the European merchant or his trader. The greater proportion of the ground nuts exported, is raised in this manner by parties who have permanent connection with the soil they cultivate[14]

What MacDonnell described was the incipience of the so called 'strange farmer' (or 'stranger farmer', called *navetan* in Senegal) migration in the peanut basin, which was to become one of the largest seasonal migratory phenomena in West Africa (David 1980; Swindell 1981). This system was grafted onto pre-existing labour and trading networks ranging from Bundu and

[11] The Dabo in Wuli, an influential *jula* family (Wright 1977), seem to have played a major role in hosting and acting as intermediaries, such as with the Bajaxa (Bajakunda) and the Sise (Garawol) (Keba Suso, 5 December 2006, Serekunda).
[12] Dae Sumbundu, Gambisara, 21 January 2008; Mamadu Dukure, village chief of Gambisara, 1975, cited by Teffgarne (1978:399). Some sources (Bakoyo Suso, Serekunda, 16 October 2006; see also Bellagamba 2004:387) state that the Soninke swore allegiance to Musa Molo, Alfa Molo's son and successor, upon settlement. Indeed, more Soninke settled in Fuladu under Musa Molo than under Alfa Molo, and those who had already settled reaffirmed their loyalty.
[13] Alhaji Sannoxo, 16 January 2008, Numuyell.
[14] GRO NGR1/16, Annual Report 1848, D.P. Gamble's file 'The Serahuli'.

the eastern countries to Lower Gambia and the Saloum[15]. The abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the first decades of the 19th century progressively led the Soninke and other *julas* to further diversify their activities. Some began to experiment with groundnuts around slave outposts, and brought along their slaves and free workers from the interior to work on the farms (Curtin 1975:168-73; Manchuelle 1997:53-9; Swindell and Jeng 2006:4-7,ch.2). Swindell and Jeng (2006:44) believe that "from the 1830s to the late 1860s production primarily depended on the efforts of long distance pioneer-trader-farmers from the interior, known as Strange Farmers [in Gambia]", and the Soninke from the east were central in this system[16].

As we move towards the end of the century it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish 'refugees' from *strange farmers* and settlers attracted by the groundnut economy. The search for fertile land, which was relatively abundant in the Upper River, was frequently the motive behind new arrivals *and* internal resettlements. Pressed by scarce and infertile land, the Silla in Darsilami sent a delegation of slaves across the river to look for a suitable place for settlement. They found it near the Kumbija stream or creek in Fuladu (see Maps 2 and 6), where four years later (around 1902) Bundankoro Silla officially founded the new Sabi. In a typical manner, the new chiefs moved into the village with their clients, the Sumbundu (leatherworkers) and the Kante (blacksmiths), the necessary 'casted' artisans to start a new settlement. The Kaba (noble clerics) followed suit from Darsilami, helping to reconstruct Bundu Sabi's social structure in the new Sabi[17].

Independent Soninke villages mushroomed south of the river, eagerly taking advantage of unexploited lands. A smaller community of Soninke eventually branched off and settled in the Central Gambian valley, in the Jahally area. In contrast, settlements did not multiply on the north bank and remained more ethnically mixed. Apart from the village of Bajakunda—an ancient settlement[18]—and the people who remained in Darsilami, it was Sheik Mamadu Lamin Drame's

[15] Curtin (1975:230) mentions that as early as the 1780s, men from Bundu (and probably the surrounding areas) spent a farming season near the salt producing areas in lower Gambia and Saloum. They would acquire maritime and estuarine salt which they would trade for gold in Bambuxu (Mali) (Manchuelle 1997:53-4).

[16] Swindell and Jeng (2006:44) also mention Soninke mariners being employed by French traders. They operated the river transport system, which was also instrumental in the advent of commercial peanuts. Such mariners constituted an important labour migration, especially along the Senegal river (Manchuelle 1997), but I was not able to find any evidence that they were among the settlers in the upper river. We might speculate that the Bundu Soninke were not in the same networks as the riverine Soninke, where most mariners were recruited from.

[17] The main sources about Sabi history are: Damude Mangasi, 19 December 2006; Kau X. Kaba, 14 December 2006; Kumba Silla, 13 November and 16 December 2007; Suleyman Sumbundu, December 2007 (all these narratives were collected in Sabi). The year 1902 is mentioned in a colonial report (GRO CSO 18/1 The Records of Fuludu [sic.] East District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)).

[18] It seems that Bajakunda was founded before the exodus from Bundu, by a marabout from Gajaaga by the name of Fode Mamadu Bajaxa (Soninke: Bajaxakunda) before the middle of the 19th century (Keba Suso, 5 December 2006, Serekunda).

followers who developed new communities. Batapa Drame founded Diabugu, and Kandara Juwara's son Kanda Kase (in Soninke: Kanda Xase) established Boro Kanda Kase.

Settling into the Upper River valley and farming groundnuts did not mean disconnecting from regional commercial networks. In 1899, the French representative of the Anglo-French Boundary Commission, G. Adams, wrote that "Les Saracolets [Soninke] de Gambissara, au nombre de 3000, rayonnent jusq'au au Soudan [Western Sudan] et au Futa Diallon. Ils font presque tous le métier de dioulas [*jula*]"[19]. Among the four Kaba brothers who moved from Darsilami to Sabi along with the Silla there was a trader. He kept on going on expeditions to Mali even while the brothers settled in the new village[20]. Jaxanke activity in southern Senegambia declined in the second half of the 19th century, in proportion to the increasing Soninke presence (Mbodji 1992:238). The Soninke were thus recomposing their clerical-commercial communities, and probably provided logistical bases for eastern traders continuing on to southern Senegambia and Futa Jallon.

1.3 LOCALISATION AND MOBILITY IN COLONIAL TIMES

In midst of recomposing sedentary and mobile livelihoods in the Upper River valley, the Soninke reached the beginning of colonialism. The Soninke consolidated their demographic, social, economic and at times political presence along the Upper River. Indigenous trade contracted significantly, but the Soninke held sway in minor niches, maintaining a degree of mobility. As the recomposition and adaptation continued in the colonial period, we can observe that localisation and migration were intimately related, as two sides of the same process.

The colonial takeover (1901 in the Upper River region) was marked by little disruption at the political level. Colonial borders cut through precolonial kingdoms, but the British Protectorate tried to maintain political units as districts (Fuladu East, Kantora, Wuli and Sandu) and appointed traditional rulers or their loyal men as district chiefs (*seyfolu*). The Soninke mostly continued their proverbial policy of avoidance of political office, but some took advantage of the changing political structure. Gambisara and Numuyell persuaded the colonialists to let them form a small district. The chieftaincy was, however, short lived and it was reabsorbed into

[19] Cited in Treffgarne (1978:399-401). "The Seracolets [Soninke] of Gambissara, numbering around 3000 people, travel as far as Sudan [Western Sudan] and Futa Jallon. Nearly all of them work as julas" (author's translation).
[20] Kau X. Kaba, 24 October 2007, Sabi.

Fuladu East no later than 1910[21]. On the north bank, the Soninke took power in spite of their recent arrival. One factor to their advantage was that from the beginning they were more integrated into the elite circles. Batapa Drame and the son of Kandara Juwara—Kanda Kase—were appointed chiefs of Sandu (1925) and of Wuli (1928) respectively. It is also clear that the British strategically chose Drame and Juwara because they were wealthy farmers and traders with a large following, and probably also because they were Muslims[22]. Even those influential men who did not achieve office wove strategic marriage alliances with chiefly families[23].

Political power did not reflect demography. On the north bank, the Soninke remained a minority: 10% in Wuli and 18% in Sandu, according to a survey conducted in 1932, just a few years after the appointments (cf. Map 3). The same survey estimated the Soninke population in Fuladu at one third (in equal proportions to the Fulas and Mandinkas)[24]. In less than three decades, Sabi had become a thriving village of nearly 1,000 people, one of the biggest towns in the district together with Gambisara, Allunhare and Numuyell. The inflow of settlers from Bundu and Eastern Soninkaara was ongoing, and some of the seasonal farmers from surrounding regions eventually settled down in the Soninke villages[25].

The Soninke scholarly tradition was strategic in the process of localisation. In 1933, British reports say that the Konte clerics of Gambisara were teaching no fewer than 80 students coming from several other villages[26]. Around the same period, two scholars, a Jawara from Kiŋi (Mali) and a Suware (a Jaxanke) from South-East Senegal, settled in Sabi, giving rise to a prestigious *maisi* (upper Quranic school) and *xaranyimbe* (basic Quranic school) respectively. The Kamara of Numuyell were also prominent, and as I mentioned, the founder was one of the

[21] This date is estimated by Travelling Commissioner Jeffs, the author of the historical note 'The Records of Fuludu East District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)' (GRO CSO 18/1). As early as 1903, Travelling Commissioner Stanley advised his superiors to reintegrate the district into either Fuladu East or West (GRO CSO2/45 Annual Report, Travelling Commissioner URP, 1903).

[22] The British considered Islam a more advanced stage civilisation, and entrepreneurial merchants were also seen in a favourable light and were appointed chiefs in some instances (Bellagamba 2000:89; Wright 2004). Both Drame and Juwara should have been only interim chiefs before office returned to the traditional rulers. But once crowned chiefs, the Soninke men consolidated their position and passed on their office to their sons. See particularly: GRO CSO 18/2 & 4 'The Records of Sandu District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)' and 'The Records of Wuli District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)'. Among the oral sources: Bakoyo Suso, 4 December 2006, Serekunda; Keba Suso, 5 December 2006, Serekunda.

[23] Gambisara families maintained close matrimonial relations with district elites, especially with the Jewuru Krubally, who took the seat of Fuladu East in 1924 and ruled for almost four decades. In Sabi, one Silla chief married a Kora, the chiefly family of Fuladu West.

[24] GRO CSO 18/1,2,4: 'The Records of Fuludu East District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)'; 'The Records of Sandu District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)'; 'The Records of Wuli District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933)'. No report was available for Kantora.

[25] Kumba Silla (Sabi, 17 January 2008) confirmed that during the first two to three decades of the 20th century, Sabi attracted numbers of migrants from Mali, Eastern Senegal as well as from southern Casamance and Futa Jallon.

[26] GRO CSO 18/1 The Records of Fuludu East District of the Upper River Province together with a short history (1933).

marabouts of Fuladu, King Musa Molo. In fact, religious services were, and are, an important dimension of local politics and power relations (Soares 2005; Darboe 2007; Bellagamba 2008a). By importing and developing Islam in the Upper River region, the Soninke were thus able to gain enduring renown and to weave clientelistic and matrimonial ties with regional elites.

1.3.1 Agriculture

If asked about their forebears' activities, most Sabi elders replied that above all, they farmed a great deal. Agriculture, particularly the expanding peanut economy, was the main factor in the process of localisation along the Upper River. Colonial pacification of the territories meant that farmers could go out to the fields without fearing raids and abductions as in the previous period, and the *strange farmers* could travel more safely along the route. Demographic growth in the Upper River villages, both Soninke and non-Soninke, meant that more people were farming peanuts, which, I must stress, were cultivated not by plantation but by ordinary households and individuals.

It is not surprising that the agricultural frontier continued to move southward into the relatively unexploited lands of French Haute Casamance. Farmers from Gambian villages established seasonal farming villages (*soxondebenu*) along and across the border, where farmers spent the rainy season before returning to their home villages. Between the 1930s and 1950s, land scarcity and population pressures in home villages led people to gradually settle in farming villages. In this way, some Sabi families founded Jalaka and Sandaga, a few kilometres across the border, and more people then transferred there[27].

The inflow of permanent and temporary immigrants was not only central to the expansion of peanut cultivation, but it also accompanied an important transformation in terms of production: the end of slavery. The British promulgated a series of ordinances (1894, 1906) to ban slave trafficking and regulate internal slavery, until they abolished all forms of slavery in 1930. Fearing disruption in peanut production, the British proceeded with care in implementation until the 1920s-30s, when people in bondage began to effectively emancipate themselves (Bellagamba 2005). Like other Gambians, the Soninke relied on slavery, and they proved at times more resilient to doing away with the institution than other communities did. However, since most settlements were founded during, or close to, the transitory period of

[27] Settlement occurred under the auspices of the *chef-de-canton* of French Fuladu, Yoro Mullay Balde (cf. Treffgarne 1978:396ff). The French administration also seems to have played a role. Lamin Kaba of Sandaga (founded around 1955) mentioned that the 'whitemen' helped the new settlers find a suitable location for the village well and dug it (7 January 2008).

abolition, freeborn families could hardly build up the large slave entourages that some observers found among the Eastern Soninke (see Meillassoux 1971b; Manchuelle 1997:32-7). By the time abolition came into force, most second (or more) generation slaves had formed autonomous households in the village and did not flee. They established their compound and acquired land to farm, though they often maintained ties with former masters and some worked for them one or two days a week until the 1940s-50s[28]. It appears that fewer and fewer freeborn were able to abstain from farm work. On the other hand, former masters could employ *strange farmers* to compensate for the loss of the slaves' labour. As Swindell (1980) has noted, the *strange farmer* system was grafted onto labour arrangements commonly used for second generation slaves, that is, working four to five mornings a week for the master/landlord in exchange for food, shelter, land and protection (cf. also Weil 1984). Moreover, *strange farmers* enabled landlords to deal with labour bottlenecks during weeding (July-September) and harvest (October-December), and left during the slack season. To attract free labour, however, supplies of food and seeds were needed. The farmers could secure access to such resources by selling produce or acquiring extra-agricultural income, by taking credit from merchants, or, more importantly, through patron-client relations which the Soninke dignitaries wove with district chiefs and other agents chosen by the British to distribute food aid (cf. Swindell and Jeng 2006:118-28; 225-6).

By the 1920s, the Upper River province had become the main exporting region in the Gambia Basin, overcoming the historical boom areas in the North Bank Province. Exports rose from 25,000 tons in 1893 (a good year) to an average of 70,000 tons in the 1913-1922 period[29]. Basse became the main market town in the Protectorate, attracting European firms, Lebanese traders and indigenous traders or agents alike (Barrett 1988:105-6). Apart from seasonal and permanent immigrants, the expansion of production was led by foreign merchant capital. European companies and their clerks maintained a firm hold on the commercialisation of groundnuts through the imposition of a debt economy which bound farmers to growing cash crops to repay loans—food, merchandise and groundnut seeds—which they had taken out on credit while they waited for food crops to ripen. This produced chronic indebtedness among the farmers, a *leit motiv* during the whole colonial period and beyond. But as Soninke historical and current accounts revealed, farmers took advantage of the closeness of the Senegalese border to

[28] Kumba Silla, 13 November 2007, Sabi. Abolition produced legally free subjects, who could own the products of their labour and control their offspring. But given the socio-economic instability of agriculture, weak slave households often maintained patron-client ties of dependence with former masters as a form of social security (cf. Pollet and Winter 1971:255-6; Klein 1998:222-5; Bellagamba 2005).

[29] Unless otherwise stated, this paragraph builds on the work of Swindell and Jeng (2006:esp. ch. 4-6).

smuggle produce according to price and marketing differentials between the two countries, or to outwit the corporate marketing system imposed by the buying agents.

As Swindell and Jeng (2006) pointed out in their in-depth study of the Gambian groundnut trade, ecology and epidemics were woven into the social and economic complexities of the groundnut economy. Despite a general growth trend, production was affected by erratic rainfalls, occasional droughts, pests and pandemics. Of course these factors severely impacted on farmers' indebtedness, pushing them to farm more cash crops to pay off the debt at the expense of food crops. Increasingly in the second and third decades of the 20th century, the British were forced to intervene and mitigate the effects of famines and crop failures by distributing food and seeds. This paved the way for a more organic agricultural policy, leading to the institution of the Agricultural Department in 1934. Nevertheless, we shall have to wait till the end of the Second World War to see the true impact of agricultural policies on agricultural production

1.3.2 Trade and Labour Migration

During the colonial period, the groundnut economy greatly polarised the marketing structure of the Gambian river to the advantage of European companies and licensed merchants[30] (Barrett 1988; Mbodji 1992). During the first part of the 20th century, the number of wharf towns along the river grew dramatically, offering companies a capillary network over the collection of produce and the distribution of merchandise. By the 1920s, Lebanese (and Syrian) traders arrived in Gambia with the complicity of the British. They successfully acted as middlemen, being able to deal with the local population, while benefiting from the privileges accorded to them by the British administration and by the European firms (credit, licences, etc.) (Barrett 1988:98ff).

Mohamed Mbodji (1992) has characterised the changing situation of the Gambian commerce as one of progressive marginalisation of African trade and of its traders, who were forced to adapt to a *frontière syncopée* that was constantly pushing the latter to residual market niches. The indigenous traders who had been so central to the whole Senegambian and Sudanese commercial system lost control of marketing hubs, and crucially lacked the political means to access banking and other facilities which sustained merchant accumulation in this period. But the decline of African trade must not be overemphasised. There remained niches that, combined with some facilities of the capitalistic economy (monetised capital, transports, etc.), left room for

[30] The main companies were: United Africa Company, CFAO, Maurel frères, Maurel & Prom, Le commerce Africain, Vézia, V.Q. Petersen. Lebanese companies and traders must also be added, chiefly Sarkis Madi, and Melhem in Basse.

African initiative (Meillassoux 1971:38-9; Amselle 1977). The evidence for the Soninke of the Upper River suggests that both marginalisation and adaptation could coexist.

During the whole colonial period, regional trading networks remained central for the Gambian Soninke. Upper River traders ranged from the upper Senegal valley and Mali to Guinea-Bissau and Futa Jallon (Guinea Conakry) (Map 5). Although manufactured textiles constituted one of the major European imports, some qualities of hand-made cloth were cheaper than European manufactures, while some types of prestigious tie-dye textiles produced in Gidimaxa and Gajaaga (upper Senegal river valley) were prestige items used for ceremonial dressing (Clark 1999:71-2). The latter were known by Gambian Soninke as *Xay yiramu* (wrappers or cloths of Kayes, a city in the Malian Senegal valley)[31]. Malian cloth was resold in Gambia, in the central and lower valleys. Guinea Bissau constituted another important marketplace for Malian cloth. Raw cloth was also imported and dyed in Soninke towns[32]. Traders also travelled south to Futa Jallon, particularly to Labe and Kindia, where a similar kind of cloth (*kindia*) could be found[33].

As ancient as the cloth trade, gold was imported from Mali to the Gambian valley. It was originally extracted at the historical sites of Banbuxu and Bure, and resold in either powder or manufactured form in Gajaaga. Both Gajaaga Soninke and Gambian Soninke were involved in the gold trade along the Mali-Gambia trade route[34]. Gold was a prestige item in Gambian society, and the growing Soninke population fuelled the demand for it. Gold earrings were particularly popular among Soninke women: it seems that, as women advanced in age, the size and number of their earrings increased. Earrings were a display accessory used in ceremonies and important occasions[35]. Buying gold earrings, and gold in general, was also a form of savings for Gambian women (Shipton 1995).

Livestock represented another form of savings and an item of trade. As the internal slave trade and domestic slavery progressed towards an inexorable end, the slave was gradually substituted by other forms of investment and savings such as cattle (Swindell and Jeng 2006:123). In addition to cloth, cattle could be bought along the route to Futa Jallon. Cows were

[31] Despite the name Kayes, the cloth was manufactured in greater quantities in Gajaaga; however, as colonisation established an administrative centre and important market in Kayes, traders probably began to supply at the very city (cf. Clark 1999).
[32] Roche (1985:314) mentions that *jula* traders imported raw cotton (*yirandora*, or *sorre*) to Gambisara where it was dyed. A 1901 British report mentions that Numuyell (Fuladu East) was renowned for its dyed cloths (GRO NGR 1/16 Annual Report 1901, in P.D Gamble's file 'The Serahuli').
[33] Sixu Konte, 14 January 2008, Sabi.
[34] Fode Kaira, 25 February 2008, Sabi; Kumba Silla, 17 January 2008, Sabi.
[35] Bakoyo and Omar Suso, 16 October 2006, Serekunda.

not only bought for personal property but were also imported and resold to Gambians willing to convert their peanut sales into livestock wealth[36].

The new political situation created constraints as well as opportunities, especially at borders (cf. Nugent and Asiwaju 1996). Smuggling went beyond selling groundnuts across either border; European goods were integrated into existing trading networks[37]. In the first part of the colonial administration, gunpowder was distributed to the population to deal with bush game as well as dangerous animals, such as hyenas, when venturing into forested areas to clear new land. Thanks to their political connections, and probably also through business arrangements, the Soninke were able to acquire a surplus of gunpowder which they could easily smuggle into Casamance and Guinea Bissau, along with Malian cloth. They would return with different qualities of imported and indigenous tobacco. Guinean tobacco was also appreciated in Mali, as it was allegedly involved in matrimonial transactions. Thus, traders would not go to Mali and Gajaaga empty handed. Peppermints and other European candies imported into Gambian wharf towns were also traded in the east. Malians appreciated peppermints, and some reportedly used strong peppermints as a decongesting medicine for the chest[38]. The advent of rail transport along the Dakar-Bamako line (1924), which had a stop at Tambacounda, must have transformed the organization of trade between Mali and Gambia. The railway probably facilitated the journey for the traders, especially those dealing in indigenous cloth, but in the long run it also structured the trade in European goods to the detriment of Soninke traders (cf. Lambert 1993:40-3). Nonetheless, it seems that the trade in peppermints continued for some time afterwards with young men taking goods to Tambacounda, where wholesale (mostly non Soninke) traders would organise bulk expeditions.

The Soninke as well as other Gambians were involved in seasonal and occasional forms of labour migration. There are early cases of Soninke going to the Senegalese basin—mostly to Kaolack, but also to Diourbel and other areas—as *strange farmers*, a migratory route that went on after independence. Though mostly local, another occupation linked to the groundnut economy was that of the *coaxer*, or *metelankoo* in Mandinka. In broad terms, the coaxer was an advertising agent for wharf based traders; often working on a commission, he went to the villages and tried to convince farmers to sell at his trader's[39]. The young men would also engage

[36] Musa Mariko, 31 January 2008, Sabi.
[37] Information for this paragraph relies mainly on: Bakoyo and Omar Suso, 16 October 2006, Serekunda; Kumba Silla, 13 November 2007, Sabi.
[38] This observation reported by Omar Suso may have some foundation if compared with today's Gambia. Peppermints are still very popular in Gambia, and widely used for coughs and colds, together with mentholated balm.
[39] Some youth from Sabi did this job on a regular basis (Ujeri Kamara, 29 January 2008, Sabi).

in *sassi* or *dabowo* work, which was work carried out for non-family members and away from one's own village. Teams of young men would sometimes tour other villages hiring out their labour in exchange for goods or shares of crops[40].

Unlike central and lower valley regions[41], Bathurst (colonial Banjul) did not attract Upper River young men at this stage. In Sabi, I could find only one Sumbundu man who, hired as a leatherworker by a colonial officer, went to Bathurst in the late 1920s and eventually stayed on to trade. Around this period, most young men would go to Velingara, Tambacounda, Kolda and even Ziguinchor to work as cleaners, porters, shopkeepers, etc. The growth of Senegalese cities in the mid 20th century partially explains the flow of labourers from the region. However, it can be noted that these cities lie on the Soninke trading routes to Guinea-Bissau and to Mali; as was the case for pre-colonial trade, traders paved the way and spread information about available labour markets.

The purpose of these labour migrations varied, but in general it did not differ much from other temporary migrations and from commercial agriculture. Youths would look for cash for their families which faced indebtedness. They would look for money for their own 'targets', especially bride-wealth or other prestige items (e.g. clothes, radios, bicycles, etc.). Finally, waged labour was a way to amass capital to start trading, either by acquiring goods near the working place and then reselling them at home, or by using the liquid capital to invest in established trades (smuggling, cloth, gold, cattle, etc.).

François Manchuelle (1997) has argued that the Eastern Soninke migrations began a transition from traditional (trade) to modern (labour) migrations around the middle of the 19th century[42]. His thesis does not wholly apply to the Gambian Soninke, who continued to engage in both trade and labour long after the mid-19th century and during the colonial period. Indeed, the traditional-modern dichotomy does not seem appropriate for analysing the mobility strategies of the Gambian Soninke in this or any other period. As we have seen, trade migration remained very 'modern' and central, and has continued to do so even after the colonial period.

[40] Conversation with J. Silla, January 2008, Sabi.
[41] Swindell and Jeng (2006:220) found that some Gambian *strange farmers* went to the coastal area starting from the 1920s, probably because in the dry season they would go to Bathurst to find wage labour. This was probably the predecessor of the strong urban migration from these regions which began in the 1940s.
[42] Manchuelle's (1997) second chapter is entitled precisely 'From traditional to modern migration (1822-1855)'.

1.4 THE FARMER-TRADER

Agriculture and trade represented the main economic activities in Soninke villages: how were they combined? Groundnut cultivation, like most agricultural activity, was a seasonal activity (June-November), which conveniently integrated with dry-season activities, especially trade. In the previous pages, I mentioned 'pioneer-trader-farmers' (Swindell and Jeng 2006:44) who began trading while they settled in Gambia and pursued—or their dependants and/or Quranic students pursued—groundnut cultivation. Some traders eventually turned into full time producers, while others used commercial agriculture to re-fund their trade. But the groundnuts also provided an opportunity to enter trade from scratch, for early farmers as well as for 20th century Soninke ones. In 1946, an Agricultural officer visiting Koina (the easternmost Gambian village) wrote "Trading is carried on in any commodity in demand in French territory and groundnuts are sold as soon as the trade season opens in order to obtain cash to buy such commodities"[43]. The dry season, also called the trade season, must have been reacted to with fervour by Soninke villagers, who discussed and conducted exchanges and trading ventures in town[44]. Although groundnut agriculture could result in poverty and chronic indebtedness, the social base of trade remained rather wide, especially for seasonal and short-range trade such as the smuggling of European merchandise into French territories. Even long-distance trade was not restricted to clerical and other freeborn families, though it must be borne in mind that these continued to be very well represented among the prominent traders.

For most of the colonial period, the farmer-trader remained the emblematic figure in migration dynamics. The farmer-trader typically invested in both mobile (trading) and sedentary (groundnut) activities, engaging in a sort of positive feedback system of capitalisation between seasonally complementary activities. Wealth acquired in farming and trading was thus used to build prestige and local social networks. As we saw, such localising strategies could serve the purpose of farmer-traders, such as accessing foods and implements distributed to district chiefs and other agents.

The Sabinko still vividly remember two wealthy farmer-traders. One is Biagi Sirandu Kaira, a man from an important noble family (*hoore*) who used to run Quranic schools and probably had a trading past before settling in Sabi. Beginning his career in the late 1920s, Biagi

[43] GRO NGR1/16 Letter No. UP/1/46 from Agricultural officer, Georgetown, to S.A.O., D.P. Gamble's file 'The Serahuli'.

[44] Bakoyo Suso (16 October 2006, Serekunda) recalls from childhood in Gambisara that even children were accustomed to some kind of trading. When their fathers sold groundnuts in Basse, they bought or were given biscuits and similar items. They gave them to their children, some of whom would then tour the village and sell their goods.

was involved in the gold trade. He used to travel to Gajaaga and Mali, and as he made money, he later began to commission other traders to buy gold on his behalf and bought from the foreign gold traders he hosted[45]. Biagi also traded in groundnuts, which became a more prominent activity of his as he grew older. Apart from selling groundnuts to wharf town agents, he would give bags out on credit to people in need of seeds or food. He applied a harsh two-for-one interest rate, usually to be paid after harvest. This was a widespread arrangement for the time, which surely increased indebtedness among the poor; it was later dismissed as illicit (*riba*) on Islamic grounds. Biagi is known as the first man to have built a brick house with a corrugated iron roof (1940s). It is said that each of his twelve sons had a horse which wore gold bangles round its ankles.

The other farmer-trader is Musa Jabu Konte, a contemporary of Biagi, but from a very different background. His father came to Sabi as a stranger and he was not trusted enough to be given noble women in marriage. Despite starting as an outsider, settling into a Soninke village gave him access to Soninke trading networks, which his son later exploited to achieve great social and economic success. Musa's story is one of a self-made man, and, perhaps better than Biagi's, it shows the mutuality between mobility and immobility. He worked hard on groundnut fields and used the sales to go and buy cloths in Futa Jallon or in Mali to resell them in Gambia. He then used the profits from the cloth trade to employ *strange farmers*, and hence produce more groundnuts, and hence recapitalise his commerce, until he became a semi-permanent groundnut producer and trader on a par with Biagi[46]. He married four wives and had many children. He eventually became respected among the nobles and established close ties with Islamic scholars. He is remembered as a generous patron, and one of the first people to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca by travelling on a plane (in the 1950s).

After the generation of Musa Jabu and Biagi Sirandu, the last trader-farmer of some renown was Sambu Kamara in Sabi, a *fina* (Islamic praise-singer group). Known as a generous man surrounded by praise-singers (*jaaru*) and the first man to afford meat on a daily basis, Sambu amassed wealth by trading gold in the 1950s and early 1960s, while farming groundnuts in the rainy season. He later invested in cotton, and then began planting mango trees and cassavas for sale. After him, nobody took over the commercial farms, though the mango orchard is still standing. Some of the junior brothers and sons of Sambu, Musa Jabu and Biagi Sirandu

[45] Fode Kaira, 25 February 2008, Sabi; Kumba Silla, 17 January 2008, Sabi.
[46] Sixu Konte, 21 October 2007 and 14 January 2008, Sabi.

took over their trading ventures, but most retired soon afterwards or ended up joining their kin travelling to Sierra Leone and other West African countries.

By this time, in fact, other migratory routes and opportunities were attracting young men away from the fields, away from groundnuts. Indeed, Musa Jabu directly advised some of his sons to do so and paid for their fares. The exodus from Biagi Sirandu's compound was even more dramatic, with all of his sons migrating to other countries and some of them becoming rich businessmen. His is still a big compound, and the first brick building in Sabi that still strikes the visitor who enters the gate; however, only a few family members have chosen to stay in Sabi today.

1.5 TRANSITIONS: PIONEERING NEW ROUTES AFTER WORLD WAR II

Charles Tilly (1990:85) has provocatively argued that networks rather than people migrate. To some extent, the Soninke case proves him right. Having survived by adapting to marginal niches, Soninke trading networks have endured time and people, and after World War II they came out of the shadows and developed in a rather impressive way. They followed what Meagher (2005:229-30) would call a strategy of diversification and globalization, reaching more and more diverse and distant destinations. They spread across West and Central Africa, occupying and intersecting market opportunities in the diamond and African art export trades, as well as in other merchandise. Shortly later (1960s-1970s), the first migrants were already setting foot outside the continent, in Europe and North America.

Where the Soninke would object to Tilly is that the advent of a migratory route during this phase of transition is usually associated with one or a group of pioneers, who then informed and helped others to migrate and thus to develop networks[47]. A pivotal figure in the Sierra Leone migration was Kalilu Kamara from the chiefly-maraboutic family of Numeyell[48]. A cattle and kola trader, Kalilu was said to have followed the well established route to Guinea; once there, he began exploring new markets until he reached Sierra Leone. In Kono he was lodged by a goldsmith from Mali, having set up his workshop there—this happened in the 1940s, and gold was indeed more important as an alluvial mineral than diamonds at this stage[49]. As he was

[47] Social networks explain the perpetuation of migration, but other factors such as 'scouts' or pioneers need to be taken into account to explain how they develop and change (Ambrosini 2008:25).
[48] Information on Kalilu Kamara is based on interviews with: Bunja Kamara, 17 January 2008, Numuyel; Suleyman B. Sumbundu, 29 December 2007, Sabi.
[49] Noting that gold extraction is more ancient than that of diamonds, Bredeloup (2007:71-2) shows that the organization of diamond mining and trading is similar to that of gold.

accustomed to the gold trade in his hometown, Kalilu began to buy and sell gold, and eventually diggers began to bring diamonds to him. In the early 1950s the diamond news spread to neighbouring Guinea and, through cloth and cattle traders going to Futa Jallon, to Eastern Gambia[50]. Motor transport along this route was then becoming available. As the news spread, some villagers sold their groundnut bags at the end of the season, paid a fee to obtain travelling documents (such as the so called *black passport*) at the commissioner's office and boarded a vehicle in Velingara commuting between different cities up to Kono[51].

Naval transport facilitated the emergence of another route along the Atlantic coast. By the end of the 1940s, some Soninke traders began to go to Banjul to trade raw and dyed cloth acquired or manufactured in the interior; they would return with kola nuts to the interior. Some settled in Banjul and began to go to Sierra Leone and Liberia by ship to trade cloth, and began to trade in diamonds in the early 1950s[52]. Among the Sabinko, Tali Kaira—the first son of the farmer-trader Biagi Sirandu—was also an early trader and settler in Banjul who later decided to invest in the diamond business in Sierra Leone. The transit through Banjul thus started to increase as Soninke and others from the interior began to board the *Apapa*, the Elder Dempster Line's ship launched in 1948.

Travelling further south on the *Apapa*, some traders found out that they could take advantage of the generous exchange rates between British and French currencies. Rice (1968:216) reported the words of a government official who, shortly after independence, told him that:

> Years ago, before any of the British territories were independent, there used to be absolutely free movement of currency between the four British West African colonies. CFA [French West African] francs used to be much cheaper in the Gold Coast than elsewhere. You could sail down to the Gold Coast on the *Apapa* with a suitcase full of West African pound notes. You changed them for a suitcase full of CFA francs, and then brought those illegally into one of the nearby French territories.

Some people of Gambisara were well known as money-changers. Once they reached the *Apapa*'s final stop (the homonymous port in Lagos, Nigeria), they went up to Kano (northern Nigeria) to exchange British and French currency[53]. Upper river villages, accustomed to both

[50] In 1953 Demba Saxo from Sabi originally went to Guinea to trade cloth, but then he followed other people to Sierra Leone (Demba Saxo, 21 February 2007, Sabi).
[51] Ba Xoore Sumbundu, 29 December 2007, Sabi.
[52] A man called Amara Bajaxa from Bajakunda was prominent in this trade and he acted as a host for the Soninke coming to Banjul to trade (Kisima Juwara, 24 February 2008, Serekunda).
[53] Sixu Konte, 14 January 2008, Sabi. Some people from Sabi were also engaged in this trade (Bulli Kaira, 8 February 2007, Sabi).

British and French currency, would probably be a good market for these money-changers, who must have amassed those suitcases of pounds through commercial groundnut and/or trading before going to the Gold Coast.

In their journeys to the Gold Coast and neighbouring countries, Soninke traders also found that they could draw on the history of ancient trades such as beads (Soninke: *xanyo*), imported by Europeans during the Atlantic slave trade and afterwards (Curtin 1975:229-30). In the 20th century, beads have been flowing in the opposite direction: it is European and American collectors and tourists who come and buy beads now (Steiner 1994:127). Beads are part of a wider trade in African art. Christopher Steiner (1994), who studied art traders in Ivory Coast, showed that in the 1950s, the art trade was already dominated by 'foreigners', mainly Senegalese Wolof, Hausa (Niger, Nigeria) and Mande (Mali, Guinea, Ivory Coast). Gambian art/beads traders went, however, to Ghana and Nigeria, probably taking advantage of money changers' networks and ship transport available from Gambia. They reached the Asante and Yoruba regions, where the major markets and collection points were.

After new routes had been pioneered, in the mid 1950s travel began to stir the imagination of young men across the river Senegal and river Gambia valleys, reaching down to the Guinean forest. Bredeloup (2007:65ff) has described an authentic 'diamond fever', attracting thousands of men from the Senegal valley and, I would add, the Gambian valley, to the mines of Sierra Leone. Diamond news toured Soninke villages, and people came back from Sierra Leone with tin boxes stuffed with clothes for the family and with raw cash, part of which would go into the 'advertising service' provided by praise-singers[54]. Several people rushed to Banjul, but in contrast to many lower Gambia young men who stayed in town to find work here, they boarded the *Apapa*, which became the veritable symbol of an entire generation of *diamantaires*. It was not only experienced traders re-investing their capital into a new venture, but also young men selling their groundnuts, a cow or their mother's earrings to go to Sierra Leone. Some of them were so young that older migrants sent them back to their villages. Early pioneers like Kalilu Kamara hosted co-ethnics and enabled them to quickly become inserted into the trade. Few became full-time diggers; most acted as middlemen, buying and exchanging the precious gemstones.

After a partial liberalisation of the mining licences in 1956, Sierra Leonean authorities announced a 'stranger drive' of 'illicit' diggers, particularly in Kono district (van der Laan

[54] Suleyman Sumbundu, 11 February 2007, Sabi. Sumbundu states that these ostentatious kinds of behaviour were prominent at the beginning, but migrants soon began to invest in assets such as food stocks, cattle and housing. Bredeloup (2007:115-119) also places emphasis on the role of conspicuous spending and praise-singers in fuelling the diamond rush.

1965:22). Some 45,000 foreigners left the country, but many of those who returned to their homes would quickly find their way back. Indeed, many did not return home at all: the ultimatum also resulted in diggers flooding diamond mines across the border in Guinea Conakry, continuing on to Ivory Coast, or even as far as the then Belgian Congo. Bredeloup (2007:85-7) rightly points out that the 1956 'stranger driver' inaugurated a policy combining expulsions of foreigners and liberalisations in many diamond producing countries, which in turn contributed to creating a complex transnational network of *diamantaires*.

A complex network cross-cut West-Central Africa, connecting and distributing diamonds, often illicitly, to the most important markets beyond the region, such as Antwerp, Tel Aviv, Beirut and Bujumbura (in Burundi) (Bredeloup 2007:esp. 24-25, 96ff). Of course the Soninke were not alone in these networks. Most of them occupied intermediary positions in this export-oriented industry, which involved several groups and marketing networks, such as wealthy Jewish and Lebanese merchants.

In the meantime, other 'migration rushes' attracted Upper River Soninke. The African art trade boomed in the 1960s and 1970s, fuelled not only by collectors but also by tourists, peace corps, civil-rights movements, African nationalist movements, and others (Steiner 1994:7). This sector too contributed to drawing many young men into the West African adventure. Ivory Coast hosted a small community of traders from the Gambian Soninke, dealing in beads, artefacts, cloth and other general goods; some of them began their migration as labourers in Abidjan[55]. Most, however, developed their businesses in Ghana and Nigeria. Well established traders would stay in the city, while collectors would tour the villages and collect old objects and newly crafted ones[56].

The narratives of this generation travellers are often punctuated by changes of itinerary. Migrants moved on from places where business had dried up, or were forced to move by expulsion and harassment. They came back to Gambia, and often re-migrated. Migrants followed rumours of new opportunities elsewhere, the 'usual diamond news' as one *diamantaire* put it. By exploring new routes they spread networks, and they eventually ended up overseas.

In the 1960s and 1970s, some art traders began to travel to North America to supply regular clients; others thought that by going to where most buyers came from, their goods would

[55] In his map of Plateau market in Abidjan (end of 1980s), Steiner (1994:24) shows that only one stall belonged to a Marka trader. Among the Sabi migrants I interviewed was Mpamara Kamara, 19 February 2007, Sabi.
[56] Abulai Tunkara, 22 February 2007, Sabi; Mohamed Danfa, 6 January 2008, Sabi.

fetch higher prices[57]. The trade in African art and other Africana has thrived since, attracting a number of West African (Muslim) traders to the US. Paul Stoller's (2002) ethnography of Harlem (New York) African art market is testimony to the ongoing vitality of West African traders. Once on American soil, however, the pioneers of transatlantic trade found other opportunities. Cheap unskilled workforce was needed in shops, restaurants and hotels; West Africans also worked as deliverers, watchmen and taxi drivers. Even without a visa one could find work and fear few problems with the police[58]. On the other side of the Atlantic, some of the *diamantaires* began to travel to Belgium and the Netherlands. During their stay, traders looked for other commercial opportunities, such as second hand car markets, particularly in Germany. In a similar fashion to what happened in America, other labour opportunities became available[59].

Gambian Soninke labour migrations to Europe spread more evenly across the continent than is the case with Eastern Soninke. The Soninke of the Upper River Senegal are well known in the academic literature for their migration to France, which grew out of previous labour migrations in commercial naval transport (Manchuelle 1997:197-203; Bertoncello and Bredeloup 2004:esp. 19-33,91ff). Gambian Soninke did not participate in riverine and maritime migrations, and their labour migrations grew out of trade rather labour migrations; in addition, their connections with the Soninke of the Senegal river valley were not very strong[60]. Nevertheless, France has been an important destination for Gambian Soninke from the 1960s onwards. The former colonising country—Britain—did not attract many Gambian Soninke. In contrast, starting from the mid 1970s, Spain became a major destination. One of the very first migrants, according to Farjas Bonet (2002:332), was Alhaji Bilali Kamara (Numuyell), who arrived in Spain in 1975 after a complex journey begun in West Africa. A few years later, the airline company Iberia opened a route between Lagos and Madrid and some migrants already in Nigeria took the flight (see Kaplan 1998:96). No visa was required before 1985, and entry (and overstay) remained relatively flexible for some time afterwards. Migrants did not stop in Madrid, they went to Catalonia, especially the Girona Province. By the early 1980s, many migrants were working in the *campo*, Catalonian farms and orchards, picking fruit and vegetables during the spring and

[57] Abdullahi Sane, 16 October 2006, Serekunda. The ethnographic film based on Steiner's research (Barbash and Taylor 1992) follows an African trader from Ivory Coast to the US, and we see him selling his goods to an American art dealer. Tall (2008:45) mentions that Senegalese traders, particularly Haalpular, in Ivory-Coast and Central Africa began to go to America to sell art objects, cosmetics, etc. They returned with electronic equipment. In the 1980s, Senegalese traders based in Dakar (Sandaga market) also started to obtain their supplies of electronics in New York.

[58] Some migrants in Soninke work as taxi drivers, couriers and transporters. Tall (2008:45-7) describes similar employment and peddling patterns among Senegalese migrants.

[59] Suleyman Sumbundu, 11 February 2007, Sabi.

[60] The Soninke from Francophone countries enjoyed favourable visa conditions because of their strong connections with their former colonial master (Diop 2008:42)

summer (Kaplan 1998:96). Eventually some found work as labourers in the construction and service sector, and later in factories near Barcelona, Gerona and Mataró.

1.6 THE FARMER, THE TRADER…THE TRAVELLER

After the 1970s, migrant networks have continued to globalise and diversify, and more people have been drawn to the prospect of travelling abroad. The model of the farmer-trader has become inadequate to describe a large part of such migratory dynamics. To be sure, the ideal of circular migration remained popular for some time—'I de come, I de go' as many former *diamantaires* used to describe their travelling, in the Krio language. But cycles of circular migration have become longer, and destinations more distant and more difficult to reach. The centres of commercial activities are elsewhere in the country and outside the country, requiring traders to stay away longer instead of coming back to farm. Similarly, labour migration to Europe and America has been such that many villagers have to live abroad, some of them until they retire. In parallel, commercial agriculture has undergone stagnation and decline; it is now barely profitable, and insufficient for funding emigration. In their turn, diamond and art trade have made some villagers millionaires, but 'big traders' have tended to stay and invest their money elsewhere, rather than in the village and in agriculture. The hyphen between the farmer and the trader has thus progressively stretched, until the two have become almost separate figures, or rather, separate stages in each one's lifetime.

Many Sabinko identify the beginning of 'travelling' (*terende*) proper with the surge of migration to Sierra Leone, and some others with the peak of labour migration to Europe and America starting from the 1980s. Not that they disregard the history of long-distance travel in their community, but the idea that migrating to earn a living and support the household is almost a permanent, life-long activity has only recently become well entrenched. This has helped to consolidate the figure of the 'traveller' (*teraana*), and consequently that of the 'stayer' (*taxaana*).

The farmer-trader has all but disappeared. Many Sabi young men continue to be farmer-traders, or rather, farmer-seasonal labour migrants, who go to the Gambian capital to find work during the dry season. But the two seasonal activities do not yield a virtuous cycle of accumulation and investment between farming and trade/labour migration as they did in the previous period; as we shall see in more detail in later chapters, urban migration has become associated with staying behind, rather than with 'travelling'. The tendency for young men is ideally to transit from seasonal circular migration to full-time trading in the Gambian capital or

to international travel (see Section 4.3.2). In the remainder of this chapter I will describe three processes that, in continuity with the rapid transitory period, have contributed to the changes in (im)mobility patterns: 1) the decline in the rural economy, both in agriculture and regional trade; 2) the increasing complexities and barriers to mobility between home and away; 3) diasporization and transnationality, that is, growing expatriate communities which simultaneously maintain close social ties with their home villages.

1.7 THE DECLINE OF FARMING AND TRADING

1.7.1 Agriculture

The boom in international migration in the 1950s was not due to a sharp decline in agricultural production. The end of World War II restored market confidence, prices went up and Gambian farmers responded by producing ever more groundnuts. Good rainy seasons did the rest. The 1950s were less favourable (Gailey 1964:162-3), but production continued to expand, breeding mild optimism for the transition to national independence. Late colonialism was marked by developmentalist policies, which took some steps towards improving infrastructure and agricultural production—even though such policies had only marginal impacts on the Upper River compared to the urban areas and other British territories. In 1949, the government established the Gambia Oilseed Marketing Board (GOMB) to centralise the groundnut trade and to provide development funds for farmers' activities and communities. It set producers' prices and organised collection at buying stations, progressively taking over the marketing network. From the late 1940s, the Wuli agricultural station ran demonstrations of ox-ploughing and in the 1950s ploughs began to be taken to the fields and sold to the farmers[61]. New seed varieties were introduced together with new implements (Sallah 1990:626). A store to preserve groundnut seeds from pests was built in Sabi.

[61] GRO ARP 31/9-11 Annual Report of the Upper River, 1949, 1951, 1956-7.

Fig. 1.1 – The Sabi Creek in the Dry Season (March)

In the background, young men making mud bricks in front of the old dam

In 1968 the run of good rainy seasons came to an abrupt halt, inaugurating a period of droughts which would transform the regional climate in the long term. At Basse, the meteorological station measured an average of 1055.7mm of rain between 1959 and 1967, falling to 876.4 mm in the 1972-80 period (van Dokkum 1992:63-4). Baker (1995:73) has found that in the western region the rainy season has become one month shorter, while Webb (1992:561) has added that "the rainy season in the Gambia has become increasingly bi-modal, with a mini-drought of several weeks occurring in the middle of the wet season", causing germinating plants to dry up. Sabi elders and adults saw the nearby stream becoming drier and drier, and women progressively gave up cultivating rice on the swampy banks (Fig. 1.1).

In spite of the droughts, however, the Sabinko remember the 1970s as years of agricultural intensity. The policy of the Marketing Board (transformed into the Gambia Produce Marketing Board—GPMB—in 1973) shifted from assisting farmers with consumption to subsidizing production. The Gambian Cooperative Union (GCU), known simply as the *cooperative* by the Sabinko, represented the main licensed agent on behalf of the GPMB and main governmental actor in the region, distributing tools and implementing credit schemes for the farmers. The villages in the Sabi Ward organized a local branch of the *cooperative*, with Nene Fatumata Silla acting as the president. By the time he succeeded Nene Binta as chief of Sabi (1983), a man from the chiefly lineage of Kumbija (Jawara) took over the presidency of the branch. The local elites were thus able to wield control over access to state resources by guaranteeing loans and the distribution of implements, and by translating credit arrangements into the local socio-moral idiom of clientelism. The GCU became in turn a tool for state patronage and control of the rural population at the cost of low rates of repayment of loans: "In effect, the GCU's credit program became an off-budget transfer to selected members of the rural population" (McNamara and Shipton 1995:105).

On their part, farmers eagerly responded to new opportunities and subsidies, even though mediated by state patronage. Farmers with fields in Senegal would receive credits and farming tools, especially ploughs, seeders and carts, from the government, even before Gambia began doing the same, though close control by border officials aimed to ensure that farmers did not smuggle their produce to Gambia[62]. On the Gambian side, animal traction was significantly expanded in the 1970s, with farmers quickly adopting the versatile *Sine Hoe*, a multipurpose frame (plough, seeder, weeder) manufactured in Senegal. In the middle of the decade, cotton cultivation was also strengthened to diversify agricultural production. In Sabi, Sixu Niuma Silla

[62] Mr. Kamara., Sabi, 16 December 2007.

(not the chiefly Silla) was one of the first cotton farmers of the Gambia Cotton Project in the Eastern part of the country, and he became a Producer Director on the GPMB board. Cotton caught on quickly among Sabi farmers, who began to replace some of their groundnut fields with it. Thanks to the high profile figure of Silla, the villagers could secure regular access to machines, fertilisers, pesticides and tools. Evidently, the pioneers were not only abroad. In the late 1980s, the Cotton Project curtailed subsidies to farmers, and farmers faced shortage of labour (discussed below). Cotton is a labour intensive crop, which requires a lot of fertiliser and of chemical treatment. Moreover, in contrast to groundnuts, cotton is not an edible plant, so that farmers are forced to sell all of their produce even when there is a shortage of other food crops in a bad season. Having too much work for too little gain, cotton growers began to revert to groundnuts and to concentrate on food production[63].

The dry years in the 1970s, combined with growing urbanization, provoked a sharp rise in the demand for food supplies, hence imports. The government responded by promoting self-development policies under the *Tesito* program, a Mandinka word evoking a hard working farmer tightening up his trousers before bending down in the field to farm (Saho 1979). In truth, since the late colonial days the Gambian government had tried to intervene in rice production to ensure self-sufficiency. Now, development projects in rice cultivation were again at the top of the agenda. Most of the Soninke populations involved in these projects were in the Jahally-Pacharr area (Central river region), where international donors had co-funded a large scale irrigation project[64]. Too far from the river and well watered creeks, Sabi was not part of these programs. The only village in the Upper River to participate in a rice project was Allunhare, which is close to the river, not far from Basse. In 1972, water pumps were placed on the river banks by the World Bank's Agricultural Development Program[65]. Villagers farmed rice twice a year, but by the mid 1980s technical problems affected the project, which collapsed shortly afterwards. When I visited the village at the beginning of 2008, the bush had made its way back into the long abandoned rice fields, and only the remnants of the water pump tower remained as a symbol of agricultural decadence. On the adjacent river banks, however, signs of renaissance were visible. A young returnee from the US was growing a banana plantation, while further inland, some women, and a few men, were growing vegetables for sale.

[63] In 1992, the Cotton Project was discontinued because of financial constraints. A new company was established, Gamcot, of which 60% belonged to the *Compagnie Francaise pour le development des Fibres Textiles*, and the remaining 40% to the government. Today in Sabi, very few farmers still grow cotton, except for some with fields close to Velingara, which hosts SODEFITEX's processing plant (Senegal's former parastatal company, now privatised).

[64] The Jahally Pacharr project concerned four ethnic groups: Mandinka (33%), Fula (27%), Serrahuli/Soninke (23%), and Wolof (18%) (Carney and Watts 1991:671).

[65] For a description of the ADP project in Cha Kunda, west of Allunhare, see P. Webb (1991).

Vegetable production and orchards for home consumption and short-range marketing are not new to Gambia, but in the mid 1980s they became a major focus of agricultural development projects, particularly in the western part of the country (Schroeder 1999; Baker and Edmonds 2004). Commercial horticulture has also developed along the river in Eastern Gambia and in well watered Soninke villages like Numuyell and Dembakunda, where gardens and orchards form a spectacular green carpet of banana, papaya, palm and mango trees during the dry season. Plantations have supplemented household budgets in the last twenty years and migrants also invest in orchard production. In the late 1990s, an international Christian organization (Youth With A Mission—YWAM) created a small local branch in Sabi. One of their projects has been to improve fruit and vegetable gardening, for both income generation and nutritional purposes[66]. But commercial horticulture requires conspicuous investments and a regular water supply, a major problem in Sabi. Here, only a few gardens stand out in a panorama that is definitely more yellowish than in Numuyell and Dembakunda.

Horticulture apart, the dynamism of Gambian farmers was progressively put to the test in the 1980s. By this time, it was already abundantly clear to farmers that a policy change would be unlikely. Faced with financial problems, the government relied on foreign borrowing, swelling the public sector to the advantage of the urban middle class. Development projects and public spending concentrated on the urban areas, while the monopoly of the patronage-ridden GPMB reaped profits from groundnuts, and farmers received low prices. In 1984, groundnut growers were paid only 23% of the international market price (Wright 2004:220). Later in the 1980s, when embezzlement and corruption became a crucial problem, some farmers began to suspect that the problem lay not in their failure to repay debts, but rather in mismanagement of state resources among the white-collar workers[67].

After the 1984/5 severe drought that starved much of the Sahel and badly affected Gambia as well, a series of good rainy seasons brought respite to the farmers. This was coupled with the liberalisation of farm gate prices. Liberalisation had been introduced in 1985 under the auspices of the ERP program, the structural adjustment program promoted by the IMF and the World Bank. Farmers were initially favoured by higher groundnut prices, but the ERP included the liberalisation of fertiliser at a time when soil fertility had become a major problem. Between 1984 and 1989, GCU subsidies were extremely volatile, with farmers having to grapple with

[66] YWAM has built a compound in Sabi, and its personnel do not usually exceed 6-7 at a time, including international volunteers. YWAM's missionary work has been limited, but they have financed a number of small-scale projects, particularly installing hand-pumps, improving nutritional standards, and providing schooling and health care.
[67] Hamme Silla, 18 December 2007, Sabi.

delays in input distribution and changing market conditions from year to year (Jones and Radelet 1995). In 1990 the problem was resolved by ending state subsidies altogether, so that farmers would allegedly benefit from the liberal market and negotiate the price of their produce directly with traders (Sallah 1990). However, Gambian farmers experienced once more their history of being weak price setters in the international market, as they competed with heavily subsidised groundnut producers in countries like the US (Wright 2004:217-8).

In 1993, the Gambian government began to privatise the GMBP. It became the Gambia Groundnut Corporation (GGU), and was later bought by the Swiss multi-national company Alimenta. Liberalisation continued after the regime change in 1994, and the Gambian Cooperative Union, deemed too inefficient and deficit ridden, was disbanded in 1996. In 1998, problems between Alimenta and the government escalated[68], and Gambia had to give US $11.4 million to the company to terminate its involvement in the industry after the two parties went to court (Baker and Edmonds 2004:195). With Alimenta withdrawing and the GCU infrastructure gone, the marketing system has struggled until now. At the macro-level, Gambia's economy has grown and shown signs of stability in the 2000s, pleasing the IMF and the World Bank which closely monitor the situation through a series of PRSPs (Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers); but even in their opinion the agricultural sector—employing 58% of the population—has continued to lag behind[69] (IMF 2009). In the 2005/6 season, many farmers were issued promises of payment for their produce and they had to wait until the following year before they could receive their cash (IRIN 2006). A very bad season followed; moreover, the farmers were advised to take their groundnuts to main depots, hence taking responsibility for the transport costs (Dampha 2007). In Sabi, this resulted in middlemen and traders with their carts and tractors buying from door to door at 350-400 D/bag, and taking bags to the Basse depot. A year later (2007/8), a collection point was issued at Sabi and cash was available, but purchases only began in mid January, when many farmers had already taken their groundnuts to the collection point at Badiara, the Senegalese village at the nearby border.

As a response to the growing uncertainties of agriculture, the government has offered the population another round of self-development campaigns, inviting people to go 'Back To The Land' and work hard to reach the goal of alimentary self-sufficiency. 'Operation Feed the Nation' and 'Operation Feed Yourself' have promoted a number of projects and initiatives, but

[68] In 1998, the government announced the price of groundnuts for the seasons, but weeks later Alimenta communicated that it would pay slightly more than half of what the government had told Gambians over the radio.
[69] The production of cash and food crops fluctuated considerably between 2000 and 2007, and remained low on average (see IMF 2008:table 7, p.48).

the campaigns have yet to show any real benefits for ordinary rural households struggling with a lack of subsidies and uncertain marketing conditions[70] (Wright 2004:235-7, 244-8).

Even if more Gambians were to go back to the land, land scarcity has become a problem over the last three decades. Between 1973 and 2003, the population of the Upper River region has more than doubled and Sabi is now at least five times larger than it was in the 1930s, hosting more than 5,000 people (Republic of The Gambia 1976, 2006). A larger population tends to farm more land, but none is available on the Gambian side today. Back in the colonial days, people used to go south into Senegal to clear new land and establish seasonal farming villages, which later became permanent settlements. The last villages were established in the 1950s, and progressively people either settled across the border or gave up making farming villages. In contrast to long-distance migration, short-range re-settlement for agricultural reasons appears to have declined, and villages seem to have become ever more permanent homes. The greater availability of bicycles and donkey carts has improved mobility to and from fields, but in general Sabi people have given up some of their Senegalese plots in favour of those that are closer to the village. Distant fields are more difficult for controlling stray grazing animals, and generally speaking villagers tend to prefer not to go too far[71]. As a consequence, fallow periods have reduced if not disappeared: farmers often alternate grains and groundnuts on the same land year after year, and they now complain that soil fertility is dramatically decreasing and fertilisers are not within reach of everybody's pockets.

Some farmers mention that they are short of labour because of emigration, but opinions and evidence in this respect are not univocal. On the one hand, the population of the rural villages has kept on growing, and the greater availability of animal traction has freed labour (Kuye, et al. 2006:10). Moreover, it was not uncommon to employ *strange farmers* to replace the absent migrants during the agricultural cycle in the transition phase in the 1960s and 1970s; this occurred especially in those households that already invested in commercial agriculture[72]. On the

[70] In a village I visited in the Upper River Region, some inhabitants complained that a successful onion producer based in the village was contracted by the government to farm 400 km west, in the Kombo. Having lost their agricultural entrepreneur, the villagers resumed farming millet on the onion fields. The political character of the 'Back to the land' campaign is perhaps most visible in the President's village, which has turned into a extensive farm where several hundred volunteers/supporters come and work each year. As an alimentary 'policy', rice and other crops produced at the farm are donated or sold at a low price. A part of the plantations supplies raw ingredients to the President's herbalist program. Finally, a large scale, mechanised farm also began in 2008 in the Kombo area through the initiative of the Kharafi Group, the Kuwaiti multi-national company which has secured large contracts to build Gambian roads and infrastructures. For a manifesto of initiatives and achievements in the agricultural sector under the APRC regime see: The Daily Observer (2008).

[71] Baker (1995:80) finds similar changes in rice agriculture in lower Gambia.

[72] Mpamara Kamara, 19 February 2007, Sabi.

other hand, the more volatile presence of young men going away to find work or visas to travel abroad is said to have affected farming and households' decisions to farm even in Sabi[73].

The decline of labour in-migration should be mentioned as an additional factor in agricultural stagnation and labour shortage. *Strange farmer* arrivals have inexorably waned in the last three decades. Besides the fact that working in commercial agriculture has become less remunerative, fewer men leave their country to come to rural Gambia and they tend to go to the coastal cities in the dry season, and eventually settle more permanently there[74]. A good number of Sabi households do not take in *strange farmers*; some host one or two at the most. Household heads have become wary of guest farmers because these have become more free-lance day labourers than tributary labourers. Villagers (men and women) pay them cash on an occasional contract basis (*sassi*) to weed, uproot and harvest according to need. Oftentimes, *strange farmers* do not bother to cultivate their plots; instead, they tour the countryside in search of contracts, so it has become more difficult to pin them down to work on their 'landlord days'[75].

Wright (2004:230) mentions that 'modernisation', mainly education and urban life, has made youths more resistant to farm work (in western Gambia). However, in Soninke villages, the low rates of schooling (YWAM 2006), and the flow of young boys being sent back home from the diaspora to farm for their families do not entirely support his argument (see also Sections 2.2.3-4). Mostly uneducated and marginalised in public sector employment, youths have been drawn to the 'modern' prospect of looking for money, following the example set by one or two generations of international migrants before them. They go not only to the city, but also to West Africa and especially to America and Europe. Indeed, the opposite argument is also true: the gloomy prospects of agriculture have shaped youths' aspirations to leave.

In Sabi, very few households have sufficient stock to reach the rainy season, so they have to buy rice (see Section 3.2). Although the rainy season was hard even before the 1970s, villagers agree that rice imports were much less frequent than now (when most people eat rice once a day). As remittances have had to be provided on a more regular basis, going abroad to replenish the household granaries has become the most frequent, and socially acceptable,

[73] Bafula Kamara, 15 December 2008, Sabi. Kamara explained that soon after the harvest of coarse grains, youths would leave for the city, leaving few people to farm the cotton.

[74] See Swindell (1982) for changing patterns of mobility and settlement, and Van Dokkum (1992:table 1.2) for statistics. In Basse, there is a growing population of Guinean labour and commercial migrants.

[75] Some migrants tour the countryside in teams and hire themselves out to the people in the fields, agreeing a payment for a given amount of work (e.g. weeding a plot). Contracts usually do not last for more than 2-3 days. Some labourers are also attracted to fruit and vegetable horticulture in which similar contracts are available at the beginning of the dry season.

motivation for travel. This is confirmed by other parts of Gambia, where young men migrate to supplement production. Following up on her original fieldwork, Baker has noticed that:

> Some 20 years ago urban remittances were used to fund the education of village children, pay for family celebrations and funerals, and fund travel abroad for family members. Today, in villages in the Western Division, remittances are essential to buy food, usually rice, and money available for such purchases is declining in the face of increasing numbers to feed. (Baker and Edmonds 2004:195)

As a result of the various constraints described so far, agriculture has stagnated since the 1980s[76]. In response, Sabi farmers have tended to concentrate on household food production and sell groundnuts produced in the communal fields mostly for collective consumption. Young men work less and less on individual fields where cash crops were produced[77]. They go to the city to find money, and certainly hope to migrate abroad in order to support their households back home.

1.7.2 Regional Trade

The establishment of the Marketing Board in the 1950s meant greater expansion and centralisation of the marketing system to the advantage of licensed agents, thereby continuing the trend of the marginalisation of indigenous traders (Mbodji 1992:223-4). This probably played a role in the diversification of migratory networks and destinations in the transitory period. European companies progressively pulled out of the country but the monopoly of imported merchandise and foodstuff continued under the public National Trading Company, created in 1973 (Barrett 1988:80). The headquarters thus remained in Banjul, whose commercial vitality increased in the 1970s.

In response to the vagaries of climate and agriculture, the government began to turn the small size of the country into an advantage, dreaming of transforming it into the 'Singapore of Africa' (Sall and Sallah 1994:128). Rice, sugar, textiles, tomato paste and other goods imported at low tariffs were thus re-exported to Senegal and the countries of the interior lacking seaports or keeping customs high to protect their industry. The re-export trade has not been a state monopoly (especially after structural adjustment), thus leaving room for African traders. Still, however, the major stakeholders have been a restricted number of Banjul-based importers with

[76] On different views concerning the issue of stagnation in agriculture cf. Kuye et al. (2006:10)
[77] In Chapter 3, I provide more details about the organization of household production.

sufficient capital and connections with the government. Then there is a network of Mauritanian wholesalers and traders, and of Senegalese trader-transporters which distribute to the region (Lambert 1994:85-7). Thanks to the capital accumulated abroad, some Soninke returnees have managed to become prominent importers in Banjul, but few of them have participated in the transport and commercial networks linking the coast with the Upper River Region.

In the 1980s, structural reforms boosted the re-export trade in Gambia (Sall and Sallah 1994:127-31), which resulted in several trucks going to Basse and then down to the Kolda region and Guinea-Conakry. The opposite direction also became an important commercial route for foodstuffs. About halfway between Velingara and Kolda, the town of Diao Be has become the main regional market in the whole region for agricultural produce (especially from Guinea-Conakry) and processed products (palm oil, dried fish, etc.). Wholesale and retail traders come to Diao Be from major urban centres, including Dakar (Fanchette 2001). Basse is one node at the cross-roads of these commercial networks. The town has once again become a bustling commercial centre that has attracted Guinean skilled and unskilled workers, as well as traders from Mauritania and even others from further away, such as the Nigerians, who sell spare parts for vehicles.

The Basse-Velingara road next to Sabi has thus been very busy, but trucks do not stop in the village. Here the effects of the re-export trade have been limited. Cut off from dwindling regional trading networks, cross-border trade has not been insignificant, but it is barely comparable to the colonial days. At the end of the 1970s, a weekly market (*lumo*) and market place was established in Sabi. Weekly markets at border towns are important nodes of the marketing system while the state controlled commerce was rolled back under neoliberal restructuring (Fanchette 2001). The *lumo* supplies goods to rural districts and represent places where goods from trucks are divided into smaller loads and smuggled across the border (Lambert 1994:235). In the 1980s, some Sabinko ran thriving stores in Sabi, sometimes with the financial help of migrant relatives. It is said that as many as twenty local Fula men with their bicycles could be seen in the evening near one of these stores, buying goods and ready to take them across the border as soon as darkness hid their journeys through the bush paths. The Fula have continued to 'ride-smuggle' goods along bush tracks they know well, but villagers have mostly withdrawn from stores and boutiques. Credit problems and redistributive pressures caused by declining rural incomes have discouraged them from business (cf. Section 4.2.2). In addition, when in 1989 Senegal and Mauritania clashed and reprisals on Mauritanian stores ensued, some traders came to Gambia. As there was competition in the village than in Basse, some have

eventually come to border villages. Guinean migrants have also come in numbers to Sabi to open retail stores, bakeries and mechanical workshops (see Fig. 3.1).

Even in Banjul many of the Soninke importers have preferred to diversify their business or decrease the portion of business capital invested in the usual re-export goods (rice, sugar, tomato paste, etc.). They complain that business is not as good as before[78]. The 50% devaluation of the Franc CFA in 1994 suddenly made goods priced in Gambian Dalasi more expensive for traders coming from neighbouring countries. The advent of the military regime in the same year scared some traders out of business, while the government's subsequent measures have sometimes had disruptive effects on trade. Most importantly, countries like Senegal became free market economies in the 1990s as required by the IMF and the World Bank, which made goods imported through Dakar more competitive than before (Sall and Sallah 1994:134).

Seasonal labour migration has remained an important activity among Upper River people. In the dry season many young men leave their villages and flock to the Gambian capital area to find work. The completion of the south bank road in 1981 made travel a matter of four to five hours by car, or a little longer with the Gambia Transport coach stationed in Sabi itself. Senegalese regional towns became less popular labour destinations as youths could rely on relatives in the city, lodging with them and sometimes working for them. In this period investments and returns of migrants multiplied the compounds, construction sites and the enterprises in Serekunda, hence the opportunities to find employment. Even when road conditions deteriorated in the late 1990s, Serekunda remained the main destination.

In sum, since the 1970s, due to institutional, marketing, labour and environmental constraints, agriculture and trade have ebbed. Villagers have not reacted by moving their villages to more fertile areas, as in the past; they have increased emigration. Locally, the link between trade migration and agriculture has undergone significant transformation. Farmers are not generally able to generate a surplus to trade, and trading networks to and from Sabi are marginal compared to the past. Soninke young men have continued to combine mobile and immobile livelihoods on a seasonal basis, but this is hardly more than a subsistence strategy to cope with agricultural deficiencies. Finally, I must add that, while they have been responsive to any opportunity and favourable condition in agriculture, the rural Soninke have not diversified into other economic activities. Their levels of education remain low and their presence in the civil service or other professions is limited.

[78] Musa Njay, 6 December 2006, Serekunda.

1.8 CHANGING PATTERNS OF TRADE AND LABOUR EMIGRATION

While agriculture and regional trading networks declined under environmental changes and neoliberal governance, international migration became consolidated. After the 1970s, labour migration to Western countries acquired further significance, and commercial migrations to West Africa slowed down. Being more entrenched in the rhythms of capitalist production, travellers are now less and less likely to return for one or two rainy seasons and farm as did some of the early West African migrants. They tend to stay away for longer, sometimes for their entire working life. This has greatly contributed to disentangling travel and agriculture. Another important transformation on which I wish to dwell here is the increasing separation between 'home' and destination, particularly the legal and economic 'barriers' to international trade and labour emigration.

The transitory period of migration was characterised by self-made travellers, those who in Francophone areas would be called *aventuriers*. Some of them have become very rich men. To mention but one famous example: Bassiru Jawara, allegedly the richest man in Gambia now, began as a cigarette peddler in Sabi and reached Sierra Leone in the late 1950s with only a few pounds in his pocket. A few years later, he built the current mosque in Sabi (around 1970) and bought hotels, bakeries and properties in Banjul. Many other *diamantaires* and trade migrants sponsored their travel by selling groundnuts or by going to Senegal to work as *strange farmers* for one or two seasons. Once in Sierra Leone, they could rely on relatives, villagers and co-ethnics to learn the trade and possibly strike it lucky with diamonds even with little initial capital. Diamonds in particular have held out the promise of sudden wealth for many Soninke and other migrants from the region—even if the tricky and erratic nature of the business has left many migrants bankrupt or simply set them to a pointless search for the gemstone (Fig.1.2).

Fig. 1.2 – 'Diamond Culture'?

A 'diamond' made from the silver paper of a cigarette pack

Within a few years from the start of the diamond rush, however, the small-scale diamond sector in countries like Sierra Leone became dominated by merchant capital[79]. By the early 1960s, shallow deposits that could be easily exploited became exhausted, and mining operations shifted to higher terraces, requiring larger teams of workers, appropriate equipment and eventually machines (water pumps, washing plants, etc.). Zack-Williams (1995:145ff) has called this the 'supporter period', whereby the licensed miner, having access to a plot but insufficient capital to mine it, was sponsored by a third party in exchange for a share of the winnings[80]. Many Soninke migrants thus became supporters: they employed a team of diggers, fed them and equipped them, and provided the machines if needed. Some of the most successful ones became full-time diamond dealers, even though dealers often supported mining operations. Relying on networks was essential in order to acquire adequate capital to enter the trade and conduct informal transactions. Some migrants sent money home to pay for the journey of their junior

[79] In 1956 diamond areas were divided between those reserved for large scale exploitation by state-private companies and those for small scale licensed miners (van der Laan 1965:16-7).

[80] A common agreement among the parties was to share the profits according to the following percentages: tributors (digging team as a whole) 25%, licence holder 25%, supporter 50%. However, the inexperience of non-traders in pricing diamonds was crucial, giving a great advantage to the supporter, and the dealer. Diggers were usually worst off in the transactions (cf. Zack Williams 1995:151-4).

brothers. Once the latter joined their seniors, they started off by supervising mining operations, and making sure diggers did not steal the gems. When they accumulated the necessary capital and knowledge, they could stand on their own[81].

On the other hand, chain migration had the effect of overcrowding business niches. By the 1980s, diamond deposits were becoming scarce and business became more capital intensive and saturated with people. The supply of art objects was also becoming scarce and Western demand fell (Steiner 1994:7). Some established traders began to diversify their business. For instance, Oussenu Yafa, the current Gambian honorary councillor in Ghana, left the art trade and turned to exporting pineapples, an important commercial production in Ghana. By the mid 1980s, he was already becoming involved in importing electronics and goods from East Asia. As African markets were increasingly flooded by Asian products, in fact, a new commercial fervour directed West African traders eastward: electronic goods (Dubai and Hong Kong), clothing, shoes, hardware (e.g. tiles) and kitchenware (China, especially Guangzhou), furniture and building materials (especially Jakarta). At first, traders would fly to Hong Kong and come back with suitcases and boxes full of watches and other electronic equipment (see e.g. Ebin 1993:103-4); then wealthy traders leapt into the business and started ordering bales and whole containers. Traders have begun to use the internet to select products and make their orders, even though business continues to a great extent to operate through networks and business middlemen in situ who have good contacts with suppliers and manufactures (cf. Whitehouse 2007:108).

Import business has continued to grow. Political instability in the 1990s dealt a serious blow to the 'classic' destinations in West Africa, especially in diamond rich countries. Civil strife in Liberia (1989) and Sierra Leone (1992) put an end to diamond ventures for great many migrants. In 1997, the political situation in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) collapsed, leading several migrants out of the country. Angola has remained the main diamond frontier since then, although the Lunda regions have been highly insecure, because of civil war first and repeated expulsions of strangers later (De Boeck 2001; Pearce 2004; Bredeloup 2007:122). Thus many migrants stay in the Angolan capital, a thriving commercial hub fuelled by the country's petro-dollars. Soninke and other West African migrants, and also Somalis, import from all over the world, including agricultural produce from Europe and South Africa. Other commercial hubs in Central Africa (Kinshasa, Point-Noire) and in the ECOWAS area (Cotonou, Lomé) have attracted traders. For instance, Benin, an *état entrepot* (Igue and Soule 1992), maintains a flourishing trans-border commerce with Nigeria (where petrol and

[81] A number of migrants without money were middlemen trying to scrape a profit by leading the transaction between the parties or by selling a diamond to a buyer on behalf of the owner.

manufactured goods are cheap) and the countries in the interior such as Niger (Galtier and Tassou 1998; Beuving 2006). In this respect, Banjul-Serekunda does not differ much from Cotonou, where similar re-export policies apply. As noticed, the re-export trade in Gambia has attracted return migrants, or perhaps one should say entrepreneurs re-investing in the country.

Not unlike other sectors, import commerce is capital intensive and highly stratified. The lower positions in the market and the retail stores are crowded, and not only by migrants: increasingly the unemployed autochthons revert to the booming 'informal' economy, the trans-border and transnational trade, to cope with the neoliberal retrenchment of public employment and the economy as a whole[82] (cf. Meagher 2003:61; Bertoncello and Bredeloup 2004:66). The sophisticated knowledge needed to deal in diamonds or antiquities is perhaps less of an obstacle in the import business; for instance, bales and containers of Asian clothes are sometimes sold out before they arrive in the port[83]. Moreover, young men need no visa to go to ECOWAS countries and transport costs are relatively affordable. Yet the need for substantial start-up capital remains a major barrier. Although a number of youths still go and try to do business from scratch in West Africa, many others would not move if they had no secure contacts at their destination from whom they could obtain start-up credit. The fervour around trade migration has not entirely evaporated, but the news of trading opportunities from West Africa are scarcely triggering the rush they did in the old days, and continental migrations have certainly slowed down after the 1970s.

In contrast, labour migration to Europe and America has gained momentum since the 1980s. After the first pioneers had established the first bases, waged work in Western countries has become a major alternative to the erratic diamond, art and other trades. Some established *diamantaires* advised and sponsored their sons and junior brothers to go to Europe or the US and search for a regular salary instead of joining their enterprise. According the household survey I conducted in Sabi, almost 58% of the village migrants are currently in either Europe or the US (Table 3.1).

Since the 1980s, migration to the West has attracted a much wider audience than expert migrants like the Soninke. Economic and environmental constraints have pushed more young people into international emigration. In Senegal, the success of mostly uneducated, rural migrants—the *modou modou*—has convinced urbanites and civil servants burdened by inflation

[82] Beuving (2004) provides an account of the segmented second-hand car market in Cotonou. He shows that despite the fervour accompanying Benin's deregulation of commerce and the many youth trying to scrape a living from the 'informal' economy, the profits they can make are often marginal, and they lack access to resources (especially credit and licences) to climb up the hierarchy of the trade.
[83] Conversation with Ibrahima Silla, January 2008, Sabi.

and unemployment to turn to migration (Riccio 2007:esp. ch. 2; Tall 2008:44-7). Similar difficulties in the rural and, increasingly, the urban economy in Gambia have induced many households to invest in international migration. Spain, France, the US and Germany have been the most popular destinations for the Soninke. A number of Gambians in the US have acquired degrees and work as skilled labourers or professionals, but the Soninke tend to occupy unskilled positions in the industrial and service sectors. Agricultural work in Catalonia has continued, though migrants have mostly shifted to more permanent occupations on construction sites and in factories and the service sector.

Needless to say, labour migration to Europe and America involves several barriers too. It is expensive and requires a visa. As for the cost, many youths maintain that if they had a visa, they would quickly find a sponsor amongst kin members or acquaintances. Once they reach their destination they will be likely to adapt to whatever job they are offered and will quickly manage to reimburse the fare, at least in times of economic growth. Restrictive visa conditions are the main problem for them. Since this is an important, and increasingly complex, aspect in young men's trajectory of staying behind, it is worth providing further details about it.

1.8.1 Migration Policies and Governance

The oil shock in 1973/4 set in train a period of restrictive measures on immigrants in traditional countries of immigration such as France (Quiminal and Timera 2002). Southern European countries like Spain kept their doors relatively open until the constitution of the Schengen area in 1985, and its consolidation in the 1990s, which progressively forced member states to harmonise migration policies and external border management. According to some of the migrants I talked to, Spain remained relatively open in the 1990s and early 2000s, a feeling which has been probably fed by periodic regularisations and the possibility of entering the country with a work contract procured by a relative in situ. Yet Spain, like most other countries in Europe, has been one of the main promoters of the security paradigm pervading European border policies, the effect of which has been the exclusion of migrants before, during and after they cross the European frontier (cf. Mezzadra 2001:57-63). The Schengen tourist visa requires a proof of financial deposits and someone who guarantees for the applicant's stay abroad, while regular labour immigration implies having a work contract in advance. In other words, aspirant migrants usually need a close and cooperative relative already abroad, who can arrange the position and the paperwork, and enable them at least to *try* to obtain a visa (Findley and Sow 1998:74; Carling 2002:32). The US have also applied restrictive entry conditions, though most of

my interlocutors pointed out that they could live and work relatively unbothered by the police until the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The 2001 USA Patriot Act has not only made entry into the US harder; it has also increased controls and made it difficult to find a job without a regular work permit. Even in desirable non-European countries like Angola, entry visas are difficult and immigrating illegally is costly.

The European Union has not simply erected a bureaucratic fortress to ward off, and discipline, aliens. In recent years the securitisation of the frontiers has led to an effective externalisation of border controls. Frontex, an EU-funded agency, has taken charge of the coordination of border security operations. Its main target has been the flow of undocumented migrants crossing land and sea borders (Laitinen 2007). The near blockage of Gibraltar has led to the transformation of sea routes, pushing departure points further to the south, to Southern Morocco first, then to Mauritania, Senegal, reaching Gambia in 2006. Boats sail people to the Canary Islands for about 900-1,500 Euros each[84]. Forced to take ever greater risks to reach Europe, thousands of West Africans have embarked on the long journey at sea, resulting in a heavy death toll (Tall 2008:47-50; Willems 2008). Under Frontex, subsidies to source countries, joint patrols and intelligence operations against trafficking networks have contributed to considerably reduce the number of arrivals, down to 9,615 in 2008 from more than 33,000 in 2006[85].

In addition to the suppression of irregular flows, the European Union is working towards a 'global approach to migration' (Falk 2008). Over the last ten years, the migratory question has become a central issue of the EU's and individual member states' diplomatic activity in Africa. European countries have used their commercial power and aid for development to induce African states to sign agreements on migration control and readmission (Gabrielli 2007). Policy makers also envisage implementing 'circular migration' agreements with source states and initiatives to provide youths with alternatives to emigration (Vertovec 2009:119ff). On their part, African states have used their geostrategic position as source and/or transit countries as a bargaining chip with the Europeans to obtain more aid and strengthen their position in international relations (Bensaad 2005; Guiraudon 2009). Visiting Banjul in March 2009 to sign a bilateral agreement with Gambia, the Spanish Deputy Prime Minister María Teresa Fernández de la Vega reiterated that "We have agreed that it is necessary to work towards a regularisation of the migratory flows, but we must also make efforts in the prevention of illegal immigration and in the fight against the [traffickers'] networks" (El Pais 2009). In line with this twofold objective,

[84] These figures were given by informants during the period February-May 2008.
[85] 5,969 migrants were also diverted back or deterred in 2008 (Frontex 2009).

the agreement issued new funds to continue joint costal patrolling and to provide fuel and equipment to the Gambian navy, and budgeted €840,000 for the construction of three skills centres specialising in construction, plumbing, renewable energy and electricity. This followed previous agreements on repatriation and aid [86].

Governance actors have identified skills training and microfinance as two of the main solutions for the many West Africans who lack specific preparation and education, and are apparently left with no prospects in the job market, either at home *or* in Spain, where visa policies are increasingly selecting qualified labour force. In Senegal, some programs have been linked to a 'temporary visa scheme' to provide qualified workforces for Spanish companies, especially in the agricultural, fisheries and catering sectors. By early 2008, 500 temporary visas were issued and 2,700 more program participants were expected to benefit from the scheme (Ministère de la jeunesse et l'emplois des jeunes 2007). Deportees from the Canary Islands were entitled to a special quota of the programs.

Skills training programs acquire further significance in a context like the Gambia, which remains a country of skilled labour immigration[87]. Apart from the commercial opportunities and linkages it offers in the urban sites and to some extent in the rural areas, West African migrants have found jobs as skilled workers in the country. Carpenters, mechanics, bakers, masons, tailors, electrical repairers, and others often come from nearby Senegal and Guinea-Conakry where skills training (formal and informal) seems to be more developed and well entrenched in youths' careers. The numerous graphics/printing and telecommunication shops run by Nigerian nationals show that skilled workers are also required. As we know, this phenomenon is also affecting the rural areas, where the rural drift in the dry season is balanced by masons and carpenters going to the villages to work on the houses financed by migrants. Some Gambian masons and sub-contractors worked initially for urban or transnational Sabinko in the city; satisfied with their job, the migrants contracted them for a building in their home compound as well. Once in Sabi, more contracts became available and a few migrants eventually established themselves more permanently in the village.

Training programs had been in place in Gambia and Senegal before the emergence of boat migration. A more recent development in Gambia than in Senegal, skills centres have complemented the widespread informal apprenticeship in crafts. In addition to the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI, founded in 1983), in 1996 the new government established

[86] In 2007, Spain announced that it would make available 10 million Euros to finance skills training programs and microcredit facilities in Senegal, Mali, Gambia and Mauritania, with Gambia being scheduled to receive one million[86] (Junquera 2007).
[87] Official immigration is estimated at 10% of the population (Republic of The Gambia 2006).

the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSS) to target school drop outs and provide them with skills training in different trades, including agronomy. Trainees are also eligible to microfinance loans to start up their own business at the end of the programs[88]. As under-trained and unemployed youth became one of the main targets of the governance discourse on illegal migration, development organizations have found it a fertile ground for intervention. In April 2008, YMCA Gambia, which was already operating a vocational training centre in Serekunda, launched a four year project on Life Skills and Enterprise Development for Marginalised and Disadvantaged Young People[89]. It aims at "empowering" 1,800 young people countrywide with skills and entrepreneurial facilities. The project is meant to "mitigate against the increase in rural urban drift and youth migration in search for potential opportunities" [90]. Disadvantaged regions are especially relevant to the project, and the Upper River Region alone is allocated a 35% quota of beneficiaries.

What seems to be significant about this aspect of governance discourse and policies is that it is re-invigorating the well-worn discourse on 'keeping people in their place' in the development sector[91] (Bakewell 2008). In this respect, there seems to be a discursive compatibility and synergy between the fight against illegal emigration and the Gambian government's call to go back to the land. In Senegal, the REVA plan (*Retour vers l'agriculture*) was launched as an even more direct response to undocumented emigration and received development aid from abroad (Le Soleil 2006; Willems 2008:290).

Migration has become an important aspect of national politics. In Senegal, youths have stepped up protests and demonstrations. In at least one case, Gambian deportees protested on arrival back in Gambia, and some were arrested (The Gambia Journal 2007). In parallel, 'civil society' organizations and governments in Senegal and Mali have launched awareness-raising campaigns against the risks of illegal emigration. In Gambia, similar, though minor, initiatives began only after I had left the field; in September 2009, the National Youth Council launched a campaign to curb illegal migration (The Point 2009). In truth, the government has tried to discourage young people from emigrating since before boat migration. When it took power in 1994, it encouraged them to stay and engage in the renovation of the country (cf. Bellagamba 2008:256ff). Over the past fifteen years of the Second Republic, the government's rhetoric has

[88] The NYSS recruits a maximum of 200 youth (17-30 year olds) from all over the country each year, though applications exceed the intake. Fifteen areas are provided in conjunction with other service providers such as GTTI and the Kotu Mechanical Workshop. Loans for successful applicants have a ceiling at 80,000 to 100,000 Dalasi (Interview with Musa Mbye, Director of NYSS, 15 April 2008, Serekunda).
[89] The project (2008-2012) is co-funded by the Big Lottery Fund and Y Care International.
[90] YMCA, description of YMCA BLF project, www.ymca.gm/blf.html, accessed 31 March 2009.
[91] Regarding the URR, it seems that the 'migration issue' is a recent entry in the agenda of develpopment organizations.

changed little. Recently it has used the immigration of skilled and unskilled labour into Gambia as an argument against emigration. "How is it possible that one or two foreigners come and make it in this country when we want instead to go to Europe?", President Jammeh thundered during an official speech in 2008[92]. Jammeh clearly points the finger at Gambian youths' attitudes and laziness. He sees the inflow of day labourers, street vendors and petty traders, especially from Guinea-Conakry, with little or no education, as the self-evident proof that one can make money at home even without qualifications. For him, Gambian youths would ostensibly refuse to do odd jobs at home while they are willing to take them up once in Europe; in Gambia, they would rather act as 'big men', but "big men with very shallow pockets", as Jammeh labelled them. Such admonitions reveal more about the political rhetoric of the government than about actual policies to address emigration, which for now amount to little more than exhortations to go 'back to the land' and to engage with the country's opportunities. In contrast to Senegal, the Gambian state has not developed a systematic policy approach to migration.

It is too early to evaluate the implications of recent governance policies for Soninke migration strategies. During my fieldwork, none of my interlocutors or their acquaintances were involved in governance programs or campaigns, and most of them were not aware of their existence. In theory, 'circular migration' agreements could restore the mutuality between mobility and immobility, but such policies are struggling to find any legal and practical application (Carrera and Hernàndez i Sagrera 2009), and so far they have been implemented only in Senegal. Sabi youth would seem a suitable target group for governance actors. The great majority of them do not have a Western education, they are clearly prone to international and urban migration, and they see agriculture as scarcely profitable. At the same time, governance solutions evidently exclude them. In the first place, Gambian youth policy and, consequently, NYSS programs set the age limit for the category of 'youth' at thirty (Government of The Gambia 1998), while the search for potential opportunities, including emigration, is something that goes on well beyond that limit. In addition, NYSS programs require the completion of grade 9 (upper basic school), which most Sabinko do not hold.

In the meantime, the Soninke have responded to restrictive policies by diversifying routes and activities (see Section 4.3.3). Contrary to what policy makers might expect, boat migration has not triggered a rush among the long travelled Soninke. They have found other, more canny and safe ways of reaching America and Europe (cf. also de Haas 2008:1308-9). While West Africa has lost much of its appeal for potential emigrants, the extensive networks spanning the

[92] President Jammeh's speech at the Opening Ceremony of the National Assembly on 30 March 2008, broadcast by GRTS TV.

region have contributed to increasing the chances of young Soninke reaching Europe. Rumour runs quickly along transnational networks and sets many youths on the move, but this time it is less about diamond or beads than visa opportunities—legal, illegal or semi-legal In addition, only the British and American Embassies represent Western countries in Gambia, so that a number of youths are currently all over West Africa looking for a route (*kille*), taking advantage of the hospitality of a co-villager or well-known landlord[93]. This should not lead us to conclude that travelling is easy for them. Most youths fall victim to the current migration regime. Legal barriers to international emigration have made it much clearer where young men stand in the migratory process because they curtail the dynamic transition between staying and moving which characterised past patterns of migration. Travellers can go back and forth, but young men who do not have visas simply cannot.

1.9 DIASPORIZATION AND TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS

An important change in migratory patterns over the last half century has been the growing significance of diasporic communities. Although this is not a new element—Bundu communities were described as nodes of a wider trading diaspora—the extent to which diasporas have developed over the last half century is remarkable. The Sabinko have retained a sense of their Eastern origins, but social ties with Bundu villages have withered and do not affect everyday life. Conversely, today a sizable portion of villagers live abroad or in the Serekunda area, and they maintain close connections with their home communities. Migrants travel to and from their villages, they have relatives, wives and children back home, and they send money and construct houses there. The transfer of some of the villagers across the legal barriers to emigration has gone hand in hand with multiple social ties developing between distant places, thus creating a space of social interaction in-between. Migration is in this sense transnational (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994:7). In other words, whereas mobile and immobile livelihoods have increasingly become distinct as far as international migration is concerned, the interplay between mobility and immobility has continued in other social aspects.

Among the many West-Central African destinations, Sierra Leone has certainly represented the most important one. It was a second home to many Gambian Soninke. As migrants spent more time in the diamond areas, some of their wives began to circulate between

[93] Access to these wide-ranging networks is a support to Soninke migrants-in-transit; it reduces costs and helps them with the maze of paperwork and bureaucratic procedures. This is one reason for the relative success of the Soninke in travelling to Europe.

the URR and Sefadu, Kenema or Bo, and more rarely, Freetown. Some migrants married local women. Some of the children attended school and learnt the diamond trade from their fathers. In Sabi, some villagers sent their children to study in Sierra Leone's Islamic schools or colleges, thanks to relatives abroad, though the opposite flow was always much greater. What also occurred was that parents of affluent migrants used to travel to Freetown for medical treatment much as they go to Serekunda today. When in 1992 civil war broke out, the dream of a second home brutally disappeared. In December of the same year, more than 2,000 Gambians were evacuated from Sefadu as the fighting approached the area (Bredeloup 1999:184), excluding those who had already left or stayed on. Entire households came back, either to Serekunda or to Sabi, and many Sierra Leonean refugees were also hosted in Gambia.

The early 1990s marked a watershed in the human geography of the Soninke diaspora. In 1991, when people were close to fleeing Sierra Leone en masse, Spain regularised the status of illegal aliens. Gambians holding a permit in the Province of Gerona went from 778 to 1,968 that year (Kaplan 1998:101). Fifteen years later the Gambian presence had risen to 7,603 in the province of Gerona alone, and another 4,590 were in the province of Barcelona. With slightly more than 16,000 (regular) expatriates, Gambians constitute the third largest immigrant minority from Sub-Saharan Africa (after Senegal and Nigeria), and the largest in Catalonia, a remarkable statistic for such a small country as Gambia (Government of Spain 2007). In 1992/3, Adriana Kaplan conducted a survey in the Salt area (a town near Gerona) and found that 47% of the Gambian migrants identified themselves as Soninke, 34% as Mandinka, and 17% as Fula (Kaplan 1998:87). Farjas Bonet's (2002:336ff) study of Gambians in Olot, Banyoles and Salt estimated that there were decidedly higher proportions of Soninke in 1998/9. Even relying on Kaplan's figures we notice that the proportion of the Soninke is six times higher among Gambian expatriates than in the home country, where they constitute only 8-9% of the population. This reflects in part the demographic distribution in the URR where many migrants come from, but also the fact that the Soninke arrived early and quickly deployed their networks to reach the new destination.

With migrants returning from Sierra Leone and with other West African countries afflicted by political unrest, the largest expatriate community in Africa is now in Angola[94]. In parallel, a sizeable Soninke community has formed in the Serekunda area. In line with the rates of urbanization in other West African countries, the metropolitan area in the Serekunda area (Kanifing Municipal Council) has grown significantly in the post-colonial period (N'jie 1995).

[94] The Honorary Councillor of The Gambia in Angola, Haji Jawara, estimated at 2,000 the number of Gambians living in Angola (27 February 2008, Serekunda).

Rising property prices and the lively commercial environment have attracted investments from abroad, and eventually a constant flow of returnees since the 1970s. Following the re-settlement of return migrants, spouses and relatives have also taken residence in the city, giving rise to a thriving and growing community and to an intense circulation of people between village and city.

Some of the Mandinka informants who travelled alongside the Soninke stressed the strong sense of solidarity among the latter[95]. It is apparent, however, that solidarity was predicated on different and sometimes diverging kinds of logic—ethnicity, nationality, Islam, village of origin, kinship, etc. In Monrovia, for instance, Gambian nationals tended to stay in one area, while in Sefadu (Kono district, Sierra Leone) many Gambian and non-Gambian Soninke (known as Marka) settled in the same quarter of the town, which apparently the then Paramount Chief had designated for them: the *Marka compound*[96]. The Marka community, headed by a 'chief', operated as a sort of indirect rule institution through which the Paramount Chiefs could handle immigrant-related issues. Early migrants and landlords (*jatigi*) played an important role in community building. The landlord is a diplomatic figure. He weaves ties with local authorities and people, and uses these ties to protect migrants and provide them with services (visas, commercial papers, etc.). It is not a coincidence that the first Marka chief was Kalilu Kamara, the pioneer *diamantaire* among the Gambians[97]. The Gambian state has also leaned on landlords to reach out to the expatriate population. Gambia has never developed a systematic and articulate policy in relation to Gambians abroad, even though the Jawara government worked hard to establish good relations with its West African counterparts[98]. A number of prominent Soninke migrant traders/landlords have become honorary councillors in the postcolonial period. This policy seems to have continued in the Jammeh era, and a number of new honorary councils have been created, often with Soninke migrants being appointed as Gambia's representatives[99].

Village membership has played a decisive role in the development of Soninke communities abroad and in the creation of transnational relations. No better instance of this process can be observed than in France, where the peculiar combination of welfare policies,

[95] Abdullahi Sane, 16 October 2006, Serekunda; Omar Suso, 16 October 2006, Serekunda.
[96] Kisima Juwara, 24 February 2008, Serekunda. The term 'Marka' was probably a weak indicator of ethnic origin, applying to other Muslim Mande traders too.
[97] Modibo S. Silla, 1 March 2007, Sabi.
[98] A High Commission was established in Sierra Leone and in Nigeria. Two monographs (Denton Eyatunde 1998; Touray 2000) document Gambia's foreign policy under President Jawara, but none dedicates in-depth analysis to the role of the diaspora.
[99] In some cases, there has been competition among candidates, showing that the office (and the diplomatic passport) is an important matter. Candidates and their communities have also lobbied the government to create honorary councils in countries where sizeable Gambian communities formed (Oussenu Yafa, honorary councillor in Ghana, 16 January 2008, Numuyel; Haji Jawara, honorary councillor in Angola, 27 February 2008, Serekunda).

urban planning and migrants' residential strategies resulted in the (in)famous *foyers de travailleurs migrants*—welfare estate buildings originally envisaged for North African migrants in the 1950s. Soninke migrants resorted to well worn communitarian strategies based on the blueprint of the village (hierarchical) society (Timera 1996:54; cf. also Manchuelle 1997:123-8) to organize communal life in the *foyer* and sort new arrivals according to their village of origin. The *foyer* became the main site for information, mutual aid, commensality and socialisation (Timera 1996:70-6), a place of both strong internal integration and social marginalisation from the rest of French society, with the complicity of the state and industrial interests (Quiminal 1991:83-4).

This combination of policies and migrants' residential patterns was rarer elsewhere. In Catalonia, migrants do not live in *foyers* but in flats and they have settled more sparsely throughout the northern provinces. Nevertheless, both Kaplan (1998) and Farjas Bonet (2002) show that chain migration and family reunions from Upper River villages created significant clusters of migrants from the same villages.

For instance, Mataró, the capital of the *comarca*[100] of Maresme, has become a popular destination for the Sabinko. The first migrant to settle here was Juju Sumbundu, an educated man originally from my host compound in Sabi, who arrived in Mataró in 1979. Juju hosted a number of migrants from Sabi in the 1980s, helped them find work and accommodation in town and later played a leading role in associational life among Gambian and Sabi expatriates, working closely with the city council to promote cooperation projects in Gambia[101]. In 1983, Gambian migrants founded the *Associació Club Jama Kafo*, and six years later he led Sabi villagers alone to form the *Associació Cultural Sabusire*[102], which gathers subscriptions and donations from Sabinko across Spain.

[100] The *Comarca* is an administrative unit, roughly equivalent to a district, of the autonomous Catalan provinces. Maresme is on the coast, between the Costa Brava and Barcelona. Mataró, its capital, has about 119,000 inhabitants.
[101] Juju Sumbundu, July 2007, Mataro (conversation during a visit to Mataro).
[102] *Kafo* is a Mandinka word meaning association, and it is commonly used in Gambia; *jama* means people, crowd in Mandinka. *Sabusire* is a Soninke word meaning 'good luck'.

Fig. 1.3 – Generations of Migrant Transnationality

Sabi central mosque: built by a diamantaire, refurbished and modernised by hometown associations in Europe and the US

The *Associació Cultural Sabusire* is emblematic of hometown associations' transnationality. Village associations are used to collecting regular contributions among migrants for an emergency and development fund (accidental fires, floods, wells, mosque, pirogues, etc.) in the home villages. Their dynamism has captured the attention of development organizations and state agencies seeking partners to implement and co-finance projects[103] (Timera 1996:72). In Mataró, the City Council has progressively invested in international cooperation and collaboration with migrant associations, and since 1996 the city's Solidarity and International Cooperation Municipal Council has been supervising activities and projects. Juju has been representing Sabusire in the Council (see Ajuntament de Mataró 2003). Since 1989 the *Associació Cultural Sabusire* has been working to develop a health centre in Sabi. The premises of the centre were finally completed in 2003-4 thanks to a contribution of €26,000 from the Mataró Council (Ajuntament de Mataró 2003, 2004).

Meanwhile, Sabi hometown associations in other countries have worked on different projects. The Sabi association in France has focused on the age old problem of the Sabi 'swamp' not retaining pluvial water from flowing downstream (Fig. 1.1). It has sponsored the construction of a dam, but unfortunately this was circumvented and spoiled by the powerful streams flooding the area during heavy rains. Sabi people in America have worked out arrangements with traders in Gambia and send money to buy stocks of rice bags at a wholesale rate, which are then sold in Sabi without any mark-up being applied, de facto subsidizing the price of rice as a pro-poor welfare policy. Hometown associations are also important in Africa; many have emerged in Serekunda since the late 1980s. Sabi people there are financing the construction of an Arabic school (*madrasa*) in the village.

Transnational (and translocal) relations denote an active presence of migrants in their communities. At the individual and household level, the migrants' presence is seen through the remittances, vehicles, goods and the buildings that migrants construct in their compounds, as well as through the spouses, children and other relatives with whom they maintain close contact thanks to telephone communication. In the past, farmer-traders too used to invest in assets and prestige goods that enhanced their presence and standing in the community. But they did so mainly upon actual return to the village, and above all they did this in the village. In contrast, in the last thirty years more and more migrants have spent their savings on properties or entrepreneurial ventures in the city, not unlike other migrants in the region (cf. Barro 2008; Tall

[103] This can be seen as part of a more general shift in governance discourse. The dwindling presence of the state under neoliberal restructuring and the growing importance of migrant remittances in local economies have shifted the attention of funding agencies and developers to migrants as possible partners in development (Caglar 2006; Portes, Escobar and Radford 2007)

2009). They have shunned agricultural investments, and this has contributed to breaking the complementary relation between travelling and farming. However, there are still exceptions. In villages like Numuyell, migrants invest in commercial horticulture, and in Sabi fertilisers and tractor-ploughing are often paid with remittances. A couple of migrants in Sabi have also sent tractors, which yield high profits when hired out for ploughing.

In sum, diasporisation both reflects and accentuates the changing patterns of mobility and immobility over the last century. Travelling has become a prominent activity, increasingly an autonomous one from an agricultural and village-based economy. At the same time, expatriates are socially present in the village, and they often organize themselves so as to maintain a village frame in their diasporic life. In many ways, the presence of all such movements and connections to and from the village heightens not only the fact that villagers share much social life across a distance, but also the fact that those who remain on the village side of the transnational field are *staying behind*, and that may be excessively difficult for them to physically reach the other side.

II
Staying Behind

The transformation of migratory patterns over the last half century has made it more evident that to stay in Sabi is to stay behind. To describe the physical and social setting of the village is to immediately acquire a sense of the dynamic interplay between 'here' and 'there'. Everyday life is entangled with long-distance relations, and villagers' perceptions are influenced by the social presence of migrants. As a consequence, villagers try and make sense of what staying behind means and implies. Staying behind involves different and competing understandings of where and why people stay, and what they are and do in relation to the travellers and other people who have moved to Serekunda. Stayers are often mobile between village and city, and their opinions about staying behind oscillate between perceiving their role as positive and authentic, and feeling the burden of being left behind to face poverty. Proceeding from the point of view of Sabinko ordinarily residing in the village, this chapter will delineate the spatial, social and semantic boundaries of staying behind, laying the foundations for understanding the trajectories of young men who remain in their country.

2.1 Basic Semantics of Migration

One striking thing about Soninke migration is that despite its historical depth and social width, it has not generated a rich 'culture of migration' in the sense of popular representations in the visual arts, music, festivals, etc.[1]. Travel is neither mythologized nor framed as a burning societal plague. It is simply a normal aspect of social life. As such, it is inscribed in the bedrock of semantic categories which orient representations of space and movement. Before I analyse the meanings of staying behind, I thus find it useful to provide a basic guide to the Soninke terms and expressions used for talking about migration.

[1] Some Soninke bards or praise-singers narrate and sing about the gests of wealthy traders, *diamantaires* and migrants. Travelling per se is not usually the main subject.

'Travelling' or *terende* describes particular instances of spatial mobility. It comes from the verb *nan tere* (to travel, to walk), which is semantically broader than the noun *terende*; while most journeys outside one's ordinary place of residence are generally described as 'to travel', *terende* is generally associated with a more specific activity. *Terende* is somehow a mission, or a series of missions according to the model of circular migration that prevailed until the 1970s. It is a quest for something (*fo mundiye*), the something (*fo*) being primarily money (*xalisi*), but with experience and knowledge (*tuwaaxu*) also being important elements of 'travelling'. The word *voyasi*, adapted from the French *voyage*, is sometimes used in place of *terende*, while the noun *aventure*, a popular term in Francophone Africa, is more rarely employed. Instead of *aventure*, people use the word *hustling* or to *hustle*, which seems to be popular in Anglophone Africa. *Hustling* substantially describes the act of *xalisi mundiye*. It conjures up the image of a hard working man who tries in a smart and determined way to obtain something (wage or profit) from his work, overcoming obstacles and adapting to new opportunities and conditions[2]. In other words, *hustling* or *xalisi mundiye* is closely associated with *terende*, but we should be careful not to conflate 'travelling' with the 'quest for money', as I make clear in Chapter 4.

Travelling is a quest for money *and* for knowledge that occurs outside a place called 'home', *kaara*. As one might expect, *kaara* has more than one meaning, according to a scale of 'homeness'. At the most basic level, *kaara* is the father's compound, so the place of origin is defined as the place of (social) birth. For example, a married woman living in her husband's compound and going to visit her natal compound in the same village will describe her visit as going to her *kaara* (*n fai telle o kaara*). At a higher level, *kaara* means village, and at a still higher one it means home country. By way of semantic extrapolation, it is the place where kin settle (*taaxu*) in a more or less permanent way. One man in Sabi described his father's village as the place where "I am not a stranger", and as an example he related an incident with the police in Velingara. He had no papers with him on that occasion; he was thus a foreigner, but above all he was a stranger, for the police were unable to identify him as a 'local' even though Sabi is only twenty kilometres away from Velingara[3]. The reference to the weak status of 'strangerhood' is implicit in the classification of what lies beyond the *kaara*, that is, *tunŋa*. Dantioko's (2003) lexicon defines *tunŋa* as "le pays d'exode" (the land of exile); it means a foreign land, not so much a foreign country per se, but a place where one is unknown and cannot claim ties with the land (cf. Konate 1997; Whitehouse 2003, 2007). Thus ideally it would be possible, as

[2] Women too *hustle*, but the idea of *hustling* outside one's place of residence is usually associated with men only.
[3] Although nation building in Gambia has been weak, it has surely made an impact on the Sabinko people's perceptions of *kaara*. Even though the village is only a few hundred metres away from the border, there is no doubt that the villagers feel Gambians.

Whitehouse (2003:Fig. 1, p. 24) has done, to chart localities according to their geographical distance (one axis) and social distance (the other axis) from the village.

The specific connotation that *terende* confers on spatial mobility—the quest—is perhaps the reason why terms like *terera* (the place of travelling, or migrant destination) and *terendengunne* (lit. travelling bush or field) are more frequently used than the more generic *tunŋa*. Still, the compound word *terende-n-gunne* conjures up some of the typical images associated with travelling to a foreign land, comparing it to the bush, that is, a place that lies outside the (civilised) space of the village. My collaborator Bakauru explained *terendengunne* to me once: "travelling is like going to the bush to look for something [*fo mundiye*]. You go and look for firewood, or to farm your crops, but you don't know what you might find: a snake, a wild beast,…". Following Bakauru's metaphor, travelling means going off to places of potential material abundance and at the same time potential dangers. When leaving the *kaara*, one is exposed to the perils of strangerhood[4] (Whitehouse 2007). Whilst abroad, migrants may be tempted by different lifestyles and immoral behaviours, a risk often epitomised by the West: Once seduced by the bright lights of Europe and America, the migrant will forget about home and his family. However, harassment, deportation, humiliation and conflict variously experienced by Soninke migrants throughout the world over the last fifty years of international travelling have reminded them that is safer to keep ties with home—the place where one is not a stranger. Many of my informants would agree with Whitehouse's (2007) view that 'exile knows no dignity'. The foreign land gives little honour to those who try to integrate, so that the migrant has to eventually make a name for himself at home by contributing to the wellbeing of his family and of his village society.

As a corollary, once 'something' is found, it is important to bring it back home. As travelling is regarded as a quest, its outcome is evaluated according to what the traveller has brought back. This is well entrenched in customary expressions that accompany even minor and short missions between Sabi and Basse. When someone leaves, he is bid farewell with '*an na in falla* [you should bring me a present]'; upon return, he (or she) is (rhetorically) asked '*an do manni ri* [what did you come with]?' Bringing (and sending) back goods and money is of course a moral imperative in relation to household economy and members.

Coming back with knowledge and experience is no less important. As in other parts of Africa (for example Cassiman 2009), seeing is associated with insight, particularly when

[4] The stranger is a recurrent figure in African societies. The weakness and simultaneously the power of the stranger lies in the fact that he/she is on the boundary between the inside and the outside of society (Shack, Skinner and Challenor 1979; Jansen 1996).

speaking of travel[5]; it widens the horizons of experience through discovery. Travelling is conducive to 'awareness' (*wulliye*, literally awakening, from *nan wulli*, to wake up, open the eyes), a degree of realisation about how the wider world works. Travelling thus requires an open and active stance, the kind of cosmopolitan attitude that Diouf (2000) also finds among Murid traders (cf. also Riccio 2004). If one cannot fully integrate, there is still a premium on learning the language and the way of life of the places one visits. In Gambia, the word *semester*—possibly adapted from the imagery associated with international students—is often employed to refer to a person who has travelled and acquired a degree of knowledge. It is closely associated with travelling to Europe and America. While the term *hustler* describes a hard-working traveller, the label *semester* applies to migrants displaying Western accessories, lifestyle and sophistication, and sometimes attracting criticism for going too 'Western'. In fact, the most appropriate attitude for the 'traveller' is not one of snobbishness but of respect for local knowledge and knowledgeable people. He (or she) has to be a 'rooted cosmopolitan' (Appiah 1997:618; 2005), exploring the world without betraying or forgetting the place where he comes from.

Finally, let me briefly return to the meaning of 'sitting' (*taaxu*), which I have already illustrated in the Introduction to this thesis. Besides the physical action of taking a seat, 'sitting' means to become established, to settle, to be enthroned, to become settled. It can be used in talking about spatial mobility to describe the decision and act of not, or no longer, 'travelling' (*tere*), that is, staying behind. Another relevant expression is *nan tokko falle*, literally 'to stay behind'. The meaning of this expression is again contextual. To stay behind is to stay in relation to people who have 'gone ahead' (*daaga kaane*), whether these people are addressed or implied in discourse. However, *nan tokko falle* can also mean to lag behind, in socio-economic development, in culture and education, or any other general idea of 'modernity'. As we shall see, the overlapping between these two meanings is relevant to some of the images associated with staying in Sabi.

[5] Visual metaphors are common when speaking of discovering something. For instance, divination can be literally translated as (fore)seeing (*fainde*).

Fig. 2.1 – Bringing Back

Architectural styles (Dembakunda village)

2.2 STAYING IN SABI

2.2.1 An Overview of the Village

Travelling the distance between Basse and Sabi can give an outsider the impression of venturing into the 'real' African savannah. Just a mile from Basse station, the old van rides through a bushy and forested area, doing its best to deal with large holes, which in the rainy season turn into small lakes. Less than eight miles ahead, descending the small hill before the village, this impression slowly dissolves. Sabi is announced by the recently built Upper Basic School and, past the bridge over the seasonal stream, the road rises again, leaving the village to the right. A few compounds recently built still follow the roadside. They are delimited by concrete brick fences enclosing big houses with shiny corrugated iron roofs. Once at the marketplace, the van stops and passengers get off. Gambian border post is visible just half a mile away, and taking a little walk in that direction, one can see the Sabi hospital under construction, a project of the Sabi association in Spain; on the other side of the road, the Sabinko in Serekunda are building a *madrasa*. Entering the market area (*lumo*), however, one starts doubting that this is a Soninke village and a rural one at all. The *lumo* is a very cosmopolitan place. The closeness of the border seems to be a good reason for selling goods that can easily be taken across the border. A 'petrol station' (i.e. barrels of petrol) run by a Gambian leads the way into the market. Opposite him, a Sabinke sells rice, some of which is sold on behalf of the Sabi hometown association in the US as a way of subsidising the price for less than affluent Sabinko. A number of commercial stores are found along the two main routes of the market. They sell spare parts, clothes and accessories, food and general merchandise. General and food stores are mostly run by Mauritanians and Guineans. Some Guinean families have settled on the fringes of the *lumo*[6], and they mainly work as mechanics and fitters. There is also a Nigerian pharmacist. Senegalese tailors work until late at night in small workshops, keeping company with *strange farmers* or labourers from Senegal, or with other villagers. A 'video club' shows the Spanish league and the English Premier League, as well as the European, African and World cups. There used to be more clubs screening a varied program of Bollywood and Nollywood movies, and more rarely, Soninke comedies from Senegal and Mali to cater for an older audience. However, since the electricity supply arrived in 2007, many people have been sent private TVs and DVD players by migrants, and now watch movies inside their compound.

[6] These settlements of Guinean skilled artisans and workers are quite common. In fact, there are many of them in Gambisara, whence Sabi mechanics come from.

Leaving the market for the town centre, one retains the impression of a rapidly growing village. In many compounds, fences of millet canes and wooden sticks have been substituted by concrete walls, and round huts with thatched roofs have given way to concrete buildings with corrugated iron sheets on top. As the villagers remark: 'all the buildings that you see in this village, it is travelling that brought them'. Some of the buildings date back to the 1960s and 1970s—the result of diamond, art and other trades in West Africa. But most of these buildings are now buried under newer mansions built by successive generations of migrants. The architecture of brick houses is rather simple: a rectangular building, sectioned along its length into 'houses' (*konpo*) with one or two bedrooms, sometimes including a sitting room. Others are self-contained buildings with only one door leading to a corridor or a parlour surrounded by bedrooms. Some houses sport a flat concrete roofing and a decorated ledge, or colourful stripes of red and yellow paint; sometimes the patronym of the compound and the year of construction are inscribed in the concrete (Fig. 2.1). Solar panels can be spotted here and there, but the arrival of electricity has made cash meters a more usual sight.

In truth, some non-Soninke villages have nice houses, but to many Gambians the concentration of such buildings is higher in Soninke villages. The visual impact is even greater in villages like Numuyell and especially Gambisara. Official statistics state there are 5,035 inhabitants in Sabi, probably a low estimate but high enough to compare it with Gambisara (7,610). The urban layout of these two villages differs considerably. The density of houses in Gambisara is impressive. The garden plots within the enclosure of the compounds (*galle*), where people used to grow some grains and vegetables, have been eaten up by buildings. The internal courtyard (*bera*) is reduced to a minimum, and more storeys are being added to buildings, not only to cope with shrinking space, but as a sign of prestige—Gambisara is famous for having a couple of four-storey buildings. In Sabi, there is only one two-storey building and much more breathing space in and between compounds. In the streets there is still space for seating platforms (*kora*) at crossroads and near compounds, where elders gather and chat in the daytime. People have responded to demographic growth by splitting compounds and settling new ones on the outskirts of the village, expanding the village especially to the south, thanks to the availability of flat land[7] and the rather concessive urban planning of Sabi chiefs (see Map 6).

Other visual props suggest that the connection with migrants occurs on a regular basis (Fig. 2.2 & 2.3). Inside the compounds, some old walls are covered with phone numbers written with chips of charcoal. These public 'phone books' contain Serekunda and international numbers

[7] Sabi has developed on a rather flat area of land, where water can be found at reasonable depths (10-15 metres).

of relatives, although many more numbers are jealously kept in private books, and now on SIM cards. Some households have a Jamano phone, a system of wireless telephone communication, which has now been superseded by mobile telecommunication. Mobile phones hanging from the roof of seating platforms or from trees try to capture the network signal as coverage in the village is bad—people only make telephone calls outside the village. Phone sets sometimes form a bunch at good network points, old mobiles hanging side by side with shiny, fully optioned ones brought from the US or Europe by migrants; indeed, they are one of the most popular presents for relatives, young and old. Some migrant destinations are also written on the walls in *ghettos*, meeting places for male youth. But the names of *ghettos* make up a more complex transnational imaginary inspired by European football teams, Jamaican reggae and American rap, which also result in many teenagers wandering about in large basketball shirts and baggy pants that their brothers sent from abroad or that they buy from clothing shops at the *lumo* (Fig. 5.3)

Reaching the central square, the heart of the Soninke village, one is again immersed in a dynamic interplay between different 'local' and 'extra-local' signs. A mostly empty and sandy square is suddenly interrupted by an electricity post, recently built as part of the government's rural electrification project. Not far from it, a hand pump well built by YWAM, the Christian organization with a branch in Sabi, has replaced the most ancient well in the village, which has collapsed. YWAM also sponsored the construction of a basic health centre on the western side of the square, and it houses the state health worker. Nearby, a Gambian Mandinka immigrant operates a milling workshop. The main attraction of the square is certainly the central mosque, a simple but nice white building with two small minarets and a dome. It was originally built by the magnate Bassiru Jawara and later refurbished and equipped with solar panels and loudspeakers by Sabi hometown associations (Fig. 1.3). At the opposite side of the square is the first Sillakunda in Sabi, the large compound of the village chiefs. To the left of their gate stands the groundnut store built in colonial times, a rather decadent building, now closed, and almost a commentary on the current state of commercial agriculture. To the right of the gate stands one of the first and most prosperous stores in Sabi, which was once run by Tankoro Janke Silla—the current chief (from June 2009)—but is now let to a foreigner—almost a commentary on the once glorious commercial past.

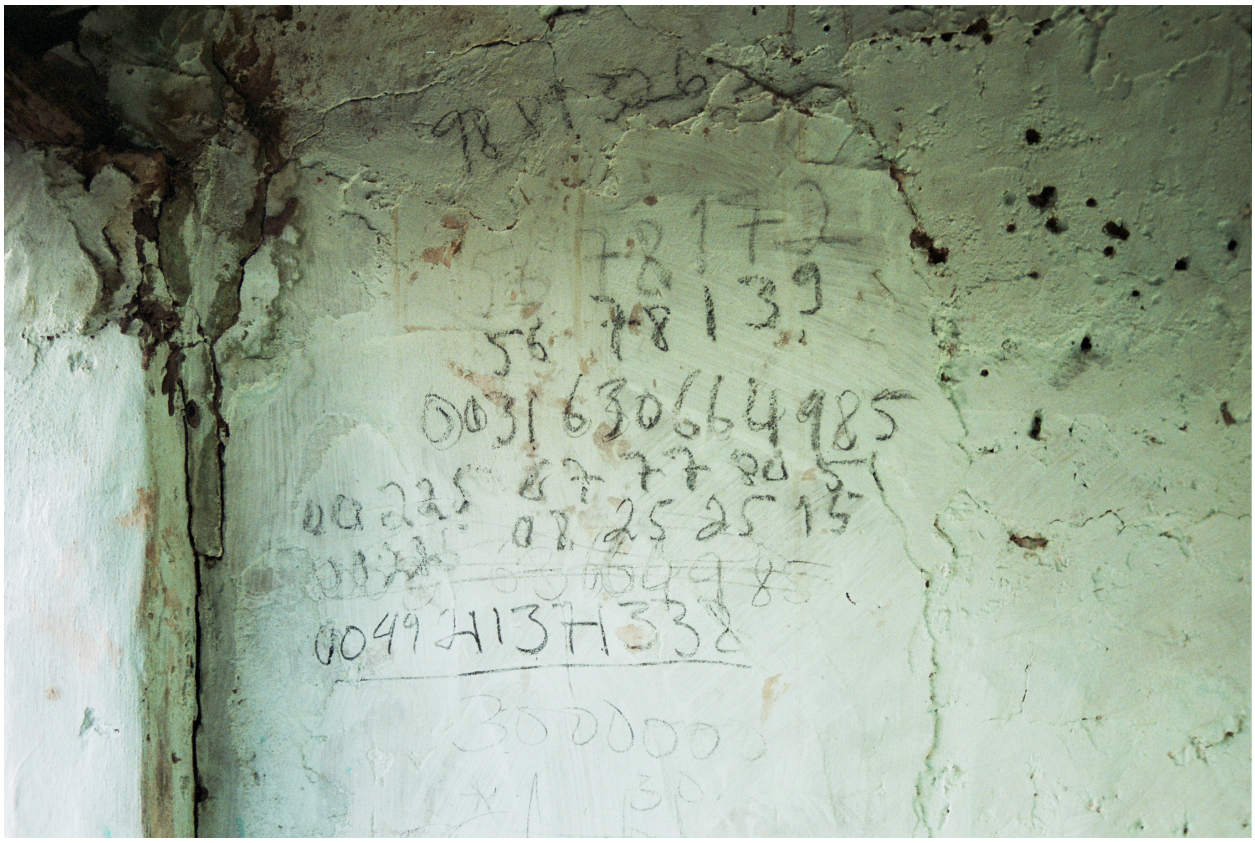


Fig. 2.2 & 2.3 – Staying Connected

Phone numbers on a house wall

(Fig. 2.3)

Making a party for making a film. The two girls' promised husbands have asked and sponsored a film for them to watch in their leisure time in Spain

The layout of the town centre reflects the history of the village. Around the chiefly compound, there is a cluster of neighbourhoods of casted artisans (*nyaxamalo*) divided according to profession. The Sumbundu (leatherworkers) and the Kante (blacksmiths) are among the founding families of Sabi, and they have their compounds here; whereas the Kamara (Islamic praise-singers) have settled between the chiefly Silla and the imam Silla, to the south-west. The latter area, called *kamunun-kanu* (uphill quarter), hosts many compounds of the 'aristocracy' (*hoore*). In general, they are large compounds with large brick houses and electricity, especially when erected on the fringes of the neighbourhood, where more space was available. To the opposite end of the village (north-west), there extends the *komon-kanu*, the 'slave quarter'. It is made up of compounds of varying size, but usually not large ones, sometimes abutting on one another, and with few cultivable land (*galle*) around them. Here, big brick houses are more scarce, something that for some villagers is an unmistakable sign of the lower socio-economic performance of the *komo*[8]. But the villagers are also quick to point out that in several cases the fortunes and vagaries of travelling have turned the tables around, making some *komo* richer than their former masters.

Regardless of economic achievement, political relations are still very much governed by 'traditional' authorities. Village hierarchies seem to be well and thriving. All Sabinko owe allegiance to the Silla, the holders of village chieftaincy. The village chief is the eldest agnatic male among the Silla. He is a state official, charged with village government. People go to him to ask for land, to settle disputes, and to get basic certificates. The Village Development Committee (VDC)—a body created in the 1970s to promote popular participation and as a lynchpin for other development organisations—also distributes offices according to status[9]. The same applies to non-state community-wide organizations, like village associations (*sappa* or *kafo*) and age-based groups and other organizations.

When one considers the socio-political setup of the village, it seems that migrants have exported village traditions rather than brought back novelties. In the diaspora, village hierarchies have been a blueprint for organizing hometown associations, and this has probably contributed to

[8] In the household survey I have conducted in Sabi (see Chapter 3), the results showed that the *komo* (n=10) households have an average of 15% of active males abroad, as opposed to 45% among the 'freeborn' (*hooro* + *nyaxamalo*) (n=10). This may reflect the marginality of the *komo* and the late achievement of autonomy after the abolition of slavery (1930s onwards), which might have delayed their inclusion in migrant networks (writing about the migrants from a Senegalese Soninke community in France Timera 1996:66-8 has also shown the less numerous presence and the more fragmented composition of the kome migrants compared to the hoore ones). The results of the survey do not, however, give a complete picture, because of the random and very limited sample, which in most cases did not include the wealthier *kome* households. In addition, even in the past, relative outsiders and *komo* could also emigrate and take advantage of Soninke trading networks (see Section 1.4).

[9] Factional interests and power structure differences have often been reproduced within VDCs (Davis, Hulme and Woodhouse 1994:257).

reproducing the status quo back home. Relations between village and hometown associations are a more complex matter. Since the nobles represent the association abroad, they often liaise with other nobles at home; but this is not always the case. For instance, Juju Sumbundu (a *garanke*) is the main broker of the Sabi association vis-à-vis Mataró City Council in Spain. Suleyman, his agnatic brother and my host in Sabi, is his main contact in the village. As it happens, Suleyman was Sabi Ward Councillor in the Basse Area Council during my fieldwork. The fact that he is educated and has a long experience in party politics certainly prevailed over other characteristics. Therefore, there are contexts that transcend 'traditional' hierarchies, such as party politics and development.

A complementary form of power in Sabi is religion. Upon settlement, one side of the Silla retained the chieftaincy, the other the imamate. Seven Silla have served as imams in Sabi's history, passing the office down the generations. Apart from leading the believers in prayer, the Silla have also cultivated a scholarly and maraboutic tradition, together with other *hoore* families. Even now, Soninke villages are known for their Quranic schools and their marabouts.

It is not difficult to become aware that migrants bring religious traditions with them when travelling. Most marabouts (*moodinu*) say that migrants phone them or send relatives to divine[10] and help them with job applications, business deals and visa problems, or even ask the marabout to take them out of prison[11]. Young men wishing to travel also resort to marabouts to inquire about their possibilities of travelling and to asking for help in furthering the visa application. If they are about to travel, they may also seek protective charms, as well as prosperity prayers.

However, migrants have brought back 'new' knowledge from abroad. Today, Sabi has a growing and thriving movement of *sunnanko* or *sunnadunko*, people who abide by the Islamic texts and the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed (Sunna) as a form of orthodoxy (Timera 1996; Rialland 1998; Timera 2001b). The literature refers to this as Islamic reformism, a heterogeneous movement and discourse inspired by Middle Eastern Sunni currents (Otayek and Bahri 1993; Kaba 2000; Piga 2001; Loimeier 2003; Janson 2005, 2006a). *Sunna* Islam is hardly a coherent set of doctrines or group of adherents; what seems to be its unifying feature is a critique of maraboutism, which reformists condemned as an unlawful innovation (*bid'a*) because of the

[10] Divination is carried out by marabouts/religious men, but it is not confined to them. Diviners can also be ordinary people who have acquired the techniques or the power of soothsaying (Graw 2006, 2009).

[11] In Sabi, in particular: Moodi Jawara, November 2006; Ibrahima Haidara, 17 February 2007. In Serekunda, in particular: Mohammed Silla, 24 February 2008. Long-distance maraboutic mediation and itinerant marabouts are important in the Senegambian and Sahelian migrations. This is particularly evident in Sufi brotherhoods whereby marabouts have direct connections with disciples and followers abroad. Marabouts may travel to see them and disciples might organize congregations in the diaspora (Bava 2003; Hoven 2003; Riccio 2004; Soares 2004a; Bava 2005).

esoteric interpretations they give of Islam[12] (see Soares 2005:9-10). Since the 1960s, migrants have become familiar with reformist ideas in the Congos—an early cradle of Islamic renovation (Manchuelle 1997:196; Rialland 1998:79-80; Whitehouse 2007:164ff)—and in other parts of West Africa, especially in Sierra Leone[13]. They have gone back to their communities and spread the novelties. They have begun to pray with their hands folded on the chest and to wear plain *kaftans* in Middle-Eastern style instead of colourful and pompous robes. In the early 1990s, a returnee from Sierra Leone led a group of *Sunna* sympathisers in the construction of a second Friday mosque in Sabi, which is not far from the central one. Some villagers turned up their noses at the innovators, perceiving them as introducing a 'new religion' and diverting from 'our fathers' way', but all in all the two mosques have cohabited in a rather cordial manner, particularly when compared to other villages[14].

For reformists, knowledge should not be confined to given groups but made available to everybody so as to adhere as much as possible to the Prophet's path. This potentially de-monopolises religious knowledge and challenges status hierarchies by giving precedence to erudition and piety over status and seniority (Timera 1996:184). In practice, reformists have been rather conservative about status groups. The *Sunna* imams in Sabi still belong to the main clerical families, and reformists have not stopped marrying according to status group endogamy[15]. They have not openly challenged Sabi scholars and marabouts, and the latter have not necessarily opposed reformists. What certainly unites both 'reformists' and 'traditionalists' is the great emphasis on religion and religiosity. So whatever way someone prays to God, it seems that what matters most is that they do pray (cf. Janson 2006a). And virtually everybody in the village does.

What I have tried to do in this quick overview of the village is to convey some sense of the wide-ranging ramifications of most aspects of its social and cultural life, even those which

[12] Marabout work is usually protective (against malignity, envy, stabbing, perforation by bullets, etc.), but it can also be used to cause harm (charming, scaring, provoking physical harm or illness, etc.) or to bring economic gain. The nature of esoteric practice is diverse: supplicatory prayers and formulae, amulets and other charms. Amulets or charms (*juju*, *baaxe*) are usually pieces of Arabic writing encased in leather or metal that are worn as arm bracelets, belts or rings; there are also liquid potions and powders for mixing with bathing water (*naasi*) (see also Dilley 2004; Soares 2005; Hamès 2007).

[13] Mohamed Silla, imam of Kanifing, 15 February 2008, Serekunda. The linkage between Islamic education, trade and migration has deep roots in Sierra Leonean history (Jalloh and Skinner 1997).

[14] The most tense case was the construction of the Gambisara mosque, where the feud between 'traditionalists' and 'reformists' became a national political case in the mid 1990s. The reformists were first supported by the government and then ordered to destroy their mosque (Darboe 2007:150-1).

[15] In Sabi, the pioneer of reformism was a man from the Silla family, though at present one of the vice-imams is a young scholar from the blacksmith class. In other Soninke contexts, clerical families seem to have maintained firm control over the new religious ground (Rialland 1998:83). In some cases, hereditary transmission in religious office has been questioned. In Gambisara, reformists were led by a Dukure, a member of the chiefly clan. By founding a new mosque, Dukure breached the customary complementariness between temporal and religious power.

are apparently least affected by migration. Migration is a 'total social fact', in the Maussian sense: it intersects all aspects of social life (Sayad 1999; Palidda 2008:1). Living in the village is not simply about non-migration; it means constantly maintaining a bi-focal or multi-focal orientation (Vertovec 2004), taking into account the social presence of physically absent migrants.

This does not mean that place-bound experiences, images and relations are not structuring people's lives. To stay in Sabi is to become attuned to the tempo of agricultural seasons and to the pace of daily rural life. Early in the morning, the dense smoke coming from fires just started in the kitchens and the thumping sound of women pounding on a large wooden mortar announce the beginning of the day. In the rainy season, young men wake up early, at the time of *fajiri* prayer (about 6am). They prepare their bicycles or donkey carts and go to the fields. They either return before lunch time (2pm), or eat in the bush if there is a lot of work. The women will follow them, while the one in charge of the kitchen will stay and prepare food. She will sweep the compound and haul water from the taps or the wells. Cooking takes many hours, and soon after lunch time, she will start preparing the dinner. Daily prayers pace activities and social time. After 5pm prayer, young men will be seen strolling and meeting in gatherings along the streets or inside the compounds, brewing tea and chatting. Girls and women do not stroll; they walk towards a place, either their compound or the compound of a relative; they spend most of their day inside the domestic walls, doing household chores, making tea and braiding the hair of other girls and women. Male elders will be seen lying down and meeting on the main platforms, chatting about village affairs. Dinner will be ready by 7-8pm. Men (young and old) will meet again until midnight or later. In December-January, the night time is chilly, and people will gather around a fire to warm up—it is one of the few moments when men and women of different ages meet and socialise. From March onwards, the temperatures rise, and the houses will be too hot to sleep inside. More and more people will leave for the city, either to work or to visit relatives. In June the rains will bring some respite, and will bring people back from the city. They will resume work in the fields: tilling, seeding and weeding. It is impossible to stay in Sabi and not pace oneself to this mix of rushed and slow social time, which apparently has little to do with what happens in the world 'out there' where the migrants are. As we have seen and shall continue to see, to be in this time (and space) does not mean to stay outside the life world of migrants.

Fig. 2.4 – On *Local* Mobility

Passenger van at the border station between Gambia and Senegal

2.2.2 Lagging Behind, Being Left Behind

Besides the visible signs of connections between the village and the wider world, it is difficult to ignore the evident signs of disconnection in Sabi. Viewed from the village, the Soninke diaspora can hardly be described in terms of hyper connectivity. There are no cyber cafés where the youths can chat with their relatives and email them. The electronic newspapers and the blogs of Gambian elite in the diaspora are unknown[16]; indeed, there are no newspapers at all in Sabi—most villagers are illiterate anyway and keep abreast with the world mainly through Radio Gambia and the BBC World Service. Husband and wife do not spend hours on the phone, and they hardly ever engage in real-time parenting of their children, as might be the case in more technologically advanced areas of the world (cf. Miller and Slater 2000). International mobile calls are costly and are made only out of necessity, when someone manages to raise credit or borrow a call from a friend to beep his or her relative abroad.

While Sabi is a lively and growing village, there is little to stop an external observer from describing it as a land of chronic poverty and underdevelopment. Many Sabinko would not object to such a description. The sight of the central square changes dramatically during a day of heavy rain. Because of soil erosion and the absence of trees uphill, pluvial water flows along the streets of the village from south to north. A wide and powerful stream fills one of the main streets, cutting through the square just next to the mosque before it is channelled by a deep ditch into the swampy area further north and east. In the past, these flash floods have claimed the lives of some children, and eroded soil beneath the fences along the streets. The road between Velingara and Basse is in no better condition. Villagers have long complained about the state of this road, an issue which was raised again with fervour during the parliamentary elections in January 2007. When I was in Sabi, villagers were left clinging to the hope that the works for re-paving the south bank road from Serekunda to Basse would reach south to Velingara or at least as far as the border. The small craters along the road cause damage to the vehicles and discomfort to passengers, and also constitute a serious danger when a woman in labour has to be taken to Basse hospital. Health provision is in fact another long-standing problem, which it is hoped the new hospital being built by the Sabinko in Spain will mitigate in the next future. For minor problems, most villagers turn to the state dispensary; for more serious medication they go to see the nurse at the clinic or directly to a private practitioner, such as the Nigerian pharmacist. Eventually, they have to go to the hospital in Basse for specialist visits and treatments. Once a

[16] Among others: Bantaba in Cyberspace (gambia.dk/forums), Gambia News (gambianow.com), Gambia Echo (thegambiaecho.com).

month the village clinic is filled with women and their babies strapped to their backs. It announces the arrival of the four-wheel drive of the Medical Research Council (a British organization), which monitors child health and nutrition. A good feature of the village is that drinkable water is available on a daily basis thanks to a water tower installed on the outskirts of the village and a basic aqueduct network. It was developed in the early 1980s through a Saudi Arabian-Gambian government cooperation, and then equipped with solar panels in 1996 by several Sabi hometown associations. The Sabinko have then provided the piping for their compounds and at the main junctions, though in some areas of the village people have to draw water from the well too.

Proceeding westwards on the path to Dembakunda, one reaches a steep slope, where the village comes to an abrupt end. From this point, it is possible to enjoy a panoramic view of the flatlands surrounding Sabi. Except for the northern forested area—where Sabi and Basse people cut firewood—the landscape is a continuous stretch of agricultural fields crossing the border with Senegal and disappearing over the horizon. The landscape at sunset is beautiful, but perhaps not enough to make one forget the view of a drought-ridden land during the dry season, when all the millets and groundnuts have been harvested and only the sandy soil is left to cake under the burning sun. At the bottom of the hill and a little to the south is one of the widest parts of the stream, where water flows in during the rains. Some thirty years ago, there used to be fresh water here even in the dry season. Boys would bathe and catch fish, women would grow rice on the wet banks that slowly receded as the season advanced. Then droughts and changing climate dried it all up, apart from a small lake in the lower part of the stream, where villagers make mud bricks in the dry season (Fig. 1.1).

Throughout the post-colonial period, the state has (rhetorically) insisted on the importance of agriculture. The current 'Back to The Land' campaign is only the latest in a series of campaigns and programs aimed at boosting farmers' morale for self-development initiatives, praising the virtue of staying on the land and contributing to the nation's self-sufficiency (see Section 1.7.1). These campaigns have certainly reinforced the importance attached to farming; yet the concomitant failures of the agricultural sector have constituted a strong counter-argument. The government's promise of a modern and mechanised agriculture does not seem to have made an impact as yet, and actually very few people justify their going to the fields by making reference to the government's campaigns.

The decline of agriculture over the last thirty years has influenced the villagers' perceptions about their place. Because farming is now less intensive and partly mechanised, some elders protest that 'juniors rest today' compared to the past. But young men feel they have

few and inadequate tools besides their hoes to obtain something from their farm work. Time and again, young men make references to their poor equipment and make comparisons with the highly mechanised European agriculture. This indicates that the state of farming is enveloped in a wider discourse about rural underdevelopment. Gambia is perceived to 'lag behind' (*nan tokko falle*) in the terms already mentioned above, in technological and infrastructural development[17].

Comparisons between Europe and Sabi, Gambia, or indeed Africa as a whole, are very frequent and cover a variety of topics. Hi-tech commodities and infrastructure (especially roads and houses) are among the favourite objects of commentary. Foreign products, particularly from the Western countries, are typically invested with an aura of newness and 'modernity'; people appreciate shiny new things such as mobiles and other hi-tech items, as well as clothes, through which local cultural tastes and aesthetic practices are continuously updated (Buckley 2000). Sabi young men and most villagers seem to share the views of Bissauian youths described by Vigh (2009), who think that the gap between Europe and Guinea Bissau is not simply one of 'modernity' but of 'progress'. As Vigh (2009:103) observes, the centrality of technology in Bissauian youths' narratives and imagination "highlight[s] 'progress' as both fact and lack…[it] makes clear that progress surrounds and evades Bissau". The flows of commodities, cars and shiny mobile phones as well as the flows of 'fakes' and low quality commodities imported from China for poor African consumers raise in Sabi youths a 'global awareness from below' (Vigh 2009:103), the awareness of living in a world which is not only connected and fluid, but stratified and disconnected; in which some areas and people are excluded from the swirl of globalization.

In contrast to Guinea Bissau, Gambia has been a much more peaceful country. This is no small thing when one takes into account the fact that many Soninke experienced war in Sierra Leone and other countries, and were forced to return as a consequence. Many people emphasise the fact that Gambians are peaceful and God fearing people, and they feel safe in their country. This does not mean, however, that they have much confidence that it will make a significant leap forward in development. Time and again, young men pointed out to me the absence of factories, natural resources and remunerative work in both the URR and the rest of Gambia. In addition, they do not have much faith in either the ability or the willingness of the politicians to change the

[17] In Africa, development discourse—so well entrenched in political rhetoric in Gambia—has certainly contributed to creating popular and populist ideas about under-development specifically linked to the idea of rurality (see e.g. Olivier de Sardan 1995). It is significant that some categories and tropes of the representation of Africa, or through which the idea of Africa has itself come into being and continues to thrive (Mudimbe 1994), are also widespread in Africans' imagination.

situation, the issue of the Basse-Velingara road being one example of this (cf. Fig. 2.4; also Section 5.4.4).

These discourses mediate the understanding of staying behind and travelling. As in other parts of West Africa (cf. Carling 2002:19), by representing poverty and underdevelopment as place-bound, some young men provide a rationale for the ineluctability of emigration. Young men very often use the argument of poverty and the lack of (the possibility of) justify the fact that they have to leave their country, or even the continent, in order to look for opportunities and feed their households. As we shall see in Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.1), this narrative about the absence of progress in one's own place can be woven into personal narratives about the absence of progress in socio-generational terms, which further reinforces the desirability of emigration.

By bringing back commodities and images from the world, migrants contribute to this awareness and sometimes buttress Afro-pessimistic views. For instance, I once accompanied some friends to greet a migrant visiting Sabi for the first time since leaving for Spain four years earlier. The migrant would often turn to me, as if he looked for complicity and confirmation of the things he had seen in Europe and was trying to relate to his friends. At one point, he turned to his parents' house (a relatively new brick house), and said to us: "You see, look at our lifestyle here. The white men would not even put their animals in this kind of house". Not that he idealised Europe as an El Dorado; he used it a comparative term to comment on the poverty which his village endures.

The Sabinko certainly view emigration as a way of reducing poverty. Many of them maintain that 'the travellers benefit us very well'. The on-going mushrooming of concrete houses with corrugated iron roofs across Sabi is seen as a sign of development. By constructing houses and alleviating villagers' poverty, the migrants help 'bring the village forward'. They and their associations bring development projects, sometimes in the form of co-development initiatives with European partners, like the hospital under-construction. While this further contributes to framing the village in the language of under-development, it simultaneously corroborates the impression of a dynamic and changing village that I have tried to render above.

While migration (*terende*) itself is a good thing for the village, villagers may nevertheless blame the fact of 'lagging behind' on the behaviour of given migrants. The accusation of 'leaving behind' (*nan tokko falle*) relatives and the village community as a whole is particularly poignant when directed at the so called 'moneymen' (*xalisigumu*) and/or *bannanu*, the very rich people who are expected to act as community patrons. Certainly, Soninke big men still strive for community honours in their home villages. In Sabi, different *bannanu* have built a mosque, built a water tower, fenced the two cemeteries, regularly paid for the whole village's compound tax

and sent food and livestock donations on Muslim festivals. While this is highly commended, it is sometimes objected that initiatives that magnify their reputation should go together with a real effort to improve the conditions of the rural community: "If you put [all Sabi *bannanu*] together, these people could put so much money here. If they do, maybe Europeans will notice Africans have made an effort and add to that. Factories can be opened here and we can work"[18]. It is relevant to point out that discourses on staying behind are addressed to urban dwellers as much as they are to current transnational migrants. A number of young Sabinko believe that in their village things are worse than in other villages. I was often invited to consider the dozens of compounds that some *bannanu* own in Serekunda, then look at the state of their home compounds in Sabi and finally compare them with Gambisara, where some *bannanu* have built houses with four storeys. Although the different urban planning in Sabi and in Gambisara may partly account for this, the greater architectural development of Gambisara is often attributed to a greater sense of unity, and particularly family unity:

> Here we have more moneymen than [in Gambisara]. But here they don't do anything for the family […] [That *banna*] has more than 20, 30 compounds [in Serekunda]; he has many things. His children go to [Europe], even for vacation. He has a house there. They travel! But look at his elder brother's sons. They are here, they want to go but they have no visa, no chance[19].

The fact that some people go, look for money and accumulate it is not the problem. The problem is where and how they 'bring it back'. Dispersal, when socially centripetal, is not a negative condition; actually, travel is an opportunity to strengthen relations by pouring resources into development projects, houses, food, gifts, remittances or just telephone calls. It is the fragmentation and dissipation of collective social capital which is detrimental. It must be said that such complaints can be strategies to exert pressure on the migrants, in an attempt to enforce redistribution and share in their riches, rather than a critique of migration and urban settlement as such.

The fact that migration can create economic differences between people within the village seems to be less of a concern for the Sabinko. Most Sabinko can easily point to rich and poor households; they see buildings that the migrants construct here as a sign of affluence. However, perhaps due to the fact that the village 'big men' and *bannanu* now reside elsewhere, differences between villagers are not emphasised as much as those between people staying in the village and those staying in Serekunda (discussed in more detail in later sections). Apart from the

[18] M. (man, aged 24), December 2007, Sabi.
[19] Ibid.

domain of consumption and building, the economic differences engendered by migrant resources are more difficult to detect, for migrants do not invest in measurable collective assets such as land and cattle (see Section 3.2).

2.2.3 'In Sabi, We Farm'

As mentioned, agriculture and other activities carried out in the 'bush' (*gunne*) are associated with backwardness or 'lagging behind'. Backwardness is closely associated with the idea of poverty (*korintaaxu*, *misikinaaxu*), and particularly that of hardship (*tanpiye*), which is often translated as 'suffering' in Gambian English[20]. References to 'bush work' can serve as a way of expressing *and* experiencing the idea of hardship, as the following episode shows:

> January 2008, Sabi. Musa and I are walking along the Basse road. A man on a bicycle is riding in the opposite direction, slowly climbing the gentle slope leading up to the first junction of the village. When we meet, he stops and we greet him. Musa notices the bundle of fine firewood tied onto the back of his bicycle. The man tells us that he goes *suwa mundiye* (in search of firewood) in the bush almost every day; he sells the surplus. Through gestures and sounds of appreciation, Musa prompts him to continue his description and then, somehow customarily, he empathises with his daily hardship: "Eh, that is hard, it is hard". Smiling, the man spreads his hands out for us to see. Axe work has made his palms callous and rough, whitish in colour. I nod in a sign of acknowledgment, and the man finally withdraws his hands and puts them back on the handlebars. He rises on the pedals and bids us goodbye. As he leaves, Musa turns to me and says that man is a real *gunnenke* ('bushman'), and after a pause he sighs: "*o tanpi yere* [we are fatigued/'suffering' here]".

References to 'suffering' are very common in everyday conversations. They are part of the customary greetings and rhetorical expressions (see also Diawara 2003:70), and they allow people to operate the kind of generalisation that Musa makes by moving from a particular individual to a collective life condition—'*we* are 'suffering' *here*'; this is a way of imagining a community of destiny (Anderson 1991). Indeed, images of hardship can be used to conjure up the 'suffering' of Africa as a whole. Activities such as farming are paradigmatic of this kind of experience and imagination.

What is significant about the nexus between farming and 'suffering' is that villagers do not only refer to it in order to justify the need to emigrate. 'Suffering' is also an index of the sacrifice of those who stay in the village, who have to endure fatigue and provide sustenance for

[20] Accordingly, Whitehouse (2003) mentions that French speakers in Mali use *souffrance* to translate the Bambara word *sègèn*, equivalent to *tanpiye*. For a Senufo comparative case see Lemarie (2005).

their households. Farming is a powerful symbol of local identity, and is sometimes described as a custom (*laada*), something which is carried out independently of its economic importance. When villagers are asked to describe their way of life, they may simply say: 'In Sabi, we farm'.

During the agricultural season, there seems to be little need for governmental calls to go 'Back To The Land'. Going to the field is a must for whoever is in the village during this period. There is a compelling sanction on every able-bodied individual to make an effort to contribute to the ideal of household self-sufficiency (cf. Section 3.2.1). When I was in Sabi, it was my hands rather other bushmen's that were subject to scrutiny. Young men often rubbed my soft and smooth hands and commented that, as a European, I must have been used to comfortable working conditions. And when I began to try myself out in the fields at harvest time, the blisters appearing on my palms both proved their hypothesis right and showed my 'transformation' into a local. Whitehouse (2003:35-6) finds that similar comments and inspections in relation to the fieldworker are less about proving his inadequacy for manual work than commenting on his foreignness. To farm is to belong, and the 'rooting' of identity implies to undergo, even embody, this experience of 'suffering'.

With respect to migration, the discourse on rural 'suffering' and 'poverty' is also tactical. It qualifies the position of the 'stayers' and the relation they establish with the travellers. Poverty (*misikinaaxu*) is a condition of humility and a simple lifestyle. In many ways, one should always keep one foot in 'poverty', and never forget 'where one comes from'. Although the fact of leaving is not usually seen as guilt, the traveller should never forget that those who stay farm and endure sacrifices to put up with the absence of those who went ahead. Some young men complain that their migrant brothers are exempted from farming when they visit the village, but it is not at all unusual for migrant men to go to the field with their brothers, and for migrant women to help with household chores. Avoiding farming would be read as a distinguishing sign, a claim to a different status, 'getting out of *misikinaaxu*', and showing to be 'big men', as it is often expressed. Going to the fields is thus a levelling mechanism, showing nominal equality (nominal because differences are created in other domains, such as housing and investments). The words of S.—a male elder who always stayed in Sabi—give us a glimpse of how the discourse on 'poverty', 'suffering' and farming is used to make sense of migration and address critiques to migrants who leave their family behind:

> There used to be poverty that weighed on people, and travelling has reduced it. But now people 'suffer' more than this: now whether you have money or you don't, 'love' is not there. When you are poor, you strengthen relations, you 'love' each other, you speak with one voice. When you [begin to] get something,

> you start to stay apart. We don't see each other any more. The children don't respect the elders; and the elders don't show mercy to the children […] What makes this happen is there is too much money in society. If you have something, you fall out with your relatives. You have millions and millions of Dalasi, while one of your relative may even have no dinner. That is a big demerit [of travelling…] It is true that people say it is easier to have food and people can sleep in mansions now. But that's not the problem. Sleeping in a hut, farming, living by the sweat [of your own brow] is better than enjoying all these things. God said we should look for [the yields of] our sweat without cheating. You know, business is all about lies. A diamond dealer always lies. He will say "*Wallahi* [Arabic: I swear to God]! I bought this for this amount", whilst he is lying. That's why you live on lies. Our former elders didn't accept that. What they bent over, weeded, and sweated over is what they would eat. Whenever they didn't know the way something was acquired, they would not eat it. Whatever they didn't 'suffer' for, even if you gave it to them, they would not eat it[21].

In a review article, Deborah Bryceson (2002:20) has shown that in many African rural contexts people think of themselves as farmers first and foremost, insisting on the agrarian model almost as a timeless moral order, while downplaying the crisis of rural economies and the advent of other livelihoods. This appears to be the case with S.'s comment, who then concluded that "staying is better than travelling". Certainly many young men would deem his conclusion anachronistic, and would probably notice that elders also push their youths, directly or indirectly, to migrate and bring back money for them. But they would equally appreciate his attempt to restore the moral primacy of farming, the necessity of maintaining of an agrarian order for identity and for solidarity, hence the dignity of staying in the village at a time when travelling is dominant and young men have to keep up with their households' expectations about 'taking them out of poverty'—making improvements to the compounds, bringing commodities and circulating money. This might seem a meagre consolation prize for young men who remain home, but the importance of farming in the experience of staying behind will return—with all its ambivalence—time and again in the following chapters.

As I showed, one of the main demerits of travelling, in the eyes of many villagers, has been that it has led some enriched people to step out of 'poverty' and forget those who stay behind in 'suffering'. S. speaks of the corruption of the sense of unity and brotherliness (*maremmaaxu*) that should bind family members. If wealth reduces hardship, it also breeds negative envy (*faasidaaxu*), which poisons relations, drives suspicion between people and triggers factionalism. S. blames the monetary bounty that people are looking for away from their homes. His contempt is a counterpoint to the commendation for what migrants do in Sabi.

[21] S. (man, aged about 65), November 2007, Sabi.

Indeed, contempt and commendation for the social effect of migrant money seems to be a leitmotiv in Sabi as elsewhere in the region[22].

2.2.4 'Our Fathers' Way'

The importance of maintaining an agrarian socio-moral order goes beyond agriculture in the strict sense. When I first arrived in Serekunda and made my first enquiries about the Soninke, I was repeatedly encouraged to go to the Upper River Region. Here I could become immersed in the 'deep Soninke language' and the 'deep Soninke culture'. When I did go, many Sabinko reiterated that here I could learn Soninke properly, speak to the elders and learn about the past. I could meet prominent scholars and see how children learn the Quran. Since I was there to study 'Soninke culture', my closest acquaintances among the young men constantly pointed out to me traits of Soninke 'tradition' (*laada*) during ceremonies and other occasions. From their point of view, to remain in Sabi was to continue to do things 'our fathers' way', and eventually to make sure that children, including those of migrants, did so too.

From the very beginning of my fieldwork, however, it became apparent that villagers and urbanites simultaneously viewed the village as 'backward', not simply because it lacked 'progress', but because the villagers allegedly lacked 'awareness' of the wider world and the willingness to change their attitudes. In Serekunda, these representations overlapped with widespread stereotypes about the peasantry as closed, conservative and unsophisticated people, epitomised by their low level of formal schooling, particularly in Soninke villages.

The cosmopolitan experience of travel is another factor in this representation of village immobilism. Since migration is a quest for novel and cosmopolitan experiences as much as it is for wealth, it is not entirely surprising that many returnees and former migrants are ambivalent about their village, which they view as either a haven of tradition, or a backward looking place. Quite explicitly, 'awareness' acquired abroad is said to drive a wedge between those who have not travelled and those who have, as in the case of the 'bush' and the 'beento' in Northern Nigeria, the unsophisticated local and the travelled cosmopolitan famously described by Hannerz (1992:228). Interestingly, as a disclaimer for the lack of knowledge about national or international affairs, some non-migrant elders are used to saying 'we haven't studied, we haven't travelled [*o ma xara, o ma tere*]'. From this point of view, staying behind comes close to 'lagging behind' in cultural terms.

[22] On the ambivalent feelings about the migration-money nexus in Senegal see: Riccio (2005), Fouquet (2008).

It may be argued that the Soninke's very selective engagement with 'modernization' has paradoxically worked well. The Soninke have preferred Quranic education to secular schooling, and travel and business to professional work and state employment. Now many educated Gambian youths sit jobless after having been seduced and disappointed by the post-colonial expectations of modernity (Ferguson 1999), and they are converting en masse to what the Soninke have long been practising: business and international migration. Moreover, the diaspora has developed through social networks and organizational templates borrowed from the hometown—and this has contributed to legitimating the village as the cultural and moral centre of the diaspora.

On the other hand, acquiring 'awareness' does not necessarily correspond to the Western idea of 'modernisation'. 'Modernity' is a multifaceted project[23] (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), and the case of Islamic reformism is instructive in this respect. The target of the *sunnanko* has not necessarily been to stop an encroaching evil Western modernity, but to reform religious institutions in the village.

What is at stake for those who stay in Sabi is not simply the fact of being stigmatised as backward conservatives or, conversely, being congratulated as those who hold the fort of tradition. Representations are linked to practices. The stake is the socio-moral primacy of the village in its relations with the diaspora, and consequently the meaning and social value attached to the activities that those who stay at home continue to carry out. This can clearly be seen in upbringing and education strategies, which are central to socio-cultural reproduction. Education is an important element in the relations between the village and the diaspora, for migrant parents often prefer to raise their children in their home village, where the children can learn the Quran and grow up following 'their fathers' way'. This practice is essential to the cohesion of domestic units and for 'rooting' the loyalty of the future travellers at home (see Section 3.3.5 for details). Whether one migrant parent considers opening up to the changing world and sending his/her children to school, or sticks to the old ways and sends his/her children to the village Quranic school, is thus directly relevant to this system of interdependencies.

Even though some *moodinu* travel and work abroad, the prominent ones usually stay in their villages, surrounded by their students and disciples. Soninke villages have been strongholds of Quranic education, and 'studying religion' is, together with farming and trading, one of the most cherished tropes of Soninke self-identification. The great majority of the young men whom I met in Sabi studied at the *xaranyimbe*, the 'learning fire' lit in the morning and evening hours

[23] In general, 'modernity' can be seen as a project of transformation of something discursively constructed as 'tradition' (Gardner and Osella 2003).

of the day, when pupils sit around it to recite what the master has written on their wooden board (*walla*), or repeat the words after him. Some have studied in the *maisi*, a similar institution, in which older boys consolidate Arabic literacy and are introduced to the exegesis of Islamic texts. Only very few can, however, become full-time disciples of the master and learn the esoteric knowledge of divination and maraboutic work. Many compounds in Sabi run *xaranyimbe* schools in Sabi. The most prominent ones are in Suwarekunda and in different Silla compounds (belonging to different descent groups). At Jawarakunda[24] there is a *maisi*, a large compound hosting students from several other villages in the region.

Under the influence of reformism and formal schooling more generally, Sabi's educational system is changing significantly. Stressing the importance of learning from the book as opposed to learning from the master, the reformists have promoted a rationalist approach to religious knowledge (Brenner 2001). Moreover, they feel that the amount of learning involved in traditional Quranic education is disproportionately marginal compared to 'bush work', which occupies pupils from morning to evening. More generally, there is a growing demand for formal education, whereby pupils spend more time with books than with hoes. This is one reason behind the construction of the *madrasa* (Arabic school) by the Sabi association in Serekunda, a project which was reportedly kept on hold for some years because of the resistance of some village scholars. In the meantime, two compounds employ *ustadhs* (Islamic teachers) to teach children. In Sabi, a limited number of men in their mid-thirties have attended Arabic schools in Sierra Leone, while others have had their fees paid in Malian *madrasas* and Franco-Arabic schools by their migrant relatives (cf. Brenner 2001). Those who were sent to Serekunda to attend school (secular or religious) also received formal Islamic education. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, most schools of the Greater Banjul-Serekunda area provided classes in Islamic studies taught by the graduates returning from Saudi and other Middle-Eastern universities (Darboe 2007:132).

There is a growing demand for 'Western' schooling as well. Suleyman Sumbundu, the first Sabinke to go to a Western school (in the 1940s), vividly remembers the strong opposition he faced from some of his family, who feared he would disavow Islam and turn into a Christian. Although their fear was not without foundation in late colonial times (Suleyman went first to the Roman Catholic Church school in Basse), the villagers' ambiguity towards Western secular education has lasted much longer. Only 20% of the village children attend school today, as opposed to the national average of 40% (YWAM 2006). Village dignitaries have resisted and delayed the encroachment of secular schooling. The Lower Basic School (grade 1 to 6) was only

[24] When applied to patronyms, the suffix *kunda* means 'the household/compound of' (e.g. Jawarakunda = the compound of the Jawara). *Kunda* also applies to names of places ('the settlement of').

built in 1994 by some villagers with the help of some migrants and hometown associations abroad. A few years later, the APRC government built the Upper Basic School, where children can study up to grade 9. These developments notwithstanding, the availability of schooling in the rural area is still suffering from years of urbano-centric development policies. Villagers complain that in Sabi, children are not in a conducive environment to study, distracted as they are by play and bush work. Village schools also lack regular staff. Many parents prefer to send their children to Serekunda, but this is expensive, and not everybody has relatives willing to host their children. Lower Basic education in Sabi is free and Upper Basic is relatively cheap, but annual fees are over 3,000 Dalasi (about €90) a year for the three remaining years of high school. Of course, migrants are better off and can afford to pay the fees for their children, whom they increasingly send to be fostered by their relatives in the city. This is one among other processes that are de-centralising or multiplying the centres of socio-cultural reproduction in Gambian Soninke diaspora, with Serekunda effectively becoming a *kaara*, a second home.

Fig. 2.5 – Farming 'Our Fathers' Way'

A group of age mates (lappe) helping one young man to perform a bride service (threshing groundnuts). A young man (off frame) is beating the drums and the work party is singing customary songs. The lappe will accompany the groom for all the stages of the wedding ceremony.

Fig. 2.6 – The Urban Way…

Building belonging to a Serekunda-based businessman, which has a small mosque inside. Providing people with a space to pray pays as a good deed (baraji)in preparation for the Afterlife

2.3 SEREKUNDA

To stay behind does not mean to only stay in Sabi. Throughout the year there is much coming and going between Sabi and Serekunda, particularly during the dry season. As farm work slows down, young men and other villagers travel to the city, leaving behind fewer and fewer people. Circulation, together with the settlement of return migrants, has considerably reduced the social and cultural foreignness of Serekunda, making it less like *tunŋa* and more like *kaara*. Even young men who travel to the city to *hustle* do not describe this as *terende*, as if the compounds of relatives and villagers in Serekunda where they are lodged make this kind of seasonal migration more like moving between two homes than an adventure to a new place. Certainly, they have to learn Wolof and cope with the urban environment, but they do not feel complete strangers here. This is their nation, and Gambian citizenship mitigates their 'strangerhood'. Indeed, almost everybody in Serekunda is a stranger originating from villages upriver or from surrounding rural areas (Kombo); and in those townships of the urban belt where host-stranger relationships are still remembered, demographic and power balances have sometimes been reversed, making autochthony less relevant (Beedle 1980). Thus, before I return to the circulation between Sabi and Serekunda, I should like to describe how the Soninke have made themselves at home in the city.

In Chapter 1, I described the particular history of urbanisation of the Upper River Soninke. Settlement in the city was mainly a consequence of return and the investments of transnational migrants rather than the result of rural-to-urban labour migration. The urban community has by now become established and the urban base has favoured the circulation between the URR and Serekunda. Gambian Soninke number about 17,000 people in Banjul and Serekunda, though it is difficult to estimate the exact amount of Upper River Soninke because this figure includes the Badugulanko—the Soninke of Guinean origins settled in the Dippakunda and surrounding area (Latri Kunda German and Bundung)[25]. Upper River Soninke do not occupy a specific area. They are distributed sparsely in the metropolitan area, with a slightly higher concentration in the areas close to the central Serekunda market.

[25] Excluding Dippakunda, Latrikunda German and Bundung, the number of Gambian Soninke from upcountry living in Serekunda and Banjul can be roughly estimated at 10,000 or above, about 10-11% of the population countrywide.

2.3.1 Business and Multi-Storey Buildings

The signs of transnational connections are even more evident in Serekunda than in Sabi, and the contrast between mobility and immobility is less stark here. There are transnational enterprises, entire compounds belonging to migrants abroad, Soninke middlemen looking for land for sale on behalf of migrant investors, official and unofficial money transfer agents, and all sorts of business transactions going on with people abroad . It is sufficient to sit in a Soninke store for some time to see relatives and co-villagers of the shopkeeper passing by with wads of notes simply wrapped in plastic bags, or talking on the phone with their people abroad about the money they have to collect from a given address. Many people also travel in and out of the country, and some are full-time transnational traders, with a base in Serekunda and often travelling to other destinations.

Commerce and business are an important dimension of the urban Soninke community. The fact that this community has mainly formed as a consequence of returnee migrants investing capital accumulated abroad into business ventures has certainly given a high economic profile to this community. Serekunda people often hold a distorted image of the Soninke, being unfamiliar with the situation of upcountry communities. Comments like 'the Serahule [Soninke] like business/money too [so] much' are often heard in town. A number of Soninke warehouses and shops bear the patronym of the owner, making identification an easier task. In other words, in Serekunda one regains a sense of the Soninke's renown as great traders. Even among the Soninke, there seems to be little doubt that Serekunda Soninke are identified as wealthy traders and businessmen rather than as poor farmers, revealing the reality of the geographic polarisation of these two types of activities and tropes of self-identification. Most of the *bannanu* are in the city, running large commercial stores, hotels, money transfer agencies and even factories.

The most visible 'ethnic marker' of Soninke prosperity is, once again, their properties and buildings—though this is by no means a prerogative of the Soninke. Along all the main commercial avenues in Serekunda there are large buildings and stores built by Soninke, and in most residential areas, mansions and multi-storey buildings are often known as the achievements of an expatriate or resident Soninke investor. However, stores and compounds are often let to other people, so it takes a more expert eye to reconstruct an accurate geography of Soninke material presence in the city. This is something most Soninke young men are familiar with. When I returned to Serekunda during my last period of fieldwork, one of the first things I learned simply by walking in town with my Sabi friends was to associate the names of famous Soninke 'moneymen' and ordinary travellers with their buildings. Even before the foundations are dug,

news about the land sale is quickly broadcast in gatherings. In the city, youth gatherings themselves often take place on construction sites, where a relative or co-villager of the migrant or businessman may be in charge of supervising the work, or where some young co-villagers are working as labourers in the site (cf. Section 4.3.2).

This social life of properties, to paraphrase Appadurai (1986), is precisely what aggrandizes their owner's name, and transforms economic wealth into prestige and renown. Buildings demarcate a field of consumption in which social distinction is expressed (cf. Bourdieu 1984). When I asked a prominent businessman whether he considered himself successful, he replied "I think so, I have [multi-]storey buildings worth five to six hundred thousand dollars". He could have told me about the volume of his import business, his money transfer agencies or all the junior relatives he had set up in business; instead, he chose his buildings as the material symbol of his success. The number of storeys is a particularly important feature, a sort of physical scale of success, the most discussed feature before any aesthetic detail is provided. Migrants' and businessmen's housing investments are perhaps the best evidence that trade and labour migration is not just enveloped in a narrative of poverty, but is also seen as a deliberate search for wealth and individual affirmation (cf. Manchuelle 1997).

While buildings are markers of success, they are not usually described in terms of ostentation. As I mentioned, the capillary diffusion of concrete houses across Sabi is seen as a sign of development. It generates *suuxe* among villagers, a sort of positive jealousy that is simultaneously an incitement to emulation. Housing improvements in the village family compound are seen as mandatory for those who have managed to 'find money' abroad. After subsistence, it is perhaps the most fulfilling investment for householders, an act that demonstrates the (migrant) young man's presence and devotion to the household. Housing investments in Serekunda also generate *suuxe*, but they follow a different kind of logic: they are personal achievements. While in the rural *kaara*, building a house is a selfless act for the domestic community as a whole, in the urban *kaara* buildings are not usually subject to the collective regime of property. They are personal properties officially registered in the owner's name. Moreover, inheritance of property is regulated by Sharia law, so that only the biological children of the owner will inherit it. Building compounds in the city is thus a proper investment. Part of it can be rented out and the value of the property is most likely to be preserved if not increased by ongoing inflation. Some early investors praise their foresight because they bought properties when much of Serekunda was still bush-like and land could be acquired with slightly more than an offer of kola nuts to the chief. This is how Modibo, a former diamond dealer, described how he bought a compound in Serekunda in the late 1960s:

> At that time, buying compounds was not expensive. Even if you didn't have money, but you brought kola nuts to the chief of that area, he would give you a plot. You would go with the followers of the chief to mark the plot. You would give them 25 Dalasi. They would say "Can we put the peg here?". You would say "Yes". They would advise: "Hope you don't regret it in the future". So you would let them extend the size of the plot. They would repeat the admonition until you were satisfied with the size. The receipt for the compound was 25 Dalasi. Finally, when the population began to increase, they began to sell land. When they charge you for the land, you go and see a lawyer who signs the paper and you pay the money[26].

Today, land in peripheral areas is sold for a minimum of 200 thousand Dalasi (ca. €6,000) for a plot of about 20 x 20 metres, and the price sharply increases as one moves closer to central and quoted areas. Those who build commercial and residential buildings for rent can also make a regular income[27]. But foresight includes more than economic acumen, as Modibo explains:

> The world was changing. Maybe one day your children will decide to go there or you can leave it there for rent. If things become hard for you one day, the money you get from the tenants will help you sort out petty problems. If things become hard, your children can come and build on empty land, and settle there. If things become even harder, you can sell the land and get the money[28].

Such an investment protects against misfortune and the vagaries of the migratory adventure, which is always subject to business risks and the perils of strangerhood. It is *fangkanta*, a word borrowed from the Mandinka language which literally means self-guard, or reserve, an insurance against potential misfortune in the future (Shipton 1995:250). It is no surprise that the Mandinka used the word *fangkanta* for livestock and now use it also for cash savings. As Shipton highlighted, Gambian saving strategies tend to privilege forms of illiquidity that "[shelter] wealth from the daily demands of kin", such as livestock, an asset that can be sold in case of necessity (Shipton 1995:250). Therefore landed property qualifies individual success not simply in term of conspicuous consumption; what migrants and businessmen build in Serekunda is also their future as a trajectory of progress and economic security.

The contemporary application of the concept of *fangkanta* to cash savings and landed property not only highlights continuity with the past; it also marks a break with it. The times when the first *diamantaires* invested in "Les 3 B: le grand boubou [dress], la bicyclette [bicycle]

[26] Modibo Silla, 3 March 2007, Sabi.
[27] Collecting rents can be problematic. Serekunda's court of justice is full of cases filed by Soninke landlords against their tenants.
[28] Modibo Silla, 3 March 2007, Sabi.

et le boeuf [cattle]", as Bredeloup (2007:197) put it, are gone. In Sabi, very few households have large herds of cattle, and I have found only a few instances in which foreign remittances are directly invested in livestock (see Section 3.2). Surpluses are usually invested away from the village, and because buying land and buildings in Serekunda is also a sign of success, some migrants acquire plots before they refurbish their compound in the village, to their household's mixed pride and bewilderment.

2.3.2 Urban Soninke?

Apart from distinguishing themselves by their high economic achievements, Soninke urbanites have made an effort to construct a sense of community. The most articulate example of this attempt is *Sunpo do Xati*, an umbrella ethnic association. *Sunpo do Xati* was founded in Basse in the early 1980s, but it has effectively developed in Serekunda since the late 1980s, and the urban branch is by far the most active and resourceful one[29]. The association has aimed to provide a place to strengthen relations among urban Soninke and to provide a setting where children born in the city can speak Soninke and learn their customs. The Soninke are culturally marginal in Serekunda. Children quickly pick up Wolof and Mandinka in the streets, while Soninke may still sound an exotic language to their companions even after many years of neighbourly conviviality. What is significant about *Sunpo do Xati* is that it can be read as an attempt to forge an urban, and 'modern', way of being Soninke. As we shall see, this is not necessarily in contrast with cherishing rural origins and connections; nevertheless, the fact that the association has attempted to solve the problem of socio-cultural reproduction in situ (instead of sending the children to the village, for example), reveals that they have felt the Soninke presence in Serekunda is mature and permanent enough to think about settling down and creating a second home in Gambia.

Sunpu do Xati is administered by an executive committee composed by prominent and influential businessmen[30]. There are also juniors and women, who organize cultural activities. *Sunpo do Xati* has been mainly active in the field of Islamic education. The effort to tackle cultural loss in the second generation urban settlers led to the construction of the 'Imam Malick Islamic Institute' in 2000, which is also the headquarter of the association. The institute provides

[29] *Sunpo do Xati* has branches abroad, but the urban one is the only active one (Musa Drame, secretary of *Sunpo do Xati*, November 2006, Serekunda).

[30] *Sunpu do Xati* has been increasingly recognised as an interlocutor by authorities, acting as a lobby for Soninke business interests. However, from speaking to its members it emerges that personal and collective agendas vary significantly even within the executive committee. Many members are only interested in preserving Soninke culture and wish to keep out of politics.

an Anglo-Arabic school of the *madrasa* type and a Quranic boarding school where children memorise the Quran[31]. Although some of the children and teachers (*ustadh*) are not Soninke, the educational policy is explicitly ethnically inflected. Soninke, which is certainly not an urban lingua franca, is the official language in the school and in the summer there are alphabetisation and language classes in Soninke. The school of *Sunpu do Xati* also reflects important changes with respect to female education. While in the villages girls do not usually go beyond the preliminary stages of Quranic education, the urban Soninke school has female sections in both the *madrasa* and the boarding school. *Sunpu do Xati* has not espoused a well defined religious doctrine, but it is unmistakeably oriented by reformist ideas. Most members and teachers expressively wear *Sunna* kaftans (the men) and the *hijab* is compulsory for the schoolgirls. The head teachers have been trained in Middle Eastern Islamic universities.

Although the 'traditional' Sufi religion is thriving, reformism is widespread among the urban Soninke community at large. This should not be surprising given the high proportion of returnees from West-Central Africa in the community. For traders, reformist Islam also appears to be a useful idiom to strengthen commercial bonds[32] (cf. Fig. 2.6). Moreover the appeal of reformism is a response to the dilemmas of urban living and to the wish of maintaining a sense of ethno-cultural identity. *Sunpu do Xati* has criticised the borrowing of what they depict as foreign and unlawful elements in rites of passage from Wolof and Mandinka neighbours, the dominant cultures and languages in town. They are particularly concerned about lavish ceremonies and the use of loud music, which according to them are both improper and deviate attention from the religious meaning of the rituals (cf. also Janson 2005:460-1).

Finally, I should emphasise that the urban Soninke community is polarising the economic and social investments of the diaspora. Although the Serekunda community is relatively small, many migrants invest in properties in the urban areas both as an insurance for the future and to prepare for future return. Some international migrants rent houses and bring their wives and/or part of the household to the city even before they buy property. This can be seen as an act of willing participation in an affluent urban society. In addition, the growing number of relatives and the educational facilities in the city cater for those migrant parents willing to raise their children in their homeland but worried about the quality of education they

[31] With time the schools have expanded, and now there are two branches, one in Kanifing and the other near Banjul.
[32] Once returned from abroad, some migrants, such as Issa Jawara, the founder of the Islamic Institute Misjad Bilal, have invested in the religious field. Reformism is also linked to business and commerce in the region (Amselle 1977, 1985; Warms 1992). Some Soninke businessmen seek scholarly credentials and cultivate religiosity in order to acquire prestige in their community. For instance, many wealthy businessmen in Serekunda spend a month in Saudi Arabia for the *umra*, the minor pilgrimage, which is doubtless an occasion to discuss business in addition to religious matters.

would receive here. My collaborator Bakauru, who is a teacher at *Sunpo do Xati*, estimated at 40% the proportion of foreign-born children attending the boarding school. Migrant parents also send their children to be fostered by their urban relatives, and they will attend other schools, including the *madrasa* in *Sunpu do Xati*. In contrast to the boarding school, the *madrasa* includes subjects from 'Western' curricula. This is a conscious attempt to respond to the 'changing world', while winking at the transnational Soninke community, especially at those parents whose children will go back after some time spent in Gambia and will have to join formal schooling in the host country. I was once shown a letter that the school masters wrote to the US Embassy in which they asked for a donation of computers. The letter stressed the fact that many US born children were attending the school and the school was striving to provide an adequate preparation for these children, who will return and work in the US one day.

2.4 RURAL-URBAN CIRCULATION

It is by now evident that there is a growing socio-economic split between village and city. The city can also take away migrant resources from the village and decentralise the socio-cultural activities on which the relation between the village and the diaspora is based. This complex matrix of translocal and transnational dynamics partly explains why villagers accuse some migrants and moneymen of having left them behind and in poverty.

On the other hand, village and city are highly integrated. The village of origin is a powerful anchor of identity and sociality among the urban dwellers[33]. Although Serekunda society tends to be structured according to socio-economic status rather than traditional status groups, village institutions are still important here. In parallel to the foreign diaspora, several hometown associations mushroomed in Serekunda in the late 1980s and in the 1990s, when the urban community was growing larger. The Sabi association is no exception. It follows the village hierarchy and accords importance to its members on the basis of migratory seniority, active participation and the amount of their contributions to the budget[34]. Most prominent Sabi moneymen participate actively in the association. There is no contradiction between participating

[33] The creation of a rural-urban social field by way of migratory circulation and exchanges is a well known phenomenon in Africa, even though the Soninke seem to distinguish themselves from other cases by the centrality of their return migration and migrant transnationalism as the context and the engine of such a migratory movement (Hart 1987; Gugler 2002).

[34] Contributions are fixed at 50 D per compound each month. However, for extra expenses and projects such as the *madrasa,* members donate extra money (up to 25,000 D) according to each one's possibilities.

in the Sabi association and cultivating urbanity, and most well established urbanites do both. The honorary president of the Sabi association is himself a good example of participation in both urban and village society. Mohamed Silla (not the chiefly family) is the current imam of Kanifing and the most senior city dweller among the Sabinko. As he recalled from the foundational meeting of the association: "We said: 'We are here now. We are not going to return home, but we could organize ourselves and help our original community'"[35].

Most urban residents maintain close ties with the rural base. When the Muslim festival of Tabaski (*Eid al-Adha*) is approaching, there is intense traffic going upcountry, with people going to their home villages to celebrate the festival and visit their relatives. It is also not unusual for urban dwellers to organize weddings in the home village, which is a way of acknowledging and reinstating the primacy of the place of family origin. Daily life in the city is also permeated by village links. For instance, Baba, one the first and closest acquaintances I made in Serekunda, identified himself as coming from Misira Ba Mariama (Kantora district) in spite of his very transnational upbringing. He was born and raised in Ivory Coast, and completed his *madrasa* studies in Mali, visiting the village every other year during the summer vacations. He was forced to leave Abidjan in 2002 when the civil war broke out, and he took residence in the compound of his father's elder brother in Serekunda. Coming from Abidjan he certainly did not disdain urban life, yet he spent most of his free time with his peers from his extended family and from his village. During my visits, he would sometimes introduce me to his guests as his *kaaranko*, people from the same *kaara*.

Human circulation is perhaps the most significant force of integration between village and city. Dual residence is reserved to very few people, mainly to returnees who have built houses in the city and commute between rural and urban compound. Other villagers are primarily established either in Sabi or in Serekunda. Yet the Sabinko have made themselves at home in the city, so to speak. That is why staying behind has become more like moving between two homely places than staying only in the village.

While rural-urban circulation is a year round activity, it peaks in the dry season (December—May), after villagers are done with agricultural tasks. This is a period of intense sociality, when weddings are organised both in Sabi and Serekunda, and relatives travel both ways to attend them. Vans leave every two or three days to and from Sabi, taking about 20-25 people at a time, while other villagers leave daily from Basse station. Because of the bad road

[35] Mohamed Silla, 15 February 2008, Serekunda. Silla does not belong to the same extended family (*xabila*) as other Silla in Sabi. His father settled once in Sabi, and then moved again. For that reason, Mohamed is considered a Sabinke.

conditions on the south bank, vans have to cross over to the north bank and queue at Barra for the ferry to Banjul, making the journey 10-12 hours in total. Rural kin come with bags of groundnuts and coos, a gift for the urban kin, who reciprocate by offering hospitality. Young men come to find employment, other people come to rest, to buy particular items or simply to visit their relatives. Not everybody has close relatives in the city, though many can rely on more distant kin or co-villagers to find hospitality.

Since the urban community is comparatively small, keeping up with the rural exodus can be challenging. Hosts often complain about the pressure of honouring the codes of hospitality, and even when full-up, they have be careful about turning down a request of hospitality, or offer appropriate apologies. Men and women may come for a specific purpose—a ceremony or hospital treatment—but may end up staying for weeks or months. Many rural elders do not disdain urban life either. During the dry season, they flee the piping hot interior of the country and head for the city. They can be seen in the markets, busy bargaining or visiting their urban relatives, where perhaps they are offered a seat on a comfortable couch and a chat in front of a fridge-cold glass of juice.

The pressure weighing on the urban compounds is amplified by the number of rural relatives coming to ask for financial assistance. One only needs to spend time in a relatively affluent compound to see acquaintances and kin coming to ask for help either for themselves or on behalf of someone else. Ceremonies also attract performers among the *nyaxamalo* and the *komo* (rarely the young men though). The journey to Serekunda is not cheap; in 2006-8 it cost 200D plus baggage fees. But some people reason that they can make more than that whilst in the city. They are willing to borrow money for the fare in the hope of attending ceremonies and raising some money for the household and for their own expenses. During the ceremony the *nyaxamalo* and the *komo* mobilise customary relationships (ethnic, village, family, etc.) to flatter their 'patrons', implicitly reminding urban dwellers that they belong to the place where those relationships originate from. At the same time, the very flow of praise-singers and poorer relatives coming to the city underscores the geo-economic stratification of the places in which non-travellers stay within Gambia. It acknowledges the fact that today's patrons are in the city rather than in the village.

The contrasting views and practices across the rural-urban divide thus rehearse once again the ambivalences about staying behind. Staying in the village means to be both at the centre and at the periphery of a wider transnational field. It means to struggle to make a living on exhausted soil and to live in a backward, slow-moving place, cut off from the modern flows of communication, and sometimes forgotten by those who have made it and decided to leave it for

good. Yet it is equally a place invested in by this wider world, by buildings, money and experiences that come back from abroad. These flows exasperate the perception of living in an economically depressed place and foment the expectation that young men will go out there and find those 'things' that ameliorate this state of living. Young men know full well that it will not mean finding El Dorado, and yet they often live or work face to face with the mega-buildings of urban businessmen and transnational migrants who were or still are out there. At the same time, material and immaterial flows bring forth the social and cultural centrality of the village, which is far from monopolising the means of reproduction within the transnational field, but it certainly gives a different, more positive meaning to enduring the fatigue of cultivating fields of crops and of tradition. Staying behind is thus a dynamic process, though one full of contrasts.

III
Householding

In this chapter I will begin to focus on young men and how they envisage and organize specific ways of staying behind. For young men, the paternal household—the *ka*—represents one of the main points of reference in their life at home (and abroad). Staying in the *ka* means taking part in a setting in which both mobility and immobility are integral to its organization. Some men have to stay in the village *ka* and preside over it, not only to diversify incomes—as much literature on the household maintains (e.g. Stark and Bloom 1985)—but also to look after people and activities on behalf of and for the benefit of the migrants. In the first part of this chapter, I will describe the principles of the domestic organization of migration, showing the positions that some young men and other people can or are expected to occupy in the household. In the last part, I will focus on how young men occupy them and grapple with the challenges of becoming established at home. Although Soninke households have largely accommodated migration, migration has also generated frictions and feelings of 'being left behind'. Thus, in migrant households young men have to actively ensure the cooperation of the travellers and of other stayers in order to fulfil their role as household stayers.

3.1 THE *KA*

Pollet and Winter (1971:356-8) have identified three meanings of the term *ka*: 1) the residential area of domestic groups, the compound; 2) the ensemble of people who either reside in the compound or think of themselves as coming from it but do not necessarily live in it; 3) the agnatic group of which one becomes a member through patrilineal filiation. My findings underscore this plurality of meanings (see also Razy 2007b:71ff). I shall begin with the last one.

The Soninke are divided into *xabilanu* (sing. *xabila*), descent groups, established through the principle of patrilineality, headed by the eldest genealogical male and identified by a patronym (though different *xabilanu* may share the same patronym). *Xabila* heads are the highest representatives of their groups in village politics and, above all, when marriages and

conflicts occur within and between the *xabilanu*. At the same time, the *xabilanu* are not highly centralised political units, especially when they are divided among different localities[1]. At the territorial level, the people of a *xabila* are distributed into one or more *kanu* (sing. *ka*), which are fundamentally autonomous domestic units. The *ka* is completed by marriage, and constitutes a patrilocal unit. At its minimum, the *ka* is composed of a man, his wife or wives and his unmarried children. As sons marry, they also take up residence in the paternal *ka* with their wives, and thus contribute to moving it onward in its developmental cycle (Fortes 1958). According to the size and specific history, the *ka* can include a number of such family units related by patrilineal descent, such as a group of married brothers and their descendants. As each man marries wives and begets children, he will wield authority and a degree of autonomy over his unit of dependants (*dimbaya*); however, all brothers will submit to the authority of the eldest among them. The eldest agnatic male in the *ka* assumes its leadership (*kagumaaxu*)—the *kagume* is the leader of the *ka*. At the politico-administrative level, the *kagume* is responsible for his *ka*, including the compound tax and other minor taxes[2].

Apart from agnates and their wives, the composition of the *ka* can be highly varied and flexible. It can include other affines (*kallu*), such as the nephews and nieces of the *kagume*, and, more rarely, non-kin people: *strange farmers* and other workers, itinerant marabouts or *nyamaxalo* and their family, Quranic students (*xaranlemmu*) in Islamic scholars' compounds, and, in the past, domestic slaves (*komo*) and some of their family. Nowadays, some compounds include houses let to strangers who work as shopkeepers or artisans and reside permanently in the village with or without their families. Enduring membership in the *ka* is however established by kinship.

In the last thirty years, Sabi's demographic growth has swelled the *kanu*, whose residents now easily exceed thirty in number, and in some cases reach a hundred. In the large *kanu*, segmentation becomes likely. Segmentation occurs according to genealogical rules—usually agnatic siblinghood between the heads of each sub-unit—either along matrilateral lines (the heads are sons of two or more co-wives) or patrilateral ones (the fathers of the heads are brothers) (cf. also Siebert and Sidibe 1992:18). The word *banŋe* or *follake* identifies an area within a *ka* occupied by a sub-unit; the *follake* can be, though not necessarily so, an autonomous unit, a functional equivalent of the *ka*. The difference is that the *follake* still depends on the

[1] Each locality may have a head of the local *xabila*.

[2] The British administration relied heavily on 'traditional' forms of authority, including the household head (Bellagamba 2000:149). For instance, household heads were responsible for the Yard Tax (1895)—a tax calculated on the premises—and later reformulations of it. In today's Sabi, one wealthy returnee residing in Serekunda pays the entire village's compound tax (about 24,000 Dalasi in 2007). Each compound must also pay a small contribution for a night guardian at the water tower.

overall authority of the *kagume* and it may establish a degree of cooperation on production and consumption with other *follaku*. A *follake* may opt out and establish a new *ka*—usually denominated *ka lenme* (junior *ka*), as opposed to the *ka xoore* (big or senior *ka*). The *ka lenme* is autonomous but its 'filiation' ties are acknowledged.

Emigration has added a layer of complexity to household formation. Lone migrants are usually counted as members of the *ka*, but when they take their wives along or transfer them to their urban compound, they can form separate households in the diaspora; those in Serekunda may be considered as permanent *ka lenmu* because of the rather permanent character of settlement here. The migrant household head may keep on remitting, though his remittance level tends to diminish over time as his household grows and absorbs a greater proportion of his resources.

The material layout of the *ka*—the compound—partly reflects the social organization. Typically, a *ka* is a fenced enclosure of varying size including round huts or quadrangular houses, stables for draft animals and sheep, and a farming field (*galle*), usually not bigger than a few hundred square metres[3]. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sabi compounds have preserved the *galle* as opposed to other villages like Gambisara. By definition, each *follake* tends to occupy one side within the compound, while the middle is usually left for the courtyard (*bera*) and the kitchen (*soronkonmpe*), a simple house with hearths inside. In compounds where migrants have invested in housing, round houses tend to be replaced by quadrangular houses, or they can be used storage and for accommodating *strange farmers* and unmarried men. Houses tend to be big quadrangular mansions with tin roofing, usually with a veranda (*sella*) along their length, and with open air, fenced toilets at the back. A platform can be built in front of the house, especially in the shady parts, where people sit and socialise. One part of the compound can host the 'boys' quarters', lodging unmarried men who are set apart from their mothers when they reach adolescence. Other young guests, such as the *strange farmers*, may be lodged here. The Soninke also practise polygyny within Islamic limits (four wives[4]), and the husband should provide a house (*konpe*) for each of his wives, which can be either a round hut or a bedroom in a quadrangular house. If space allows it, the polygynous husband should also have his own personal room, especially when he grows older and needs a room where he can receive guests.

[3] Cattle heads spend the night in special fields called *gore* outside the village. They are free in the daytime. In the rainy season, households send an older child or hire a herder (usually a Fula man) to follow the cattle and make sure they do not graze on cultivated fields. People may grow maize, millets, sweet potatoes and other vegetables in the *galle*.

[4] A fifth marriage is allowed when the bride is a slave or, according to Soninke custom, classified as of slave descent (*kome*). This is very rarely practised.

The *ka* organizes the production, distribution and consumption of subsistence. In June, when the first rains fall, the men normally till the soil with a plough pulled by draft animals or by tractor (tractor ploughing is paid by cash)[5]. Then the men sow millet and maize, and the women sow groundnuts. Throughout the rainy months (from June to September or early October) the men and women weed their fields. The men harvest the millets and then dig up the groundnuts around late October to November. They bring the grains to their compounds, but leave the groundnuts to dry and wait for the Harmattan wind to rise (in late November-December); then, they will thresh and winnow, together with the women, the groundnut plants. In Chapter 1, I stated that the decline of agriculture over the last thirty to forty years has forced the village *kanu* to reorganise production. There has been a partial transition in what the men produce, from commercial to food agriculture. Men from the compound almost exclusively farm food crops (millet, sorghum, maize and sometimes groundnuts), focusing on the communal field (*tee xoore* or *furuba*) under the tutorship of the *kagume*. Their produce will be kept in the granary and constitutes *biraado*, 'subsistence food'. Individual plots (*saluman teenu*) are less frequent and significant today. In the past, after working on the communal field in the morning, men would go to their individual plots in the early or late afternoon, where they could farm groundnuts or millets for sale and/or for sharing among their own restricted family unit (*dimbaya*). Now, however, even if they do not have individual plots, each married man must take responsibility for expenses beyond basic subsistence vis-à-vis his own wife or wives and his dependants.

Married women are entitled to a plot and to some of the *ka* male labour (especially for soil preparation and uprooting and thrashing groundnuts). They customarily farm groundnuts and have property rights on the harvest (cf. Pollet and Winter 1971:395-7; Weigel 1982:50). Before droughts became more frequent in the late 1960s, some senior women also had rice fields near the stream. With men withdrawing from groundnut cultivation, women have almost exclusive access to cash crops, yet they use much of their yield for making groundnut paste (*tigadege*) and for buying the condiments (spices, leaves, etc.) in order to prepare the sauce for the meals when it is their turn to cook[6]. In their husband's compound, women are responsible for household chores: cooking, cleaning, pounding grain, fetching water and childrearing.

In a *ka* partitioned into autonomous sub-units, each *follake* tends to have one communal piece of land, and the men of the *follake* work on it. It is extremely rare for men to form labour

[5] When no workforce and no draft animals are available, households may just hoe the soil where they sow.
[6] According to my observations and enquiries, it is rare for women to be able to sell more than 30% of their yield. In other groups, like the Mandinka, women may not have crop rights in upland groundnut fields (Carney and Watts 1991:673).

units larger than the *ka* (e.g. at the level of the *xaabila*)[7]. In their socio-economic survey of ten villages of the upper river region, Siebert and Sidibe (1992:49) found that such large units (Mandinka: *dabada*) were already a minority at the beginning of the 1990s; most labour units coincided with compounds or sections of them (*follaku*). Thus, labour and consumption units tend to overlap. An autonomous *follake* is marked by the presence of a separate *kingide* (or *kinŋu*), literally meaning a hearth, where meals are prepared and consumed, the food being produced and prepared by the members of the *follake*. The term *kore*—now a rare one—used to be the correct word for identifying such labour-distribution-consumption units. The *kore* is the labour unit of men, completed by their parents, wives and children, among whom their produce is distributed and consumed (Pollet and Winter 1971:397). Whereas *follake* usually refers to those who belong to a section of the *ka* by agnatic descent and marriage, the *kore* can include non-kin members such as the *strange farmers*, and in the past, the slaves. With changing productive relations, today the *kore* has an easier structure, and coincides almost invariably with the *ka*, or the *follake* in partitioned *kanu*[8].

In etic terms the *kore/follake* can be defined as 'household'. This definition highlights kinship as the main criterion of membership as well as the economic dimensions—production, distribution and consumption—which are at the core of domestic relations. Accordingly, partitioned *kanu* can be defined as joint households[9]. In defining the *ka* as a (joint) household, I do not mean to confine a complex reality within the straightjacket of typologies and theoretical models, as much literature on the household has done in the past (Yanagisako 1979; Pessar 1988; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Evergeti and Zontini 2006). I use the category of the household as a starting point (cf. Yanagisako 1979) to begin describing and analysing some of the principles of domestic organization in the dynamics of staying behind. It allows me to take into account migration as an integral aspect of the household economy. While migrants do not farm on the communal field and do not consume in the compound, they partake of the distribution of resources.

With the rural economy stagnating since the 1970s, migrant remittances have become a major lifeline for households. The importance of liquidity has increased, and, since agriculture

[7] I could find only one case of such labour cooperation between compounds linked through the matrilateral line. It was mainly motivated by the scarcity of workforce in one of the two compounds.

[8] The *kore* included slaves working for their masters and consuming from their granaries. The disappearance of slavery as a system of production probably led to the simplification of the *kore*, so that it overlaps with the personnel of the *ka/follake* (Weigel 1982:45). Nevertheless, since the use of slavery in production ended, the Gambian Soninke have included *strange farmers* in their labour-consumption units.

[9] The Mandinka equivalent of *kingide—sinkiroo*—is often used to define the household (e.g. Siebert and Sidibe 1992:18). Too much emphasis on consumption, however, risks leaving out of the picture the migrants, who do not consume within the premises of the compound, but contribute to food stocks.

has turned to subsistence production, money has had to be found elsewhere. To have a sense of the relevance of remittances for household subsistence, it is sufficient to consider that most Sabinko eat rice once a day. Rice bags imported from abroad are sold by most stores in Sabi.

The category of *biraado* is also growing larger and more cash dependent. For most elderly people, and even for some of those aged between 30-40 or over, commenting on changing times also means commenting on changing tastes: not only was rice more of a rarity in the old days, but above all people used to eat breakfast *fonde* (porridge) with no sugar at all[10]. Today, however, sugar is considered a component of *biraado*[11]. Manufactured cooking oil is another staple that tends to be included in *biraado*. Since rice, sugar and cooking oil can only be bought with cash, it is easy to understand that remittances make a substantial difference to households coping with declining cash crop production (particularly on communal lands). Indeed, a common arrangement is that migrants take charge of providing such staples. As we shall see, many households can count on remittances in some way or another, but not all do; this produces asymmetries between and within *kanu*.

In addition, remittances are linked to changing consumption patterns that tend to raise the standards of what it means to be 'self-sufficient'. As noticed in other Soninke contexts (Weigel 1982:83-4), alimentary changes only partly reflect shifting subsistence needs; they also result from the fact that food, not unlike buildings, is used to express social distinction. People's tastes and needs have been influenced by consumption patterns introduced from migrant places (particularly Serekunda) and financed by migrant resources. We see that bread and butter are widely consumed for breakfast, and more than five bakeries can be found in Sabi alone (bread is made with imported flour and yeast). Many households do not have sufficient money to afford it, at least not on a daily basis[12]. Conversely, some households take pride in the fact that migrants provide them with enough money to buy extra food for breakfast, as well as a plethora of ingredients that make their meals more palatable: fresh and smoked fish, onions, meat, tomato paste, palm oil, flavour enhancers (stock cubes, crystalline monosodium glutamate), etc. (Fig. 3.1). In this case, commenting on the taste of food in a given compound can be an explicit reference to their economic status.

[10] Polak (2007), reporting on a Bamana/Bambara (Mali) village, also highlights generational changes being mediated by consumption habits such as sugary porridge and other breakfast foods. Such habits have been largely introduced by rural-urban migrants.
[11] Rice and sugar are also a common Ramadan gift for more distant relatives outside the *ka*.
[12] Note that, apart from porridge, each family unit is responsible for cooking breakfast. This means that there can be internal differences within compounds, for wealthier units can have higher consumption standards.

Fig. 3.1 – Subsistence Levels?

A shop in Fass Bajong village

3.2 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCIDENCE OF MIGRATION: A HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

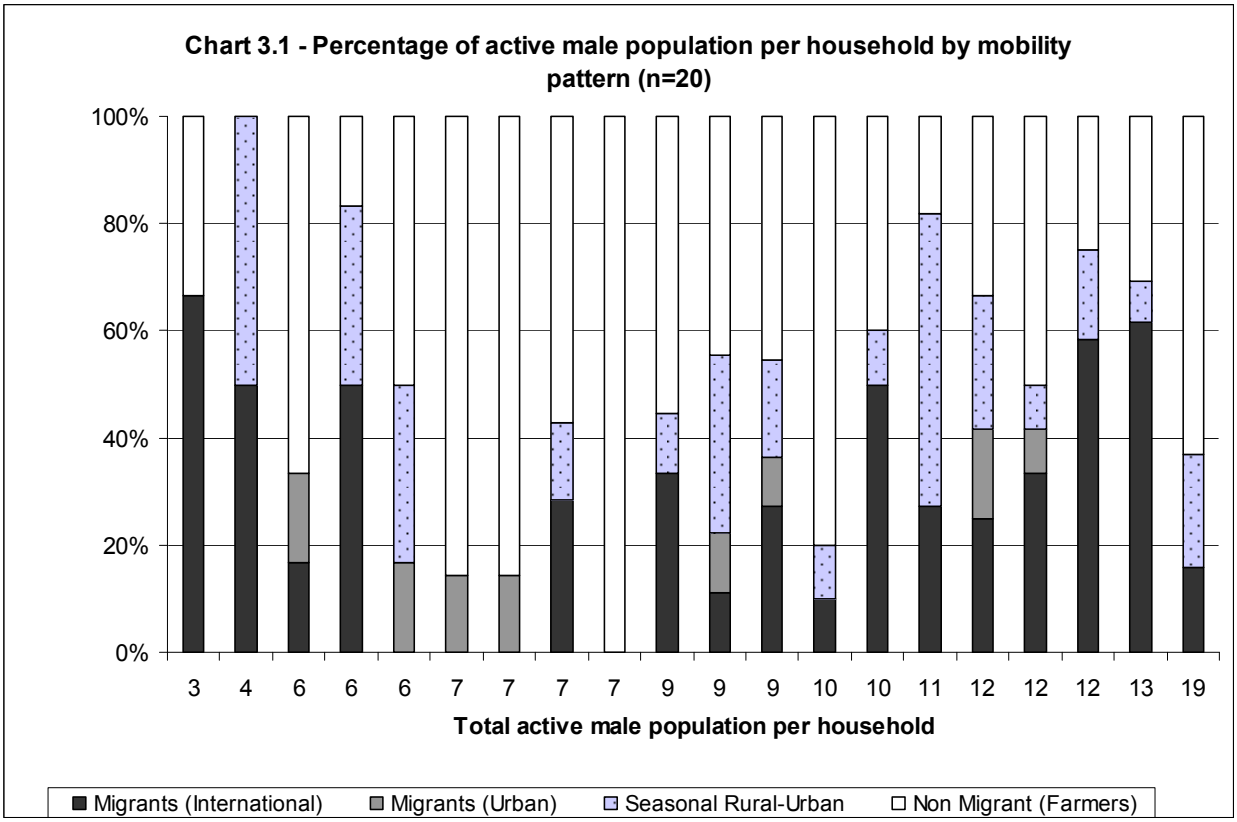
Between December 2006 and February 2007 I conducted a small-scale survey in Sabi to assess the demographic and economic relevance of emigration across the village households. The sample was limited, and it is important to stress that the figures which I will illustrate are an indication of general trends only. Twenty households were randomly selected from a total of 182 *kanu* (YWAM 2006:27, table 11). Interviews for the survey were carried out with household heads, the people in charge of the collective budget and granary. Accordingly, the survey did not cover all economic aspects of migration, but contributions to the household as a whole, particularly to the *biraado*. In addition, household heads were interviewed primarily about male migration, so eventual contributions from married daughters and sisters were not counted (they are not normally expected to remit for subsistence needs). For the purpose of the survey, I defined 'migrants' as villagers ordinarily working and residing outside the village for more than a year, and hence in the position of remitters. This definition includes Serekunda-based householders (who are not strictly speaking travellers in emic terms), but excludes seasonal urban labour migrants (who reside in rural households). Respondents were not always consistent about household membership. Not surprisingly, the most ambiguous case was that of those brothers of the *kagume* who had effectively established their independent household in Serekunda or abroad and might not contribute to the household, or might contribute only irregularly. As a general rule, I let the informants establish the boundaries of their household, and found that most tended to include those who actually contributed or were normatively obliged to contribute through remittances, such as their agnatic sons.

Four out of the twenty households in the sample correspond to individual *follaku*, the rest correspond to entire *kanu*. Household size (only residents) varies considerably between 9 and 68, with an average of 30 residents and 3 male migrants, either in Serekunda or abroad. With respect to the active male population—the males deemed fit for all farming tasks and/or travelling[13] (roughly aged 16-55)—one out of three is a migrant. Two out of three migrants are abroad. Table 3.1 shows the distribution of migrants per destination for a sample of 52 migrants whose destination could accurately be established from the information provided by the household head. Percentages of migrant male population also vary considerably with peaks around 60-65% (Chart 3.1).

[13] Again, this figure does not always include households that have branched off abroad or in Serekunda; the sons of such migrants residing with them are not included either.

Table 3.1: Migrant Destinations (n=52)

Destination	% of Migrants
Euro-America	**57.69**
Europe	46.15
USA	11.54
West-Central Africa	**42.31**
Serekunda	23.08
Angola	9.62
Rest of W-C Africa	9.62



The survey confirms that migrant remittances are a structural component of *biraado*. Among the 20 households included in the survey, only 3 declare themselves to be self-sufficient in agricultural production, and in any case buy rice with groundnut money (only one does this) and with remittances. In all other cases grains either finish before the following rainy season or last until the harvest, when rice is added on a daily basis throughout the year. This confirms Siebert and Sidibe's (1992:52) finding that deficient production is a long-standing problem in the

Upper River Region: they found that in 1991 only 6 out of 75 informants declared themselves to be self-sufficient. In Sabi, among the 19 households with at least one migrant, 16 are supplied with rice and sugar by migrants, to offset low production. Two of the three remaining households have only one migrant in Serekunda: in the first case, the migrant is not earning enough to remit; in the second, the migrant has established an independent *ka* in Serekunda. Both of these *kanu* rely on mutual aid networks in the village and on a non-household kinsman abroad to cope with *biraado* emergencies. This is also the case for the one household with no migrants. The third household has a second-generation migrant/settler in Serekunda who is helping regularly with rice and sugar, whereas the *kagume*'s own brothers abroad do not remit. Six household heads declare that remittances are irregular, and thus insufficient to complement production. However, this statement must be treated with care since, as we shall see later, complaining about the contribution of migrants can be a strategy to put pressure on them and encourage a greater remittance level. The percentage of migrants contributing to the household expenses is high, averaging 76.9%. Nine household heads explicitly stated that remittances cover extra food needs, such as meat and condiments, and money to pay for machines to pound the millets. This does not exclude some money being directly remitted to the wives or sisters of migrants for them to buy condiments.

Eight households (40%) earn a regular cash income from small scale business activities (bakery, bike fitting, marabout work, etc.) or rented premises. In three of these households, such activities are explicitly conceived of as generating money for *biraado*; thus they are owned collectively by the household or are run on its behalf: shops annexed to the compound and rented out (n=2), and a van operating a mini-bus service between Sabi and Serekunda by junior householders (n=1). These activities have been partly or wholly started up through migrant remittances.

A widespread source of income for male householders is seasonal urban labour migration. Almost 30% of the male farmers migrate to the Serekunda area in order to find employment during the dry season. This constitutes only a minor and intrinsically irregular contribution to *biraado*. This is difficult to quantify: some men go to Serekunda to find money for their own purposes, while others make non-alimentary presents to their kin (see also Section 4.3.2). However, in households without permanent migrants and/or remittances, seasonal migration represents a more substantial contribution (n=2). At the very least, seasonal migration reduces household size and hence lowers expenditure on consumption, thus transferring responsibility onto young men to find their own means of survival, or even onto wealthy urban hosts to provide nourishment for their rural relatives during the dry season.

I consider agricultural inputs paid with remittances as a form of productive investment in *biraado*. Only five household heads report that migrants send money directly to them for one or more inputs: tractor ploughing, fertilisers, carts, tools and draft animals. This gives us a glimpse of the migrants' withdrawal from agricultural investments. Otherwise, the *kagumu* pay for fertilisers and ploughing when money is available; and such money may be saved from past remittances. In general, each woman is responsible for her plot; although I did not collect specific data on this, it appears that migrant husbands or brothers assist their wives/sisters when bad harvests prevent savings. Tractor ploughing, hired labour (*sassi*) and especially fertiliser are the most frequent investments.

Remittances are also spent on items that enhance the socio-economic status of the household. Building houses and making housing improvements is considered an obligation for migrants and, as mentioned in Chapter 2, it is linked to prestige, to the extent that it generates emulative jealousy (*suuxe*). Sixty-five percent of the respondents confirm that migrants have paid for housing improvements in the last ten years, and the improvement was almost always the construction of a house. Migrants also invest in other sectors. A means of transport (bikes or motorcycles) is a popular present (52%), which is usually thought of as an individual gift at the beginning, but then is used collectively. In two households out of three, extra rice, sugar and money to buy the sacrificial ram are sent on the occasion of the religious festivals of Korite and Tabaski.

Remittances are also essential to other aspects of social reproduction. For instance, migrants help stayers to pay marriage expenses in 38.8% of the cases. Some household heads consider this an obligation because marriage is a household- and *xabila*-wide event, regardless of the actual kin relation between helper and groom. Others, however, consider that it is up to the groom to find his sponsors (there will be more on this in the following sections), and to handle the money he receives from abroad; this has certainly produced a lower figure in the survey than appears to be the actual case.

Migrants rarely invest in collective forms of saving at the disposal of the *ka*, the so-called *fangkanta* reserves that I have described in Chapter 2. Among the households surveyed, only one *kagume* or household head manages a very large number of cattle (111), the other households have fewer than five heads of cattle (4.93) on average, including in most cases a pair of oxen used as draft animals that are sold under exceptional circumstances only [14]. Since there are few

[14] Note that cattle can be owned individually by both men and women. Women tend to invest their savings in smaller livestock, such as sheep and goats.

measurable collective assets[15] (cattle, land, etc.) in which migrants invest, it is difficult to estimate the impact of migration on economic stratification between households. The quantification of household income is a notoriously difficult parameter to define and measure, and the survey did not attempt to measure it[16]. By speaking informally with household heads, however, it was apparent that households with no or non-remitting migrant men struggled to make ends meet. Having few men at home also causes problems to agricultural production, though small but resourceful households can employ *strange farmers*.

In her study of the Malian Upper Senegal valley, Sally Findley (1989, 1994) has argued that large households, especially those with large male labour pools, are better able to let young men emigrate. They can cope with the absent male labour during the initial phase of international emigration, when young men are away from home to find visas, finances and then a job at their destination. Months or even years can then go by before they can start remitting regularly. The tendency in Sabi is for the number of foreign migrants to be proportional to the total number of men, though the correlation between these two variables is only a loose one (see Chart 3.1). There is also a loose correlation between household size and the number of male migrants. Findley's argument appears to apply better to the first period of international migration (up to the 1970s), before migration policies and social capital became more important factors than the labour force at home; that is to say, emigration now heavily depends on having relatives abroad (though not necessarily householders) who help young men to acquire visas. If a young man in a household with few men has a good opportunity to travel directly, say, to Europe, it is very unlikely that he will be refused permission—the household can rely on credit and relatives in the meantime. Households of over 40 people (n=5) have an average of 11.6 active men, almost half of whom (47%) are abroad[17]. This is too small a sample to draw conclusions; it may be said, however, that more migrants means more people among whom to distribute the requests for subsistence, emergencies and extra investments, and more income earners who can compensate for those who are temporarily unable to remit due to unemployment or lack of business opportunities.

Finally, in the second half of my survey I asked my interviewees (n=8) to briefly describe the history of emigration in their *ka* before I presented the ordinary questionnaire to them. I did

[15] All households in Sabi 'own' land, or to be more precise, they have permanent usufruct rights granted by the chief (in rare cases the 'master/chief of the land'—*ninye gume*—is not the chief). Households' communal land is a collective property and thus cannot be sold. In some villages with a flourishing commercial horticulture, land can be saleable (see Section 4.3.1).

[16] This is a setting where household members often acquire small sums money from a wide network of kin and acquaintances, and do not necessarily pool all the moneys and resources that they acquire.

[17] This figure does not take into account that such households could be part of larger *kanu* which split over the years.

this in order to have a more accurate picture of how their current situation came into being. Complex and often partial histories could not easily be worked into succinct statistics. Nevertheless, I have found that all compounds have a two or three generation long history of international travel. Large and prosperous *kanu* at the beginning of the 1950s tended to have, in line with Findley's argument, more possibilities of allowing men to migrate, and this enabled some of them to remain large and prosperous over time. However, some households were clearly larger and wealthier in the past, before they split into sections or faced depopulation. Some of these had more migrants in the past than now because migrants have established their own *ka* in Serekunda, or they have not helped juniors to emigrate. These provisionary findings remind us that households can be complex and divided internally, and that variations in income levels within households can be greater than between households. Above all, these considerations remind us that the survey is only a snapshot of a very dynamic situation.

3.3 DOMESTIC ORGANIZATION OF MIGRATION

Remittances are central to household subsistence and wellbeing, but they are only one aspect of a more complex organization of domestic relations. In some African contexts, rural outmigration has led to new forms of domestic organization and has changed household roles and tasks, such as in those places where the absence of young male adults has increased agricultural workloads for women and elders, and/or where women assume household leadership (e.g. Murray 1981; see also Hampshire 2006:402-4). Among the Soninke the accepted rules governing domestic organization have accommodated migration. Senior men continue to rule over households, men continue to work on the communal land, and women work in their individual fields and in household chores. This means that not only do households need migrants' remittances to survive, but migrants need households to continue their quest for money. In fact, some men have to stay at home and farm, to look after migrants' wives and children, and in general to ensure the wellbeing and the management of the household in their absence. This rule can be disregarded sometimes, but it is rare for households to be left with no active man behind.

Migration constructs the *ka* as a centre of production as well as socio-cultural reproduction, a place of sociality and morality that has to be presided over. The survey gives an indication that migrant households are generally able to ensure cooperation and compliance among their dispersed members. On the other hand, migration has also raised specific problems.

The management of migrant resources can cause frictions and divisions within households, while the formation of separate households in the diaspora can affect the timing and mode of household formation and the inter-dependence between stayers and movers. In this section, I will not try to describe all the possible variations in household structure and formation. Rather I will focus on the main principles of the domestic organization of mobility and immobility in order to shed light on the organization of staying behind. I will show that the household envisages positions and functions that young men can or must assume at home. These positions are relational; therefore it will also be necessary to describe the position and (im)mobility patterns of other householders.

3.3.1 Subsistence and Beyond

In spite of the weight of migrant remittances in household budgets, the importance of agricultural production should not be underestimated. Apart from being widely publicised by the government, the ideal of food self-sufficiency is held in high esteem even in affluent households that theoretically could live from remittances alone. To secure sufficient subsistence food is to be independent, a fact of some importance in the history of this region, where some households used to be forced to beg assistance from self-reliant households during the 'hungry season'(July-August), when the crops are not yet ripe and the previous year's stocks are running out. As the shifts in household production suggest, the cultivation of food crops represents the minimal core of household economy; it is what holds it together and guarantees minimal subsistence if the vagaries of travelling lead to failure and/or repatriation. In a similar vein, Stephen Wooten (2005) has shown that the advent of commercial horticulture in a Bamana (Bambara) community (Mali) has not displaced the significance of what he translates as 'for life' production—which could be a translation of *biraado* too—the production of subsistence grains. 'For life' production takes precedence over 'for money' production, through which householders satisfy extra needs and consumerist desires. Among the Soninke, agricultural production ideally takes precedence over migration, but in practice the 'for life' domain also feeds on the 'for money' one.

Since international and urban migration is the main 'for money' activity, the relation between migrants and stayers is central to the organization of *biraado*. Even though they have been set apart by changing migratory patterns, farmers and travellers continue to be complementary figures with respect to household production. *Biraado* is a collective project with a translocal reach: the Sabinko explicitly say that those who stay behind, farm, while those who

travel, remit. Or to express it in metaphors: travellers look for money in the 'travelling bush' (*terendengunne*), a symbolic extension of the quest for crops in the farming bush[18] (Fig. 3.5). This is the logic underlying the arrangement by which migrants buy rice, sugar, oil and eventually other consumer goods that have been included in *biraado*[19]. Remittances for *biraado* often constitute a special part of the budget, so that money arrives with an indication of what it has to be used for. In most households, rice and millets are alternated at the main meals (lunch and dinner), making inter-dependent complementariness between farming and travelling readily manifest.

Therefore, it would be misleading to speak of outright dependence on remittances. The household economy can be described as a 'system of assisted self-sufficiency', to use Quiminal's (1991:11) expression. As the survey has shown, this does not detract from the fact that securing subsistence *and* prosperity effectively depends on a constant flow of remittances, and hence on maintaining a permanent base of migrants abroad.

It is more difficult to speak of complementariness with respect to consumption beyond subsistence levels. Household men not only cooperate but compete for honour, consumption being an arena of social distinction. One of the reasons why households succeed in attracting migrant resources is that the household provides a site to express personal accomplishment (cf. Giblin 2005:9). Individuality is not subsumed into a supposedly anonymous domestic communalism: the money, rice, houses and commodities that the migrant sends function as place holders and reminders of that person's achievements in spite of the fact that they are, ideally, 'for everybody in the household'. All such things pertain to the 'for money' domain, as Wooten (2005) would have it, and farmers are not usually in a position to (co-)sponsor buildings, vehicles, etc. Nevertheless, they can play a complementary role by contributing labour to and supervising the construction work of a house (Fig. 3.6; see also Section 4.3). In contrast, private investments such as urban properties are outside the collective regime of the household of the household, and express individual success.

[18] Similarly, Wolof-speaking migrants from Senegal describe their sojourn abroad as cultivating a field (Fouquet 2008:249).

[19] Some households told me that migrants keep in touch among themselves and pool contributions for subsistence; the most senior migrant may coordinate the others.

Fig. 3.2 – What's in a Meal Bowl?

Partaking of a rice meal – eating from the same bowl is a powerful symbol of unity

3.3.2 Relay Migration?

Generally speaking, people do subscribe to what we may term an ideal of relay migration. Relay migration means that juniors substitute the seniors in the 'travelling bush', thereby contributing to the household subsistence and prosperity in the long term. Householders may in fact accept that a migrant invests in personal properties in Serekunda, if he has taken junior brothers abroad, thus devolving to them some of the responsibility to provide for the household. Some migrant fathers and particularly migrant brothers have been consistently sponsoring their juniors' emigration in order to contribute to the household economy, and eventually replace and support them once they return. In this way, households that have joined profitable migration networks early on have generally secured a base of migrants abroad. This was the case of households with a relatively large male active population in the past, which through relay migration usually maintained high percentages of emigration. However, relay migration is rarely a linear process, due to the unpredictable legal-political barriers to international emigration on the one hand, and the frequency of intra-household rivalries on the other—a point I shall return to later.

Above all, the ideal of relay migration should not deceive us into describing Soninke migration as a planned household strategy of economic security. Doing so would be to see only one side of the process, especially its *a posteriori* redistributive effects. The resources to emigrate are often found in wider networks than that of the *ka*. The *nega* (mother's brother) is a key sponsor of migration and business, when he has the means to do so of course. The reasons for avuncular help are a mix of prospective marriage solutions in which the *nega* has an interest (the preferential marriage rule between cross-cousins—i.e. his nephew and his daughter), of sibling solidarities (he helps his nephew migrate so he can help the mother/sister), and of matrilateral solidarities extending from kinship, which customarily establish informal relations between uncle and nephew. The migrant's own agnatic elders may or may not play an active role in their junior's attempts, not infrequently leaving him to find his own route and to demonstrate he can manage for himself, at least until he has migrated. It is only then that he is peremptorily reminded of where he belongs: he is still a member of the *ka* and should focus on the needs and requirements of the *ka*. A consequence of this semi-liberal policy is that given juniors may have better connections (e.g. their *nega*) and travel before their agnatic seniors, and it can be very difficult to establish an orderly pattern of relay migration in households. Conversely, a number of young men find themselves struggling to find a way to travel without support, and they actually fall back on the domestic unit and behave as household stayers.

3.3.3 Seniority

Whether they travel or farm, young men are under the authority of their senior householders, particularly that of the men. Soninke society, and hence each domestic unit, is gerontocratic. The roles and authority that young men occupy change significantly according to the position they hold on the scale of seniority within the household. Young men are usually junior householders, though some of them are *kagumu* or assume similar functions in households when men of the parents' generation have died out. Seniority is central to the organization of migration: the seniors (ideally) stay at home, and the juniors *hustle* for the household. In this section, I shall describe the socio-political and moral bases of this division of mobility careers, and the functions that senior householders assume in the domestic organization of migration.

Seniors do not stay home only because old age makes them unfit to travel; they have a right to 'sit' and require that their juniors provide for them by farming and by finding money. This entitlement stems from a logic of reciprocity and social indebtedness, which is particularly evident in inter-generational relations (Meillassoux 1981; Marie 1997; Roth 2008). Parents donate life to their children, and throughout their upbringing they provide daily nurture and training until adulthood. The fathers are responsible for food and shelter as well as moral instruction, whereas the women take care of the day to day minute practices of caring and rearing. As the children grow up, they have to reciprocate this debt accumulated during childhood and their teens by taking care of their parents, providing food for them and complying with their authority. Reciprocity in inter-generational dynamics does not stand for equality. This kinship and household system is based on 'hierarchical solidarity', where mutuality and support are underpinned by asymmetric relations (Viti 2007:168). Although biological parents are (usually) the main 'creditors' in this exchange, other subjects are also involved; these may be social parents, such as foster parents (Skramstad 2008:147-50), and more generally the classificatory fathers and mothers of the individual, as well as senior agnatic siblings. By way of 'generalised reciprocity', having consumed household *biraado* during his upbringing, the junior is also indebted to the household as a whole; consequently, he has an obligation to provide *biraado* in his turn. Meillassoux (1981:39-42, 55ff) saw this process as the basis of the domestic mode of production in agrarian communities, where the seniors wield control over the juniors' labour on account of the fact that the former control the granaries and can thus feed (i.e. indebt) the juniors before they are able to produce their own food..

Emigration both poses problems and reproduces this agrarian model. With the notable exception of commercial enterprises based on kinship, migrants do not work directly for their

senior kin, as in domestic agriculture. They work away from home and save their own money. The days when all the savings of a young migrant were wholly remitted into the hands of the *kagume* are long gone, if they ever existed beyond the epics of an orderly past; migrants can be more selective and secretive about their resources and being away from the family environment facilitates personal accumulation and partial emancipation from seniors (their urban properties are a manifestation of this). However, young men do not settle their social debt even if they move away from home; they are expected to remit money in substitution for farming. Moreover, emigration often comes at the expense of greater social indebtedness. Even if fathers and mothers may not sponsor emigration directly, they may help young men by mobilising, or letting them mobilise, their networks. Alternatively, migrants helping their junior brothers to travel also produce a social liability within the same generation, especially if the help is motivated by relay migration in order to provide for the household.

Relations based on seniority, including remittances, assume highly moral overtones, even religious ones. This is clearly evident in the logic of blessing or *barake*. *Barake* (from the Arabic *baraka*) is a well known notion in Sufi Islam, particularly associated with prominent scholars and saintly figures[20] (Cruise O'Brien 1975; Coulon 1981; Cruise O'Brien and Coulon 1988; Bava 2003). Among the Soninke, parents are thought to be the first and foremost source of *barake*. Blessing is a vital element in social life. It is prosperity and protection. Yet wealth alone is not a revealing index of *barake*. No matter how wealthy someone may be at one stage, if his/her wealth is not insured with *barake*, it will be volatile and subject to sudden deterioration. In contrast, even if what God has destined for someone (*warijaxe*) is not material abundance, nevertheless through a blessing he/she will be able to make the most out of it. Being blessed is necessary to accumulation and in general to progress in life[21]. Thus, *barake* is not only protective but also productive, multiplicative and fecund.

Acquiring *barake* is a matter of obedience and devotion. As Cruise O'Brien (1975:62) put it with reference to the Murid disciple: "Obedience […] implies various forms of tribute, in labour, in kind, and in cash". It is a very practical issue. Tributes are clearly seen in a number of daily activities and less common actions, from ritualised greetings to work in the communal field (boys), to household chores (girls), to presents, to housing improvements. Subsistence goods bought with remittances are assimilated into the same cultural and practical logic; they are tributes owed to the senior householders, who manage them on behalf of the household as a

[20] Sainthood is played down in the Soninke context, where there are no Sufi brotherhoods, and where reformism is gaining ground (reformists condemn sainthood as idolatry or assigning partners to God).
[21] *Barake* is not a direct measure of success: blessing is an investment for the future, but it cannot be predictive of the future.

whole. Devotion is rewarded by supplicatory prayers (*duwaŋe*) and in general it flows from the state of satisfaction which the junior is able to induce in his parent or senior. As such, devotion is not a matter of obligation alone. It is part of a wider discourse about success and reputation. The loyalty and subservience to the parents and the family constitute an element of social virtuosity which can have practical implications. The more someone is spoken of as a blessed individual, the more people will treat him as such, and the more he will probably prove to be one: people will trust him, he will be relied on in business ventures and transactions, and so on (cf. Bava 2003:73). Thus *barake* is an incitement to excellence, and a potential reason for competition for honour among the household sons.

There is no doubt that emigration enables young men to multiply their demonstrations of devotion far beyond subsistence levels, and this goes together with the fact that migrants invest beyond subsistence levels. The association between *barake* and travel is often explicit and normative: "You go out [abroad] and hustle. When you have something, you bring it back home and give it all to your parents or to your family, so you will have *barake*: when you go out again, you will get double of what you brought back"[22]. Migrants take their parents to Mecca, where they perform the pilgrimage and acquire the honorific title of Al Haji or Haja, and where the efficacy of their prayers for their children are multiplied several times over. Some of those who are based in Serekunda or have a house there bring over their aged parents. Here the latter can find better health facilities, comforts and food. Bringing parents to the city is presented as a timely and deserved treat for their old age, a social promotion from 'poverty' (*misikinaaxu*) towards a life where "they don't have to worry about anything but their afterlife", as a young man put it, daydreaming of what he would have done for his parents, if he had travelled. Cash gifts to the parents are of course included, and *barake* is not exempt from a degree of monetisation.

At the same time, migrants are still expected to show devotion in non-material ways. For instance, they are expected to visit on a regular basis, spending time with their parents and their family. Visits become almost compulsory when parents are ailing. Migrants also come home to acquire *barake* in order to improve their chances in migration. A man who had spent a few months in West Africa trying in vain to re-enter Angola—where he ran a business—said: "When you cannot find a [migratory] route, when things are tough, you come back. You start again. You stay with your parents, you get a blessing, and then you try to find another route"[23]. Young men

[22] M. (man, aged: late twenties), January 2007, Basse.
[23] Musa (aged 35), January 2008, Sabi.

who are about to travel are also used to touring their household and extended family elders to acquire blessings and prayers for them to succeed in the migratory venture.

Although parents are the primary source of *barake*, other senior householders can dispense blessings too, especially when they play a role in upbringing and in household management. Allowing the *ka* to survive (*birandi*), either by farming or by sending money for the seniors, is definitely described as a way of acquiring *barake*. Indeed, it is not unusual that the father's *ka* is thought to be endowed with trans-generational *barake*, something that the ancestors pass down to contemporary male seniors along the paternal line. This is especially evident in the case of renowned (blessed) marabouts and prosperous people[24]. Donald Donham (1999:esp. 103ff) has argued that among the Maale of Ethiopia, power relations are characterised by the fetishisation of fertility, as if people's success in producing assets (crops, wealth, children) depends on the power of others (the king, chiefs, husbands, fathers, elder brothers, etc.) to control the fertility of the land and of the people. Although there are several differences between the Soninke and the Maale, I would argue that a similar fetishisation is at play here. Seniors 'beget' and keep on 'begetting' juniors, they unlock and insure their potential by nurturing and blessing.

In sum, by 'sitting', senior householders not only lay claims to migrant resources, but they also co-construct and sustain migration. Scholars of West African migration have underlined the role of intergenerational reciprocity in transnational domestic arrangements and remittances (e.g. Demonsant 2007; Mazzucato 2008), but they have paid less attention to how it constructs parents and senior householders as rightful and necessary stayers.

The political and moral authority of senior stayers is necessary to migrants in other ways, for instance in marriage. Marriage is a key factor in the process of emancipation of junior men and in the social reproduction of the household. In the recent past, seniors provided economic resources needed for juniors' marriage, thus controlling the timing of their emancipation. Today, seniors tend to offload the economic incumbencies of marriage on the juniors, and migrants often provide the money to pay for other grooms' marriage expenses. But seniors have not entirely relinquished their power over marriage arrangements. They have a strong say in relation to marriage partners, particularly the first wife, and often seek out suitable brides by activating their

[24] The transmission of (social) life and blessing is symbolically associated with breath and sometimes with spittle. During naming ceremonies, male elders pass the newborn to each other, whispering prayers and blowing into his/her ear.

kin networks[25]; mothers are very active in this. This matrimonial service is particularly significant in the case of migrants, whereby the parents are asked or spontaneously lead the selection process and the transactions in a migrant's absence (age mates and trustworthy intermediaries may help in this). As family leaders, the senior men and *xabila* elders have maintained a central position in marriage transactions, actually weaving and sanctioning the alliance between the two descent groups (cf. Buggenhagen 2004; Wooten 2005). For instance, when the official engagement is decided on, the spouses are absent, and it is the male elders from both sides who come together and 'tie' the marriage in an official ceremony (*tanmanragaye*). A marriage without the approval of the elders is hardly possible.

In the following pages, I will describe more activities and relations in which the presence of the senior householders is directly or indirectly important for migration. Before I continue, however, I would like to say something about the implications of seniority and of seniors 'sitting' at home for young men. Senior householders are often ambivalent about the dispersal of their juniors (see also Pollet and Winter 1971:131). On the one hand, there is pressure on the young men to enable their parents and the household seniors to 'sit' with enough peace of mind and to access forms of prestige that emigration is increasingly making available to them (e.g. pilgrimage to Mecca). In this respect, the funnel or blockage imposed by migration policies on young men's mobility can swell the number of young men remaining at home and make the seniors worried about having to assume social and economic responsibility for the many household dependants, including the young men, and this increases the pressure on the latter to take on their normative roles as sons and household providers. On the other, seniors are rarely left on their own in the household, especially if the person is an aged senior man. Migrants' money cannot compensate for all that there is to do at home. To be an elder is to have people moving and going on errands on that person's behalf. It means to have young men farming for him, helping him with household management and taking care of him. Although no elder would refuse a young man the permission to travel if he had a concrete opportunity, elders do not wholly dislike having some juniors around whom they can rely upon.

This leads us to a second and consequent aspect of staying behind: succession. Although senior women can wield considerable power, in no case can they assume leadership or attain the

[25] Marriages arranged from childhood seem to have almost disappeared. Preference has not. There are preferential patterns associated with kinship classification, particularly between matrilateral cross-cousins (*kallungora*) who share a joking relationship that, as part of the 'jokes', includes addressing each other as 'husband' and 'wife'. Though much less common, parallel cousin marriage is also practised among the Soninke. According to recent studies of marriage practices in Gambia, most marriages are arranged by the parents and take place in equal proportions with cross-cousins, other kin, and acquaintances of the family (see Skramstad 2008:91). Although I do not have statistical data on this, my observations tend to confirm such findings.

political-moral authority of the senior men. In Sabi, I have witnessed only one *ka* where all the men were abroad and only their mothers and wives were left at home. Because the household is such a socially and morally central institution, it should not be surprising that the Soninke hold that at least one man is needed to supervise the *ka*, or better, to govern (*mare*) it. Some people maintain that God would not allow all the men of the *ka* to migrate, leaving the leadership vacant. In those rare cases when the *kagume* dies leaving no adult heir behind, an elder of the *xabila* may assume the interim headship. This means that, while some senior men have to stay behind, they also have to prepare their heirs for succession. A number of elders told me that their father did not allow them to travel in their youth because he wanted them to stay and learn how to manage the *ka* in order to replace him in the future. These were often the first born male sons, the agnatic heirs par excellence. I also noticed that in many cases the first foreign-born male child (*soma*) is more likely than his younger brothers to be sent and raised in Sabi. I was told that this ensures the future household leader grows up with sound family values and expertise.

However, by the late 1970s households were in need of remittances for subsistence, and many first born males were raised abroad or were allowed, if not directly helped, to emigrate. As for relay migration, this has made sibling order less relevant to succession. Pragmatic considerations prevail over seniority when it comes to succession, especially when potential successors are the main providers of the compound and their householders prefer them to stay abroad. More or less senior men who remain (or fail to migrate) become household 'sitters'. As we shall see, the fact of presiding over the paternal *ka* potentially confers a degree of authority and household responsibilities on them.

Fig. 3.3 – Sumbundukunda

Posing for a family photograph at Sumbundukunda on Korite day. It is an informal picture, yet people are grouped around Junkung, the kagume and family elder.

3.3.4 Gender

Besides being a structuring principle of domestic economy and politics, gender is also central to immobility. If men are the most mobile people in the household, there is little doubt that the women are the least mobile ones[26]. Only a few unmarried daughters of the urban wealthy are sent abroad to study in universities or work in white collar jobs. Within the rural milieu, unmarried women hardly ever undertake international travel on their own, not least because they marry very early (usually between the age of 14 and 18). For married women, emigration means joining their husbands abroad, or moving to the urban compound rented or constructed by the latter. But this is not automatic; ideally, wives of migrants should stay and work in their marital compound like other married women. Although they carry out much of the day-to-day management of the compound and can acquire much decisional power, women never assume the role of household leaders. Married women are not agnatic members of the marital *ka* and the men may keep them at the margins of decision-making or represent them as vulnerable, dependent and irrational, and hence in need of male authority. In addition, when the husband is away it can happen that the wife is isolated and subject to discrimination and exploitation by other women in the household; it is the responsibility of the men in the household to balance and mediate conflicts (senior women are also involved in diplomacy). Migrant husbands thus entrust their parents and brothers with the supervision of their wives *and* children, thereby increasing their dependence on the *ka* and legitimating the role of the men who stay behind. The example below gives us a glimpse of how male authority and control over the wives of migrants are important in the everyday context of migration:

> November 2007, Sabi. N. [a woman, about 25 years of age, whose husband is a migrant] enters M.'s hut [M. is a man, 33], where M. and I are chatting. She informs M. that her five-year old son and another child are fighting and insulting their respective parents [i.e. a serious offence]. M. rushes outside, grabs a stick and vigorously scolds the two children, threatening to beat them with the stick. The two children stand still and hang their heads, and then go their way when M. returns to his hut. This is not the first time N. has asked M. to intervene—M. is the eldest of her husband's agnatic brothers in the Sabi *ka* at the moment. Sometimes her son points his feet and refuses to go to school in the morning, and N. calls M. and informs

[26] Rural women are discriminated in several domains of social life. Traditional Quranic schools do not envision learning for girls beyond childhood; in contrast, in cities, Soninke girls can go to Islamic schools (for instance in *Sunpu do Xati*). However, early marriage (around 14-18) remains the cause of the high numbers of drop outs among those who manage to go to either an Islamic or a Western school. In an interview with Amie Bojang-Sissoho (24 October 2006, Serekunda), programme coordinator of GAMCOTRAP (an NGO campaigning against 'traditional practices that affect the health of women and children'), she identified the Soninke as particularly resistant to abandoning such practices as female genital mutilation and early marriage (Amie herself is married to a Soninke man).

him about her son's behaviour, and he usually settles the matter. M. is also used to keeping an eye on N. When I am at his compound, I have often heard him asking N. where she is going or has been, as he sees her going out of the compound or coming back.

Just as for the men, household requirements are a primary regulator of a married woman's mobility. Since the product of her sweat (*futte*) has been secured through the payment of bride-wealth, her work is needed at the parental compound, where the woman replaces her mother-in-law in household chores and where she rears her children. By working and caring for her parents-in-law she will accrue *barake* for her husband, and then for her children, through a sort of transitive property. When there are enough other women staying behind she can be freer to move, which is a decision in which her husband will have a considerable say. A turning point in a migrant's household formation can be the death of his parents, when his wife (or wives) is partly relieved from having to serve her in-laws and can join him. Since to take the wife abroad means to spend more resources and create a semi-autonomous household away from the agnatic *ka*, householders may resist this decision, unless other conditions have been fulfilled. The migrant will be more legitimately able to decide over the mobility of his own family unit when he has ensured some degree of relay migration, and helped his junior brothers to marry, and hence provide female labour at home.

Migrants may prefer to leave their wives in the village *ka* for at least two additional reasons. In the first place, this is usually a cheaper option for migrants without a secure base abroad (or without a legal permit), or who wish to maximise their earnings. Secondly, the 'hardship' (*tanpiye*) of village life is seen as a disciplinary and humbling mechanism for producing docile wives. The Soninke men seem to have earned a reputation for making their women farm by hand even if they are rich businessmen[27]. While this commonplace is not necessarily true, it is underscored by some Soninke men, who praise rurality as an antidote to the growing consumerist desires of women. In addition, excluding women from migration can be a deliberate strategy to exclude them from the 'awakening' experience of travel. As one non-migrant man in his late twenties put it, people prefer to keep their wives at home because "even if you were to lose all your property one day, you can be sure that she will not leave you […] If I travel I will not take my wife to Europe. Lots of them have seen the [different] lifestyle over there, and they have left their husband for another man"[28]. I have no data to discuss the merit of the informant's observation, but his words echo widely shared clichés among the male folk, and

[27] E.g. Farlai Krubally (Mandinka elder), 8 December 2006, Abuko.
[28] B. (man, aged 27), October 2007, Serekunda.

further emphasise the need for the village *ka* to have household personnel at home in order to supervise the migrant's wife or wives.

However, as phases of circular migration stretched longer or eventually stretched to encompass the entire working life span, the need has emerged to reunify the conjugal unit. As migrants settled in Sierra Leone and other places in the 1960s and onwards, they began to bring over their wives. What has emerged from my observation is that some of the men, in contrast to the informant above, may wish to live close to their wives rather than live separate lives.

Married women too can exert pressure on their husbands to find papers and make arrangements for them to emigrate. They may be motivated by the wish of living with their husband and, in contrast to the men's representations of women as dependants, by economic ambitions. Rather than staying at home in the host country, in fact, many expatriate women find an occupation and accumulate personal resources. In West African countries, they have been used to doing small scale business, and today many young wives of migrants in Sabi are intrigued by the fact that they can find waged labour as cleaners, restaurant workers, and other unskilled occupations in Europe and the US. It must be said that several migrants, and would-be-migrants, appear to be more flexible with respect to their wives' attitudes than the above mentioned young man. Moving to Serekunda may be an alternative for the wife of a migrant, and an appealing one. In the city, women can generally manage their domestic space more autonomously and keep some distance from the inquisitive eyes of the marital household. They are relieved from farming, and food, clothing and other everyday costs connected to the children are normally provided by men. To be sure, things can go badly in the city as well. However, given the relatively high standard of living of the urban Soninke population, it is normally understood that a man should bring or keep his wife in the city only if he is 'strong' enough to take care of her and her children. Indeed, being able to sustain an urban household under these conditions is often a matter of pride for migrants and businessmen.

In other words, family reunions or moving the couple's base to Serekunda may accelerate the formation of independent households and potentially decentralise migrant resources. The survey I conducted in Sabi households did not deal with this issue. My impression is, however, that most (at least half) of the wives of current migrants still tend to stay in Sabi, though this does not take into account long-established Serekunda households that can be counted as autonomous *ka lenmu*.

One factor that bridges the gap between the village *ka* and the migrant married couple is the circulation of wives. In polygynous marriages, the rotation of two or more wives between Sabi and other African destinations, chiefly Sierra Leone, became a fairly widespread practice as

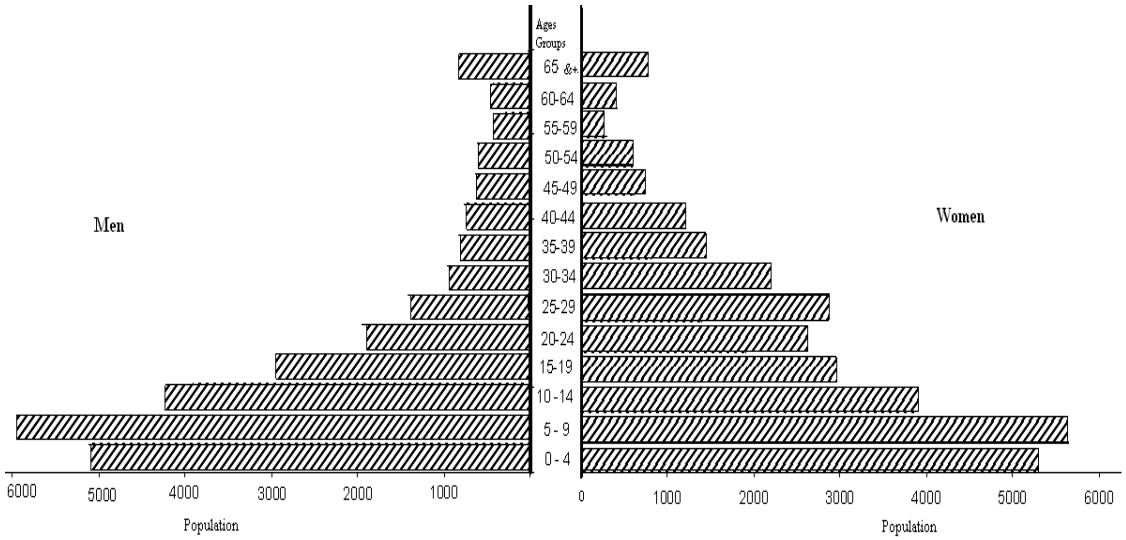
early as the 1960s. While one (or more) wife stays in Sabi, the other one(s) can stay with the husband. The length of migratory phases depends on circumstances, pregnancies and child rearing, and usually does not last more than two years. However, with the partial wane of Africa-bound migration and the surge of Europe- and America-bound ones, such circulations have declined. Restrictive conditions on entry into Europe and the US as well as family reunion laws predicated on a monogamous model of the family have seriously reduced wife rotation transnationally, which today continues internally between village and city.

3.3.5 Child Rearing

Another practice that helps maintain a degree of inter-dependence and cohesiveness between the village *ka* and diasporic domestic units is the fostering and circulation of children. The age group pyramid of the URR Soninke population shows a corresponding increase in the 5 to 9 age group (Chart 3.2); this is the period in which many migrant parents send their children back to the village to be raised or to spend some time in the village *ka* (YWAM 2006:21). Transnational childrearing has stemmed from the widespread practice of inter-family child fostering in West Africa (Goody 1982; Bledsoe 1990; Alber 2004). Since the 1970s, a number of migrant children from Sierra Leone and other West-Central African countries, and later from Europe and the US, have joined their parental compounds to be raised in their 'fathers' way' (*faabanun kille*). The West African (primarily Malian) parents in Brazzaville interviewed by Whitehouse (2009) send their children back home in order to shield them from the host country's cultural influences, to give them a proper Islamic education and to enable them to be raised in a family environment where they can speak their language and grow respectful towards their parents and household seniors. Similarly, Razy (2007a:27) reports that Soninke families in France send their children home for varying lengths of time in order for them to 'know the family' and to 'know the culture'. My conversations with visiting migrants and village foster parents underscore these motivations, and I also observed that urban-rural child rearing is not only common, but also easier and cheaper to practise than the transnational one. I also found that parents and senior householders can exert pressure on their kin so as to send their children home and let them grow up in the village. Thanks to transport and telecommunication, today migrant parents can be more active in long distance child rearing; however, most of the pedagogic functions are de facto delegated to the village household. Therefore, transnational and translocal childrearing highlights the importance of sticking to 'our fathers' way', as already remarked in Chapter 2; in particular, it frames the village *ka* as a haven of socio-cultural reproduction, and

consequently assigns those who stay behind the important role of educators and keepers of the socio-moral order on the basis of which migrants have sent their children home.

Chart 3.2 - Age group graph of the Upper River Region Soninke population (1993 census). Source: YWAM (2006:20, fig. 6)



Although the length of exposure that children have to the rural *ka* varies considerably, what I would like to highlight is the nature of this exposure, how it instils a sense of 'rootedness', and indebtedness, in children and makes the dynamics of staying behind an important aspect of domestic organization. It will also give us an idea of the kind of training that Sabi young men have received and how this orients their livelihood. Education for both 'local' and 'transnational' children is premised on a "logique d'imprégnation inscrite dans des apprentissages quotidiens dont la repetition fait l'enfant"[29] (Razy 2007a:34). The household chores for female children and farming and other work activities for male (and female) children constitute this daily training environment. Training is not only practical, but experiential. It is framed as direct knowledge of rural life and its hardship. Hardship or 'suffering' (*tanpiye*) is an educational tool to instil self-knowledge, self-discipline and responsibility. It is in this respect that farming acquires an additional social function. In his previous study of a Malian Soninke village, Whitehouse (2003:34-5) argued that farming is a form of education:

> Time and again, informants stressed to me the positive influence of farming on young people's moral fiber […] As a form of hard work, it teaches children lessons about sacrifice, duty to family, and the merits of

[29] "logic of being immersed in daily practices of apprenticeship the repetition of which trains the child" (author's translation)

suffering. It helps them to acquire fiscal discipline and be better able to look after their parents in their old age. Those who do not farm as children are in danger of becoming wastrels, dependent on relatives for their subsistence.

Farming is at the core of the reproduction of household organization, particularly of seniority. Children will grow up by respecting their agnatic parents and senior householders, by knowing the codes of reciprocity and growing food crops for the parents and householders, and hence acquiring their blessing. Discipline is an important aspect of rural education (cf. Razy 2007a:28 and 31). "I was stubborn, so my father brought me here" I was told by Musa, a Sierra Leone born man who went through some years of schooling before he was sent to Sabi to farm. 'Stubborn'[30] qualifies many behaviours, from dropping out of school or disobeying parents, to engaging in 'illicit' activities (such as smoking cannabis or drinking alcohol). Farming also teaches children to live by their own sweat (*futte*) and be self-reliant. This kind of training is thought to be pivotal in teaching would-be-travellers the necessary life skills, the endurance and the morality to live and work abroad amidst perils, hardship and temptations (see also Section 4.2.1).

Another milestone of upbringing is religion (Fig. 3.4). As I observed in the previous chapter, Sabi and other Soninke villages host Quranic schools (*xaranyinbe* and *maisi*) led by prominent scholars. Besides learning the foundations of Islam and Muslim life, one reason why parents send children to learn from, and work for, a prominent master is that they will receive his powerful blessings. Pupils in fact do a great deal of farming and household chores for their masters, while they tend to concentrate on learning early in the morning and late in the evening. Emphasis is put on Spartan conditions of living, which are said to be necessary to teach the virtue of sacrifice in life as well as in learning[31].

[30] The English word is often used; a frequent expression for stubbornness is '*toro xote / toro nan xoto*', 'hard ears', i.e. not listening or disobeying.
[31] Children living at home may join Quranic students during the evening study time, while working mainly for their compound.

Fig. 3.4 – Growing Up

A child preparing to pray the Friday prayer (Dembakunda). "After he has learnt the Quran, and after he has farmed, a young man can travel!" (Male elder).

However, in Chapter 2 I showed that attitudes to education are quickly changing, and the pedagogic status of farming is being called into question[32]. Moreover, children may return abroad after a few years in the home country, and their parents are consequently concerned that the children should be introduced into the European and American educational system. A number of foster children now go to the Lower and Upper Basic Schools in Sabi. Alternatively, parents abroad place them with urban relatives as foster parents so to the children can take advantage of educational facilities. The urban polarisation of transnational childrearing is certainly diverting socio-cultural investments away from households in Sabi. Education of children in urban schools and *madrasas* can be also a motive behind urban family migration, with the mother moving to the city to take care of her children and their education. Having said that, it is very frequent for children and teenagers studying in the city—including the sons and daughters of some prominent businessmen—to be sent back to their home village during the summer holidays, so they can help with farm work, have a try with a hoe and spend time with their rural household.

Even when children do not undertake farming, most householders and migrants alike think that exposure to the *ka* is necessary to their upbringing. A young man, Haji, told me that his elder brother has been abroad for more than thirty years with his family, but he sends his children on holiday to the Gambia every year. Haji argued that even such short periods are important: "They [the children] don't farm, but they see. They see the family. They see the 'suffering' here, so they cannot forget about us tomorrow. When they call and say 'Who's speaking? It's Fode', they will know who they are talking to"[33]. These children are like migrants, travelling long distances to see things and acquire an awareness—not of the world out there, to which they are already (over)exposed—but of the situation of those who stay behind, which is so necessary in order to maintain affective, reciprocal and redistributive links to their home when they grow up.

[32] The pedagogic character of 'suffering' is also emphasised in the city. For instance, *Sunpo do Xati*'s boarding school provides a rather Spartan environment and pupils often wear unkempt clothes.
[33] Haji M. (aged 30), September 2007, Serekunda.

3.3.6 Household Formation and Translocality

Manchuelle (1989) argued that in precolonial and colonial times, Soninke migrants would come back to their village and use their economic wealth to claim independence from household seniors and to found a new *ka* in their village. This practice changed when migrants began to settle in the cities and take their wives abroad. The same seems to apply to the Gambian Soninke, where two opposite tendencies seem to prevail. Migrants keeping their wives and children in the paternal *ka* may delay the formation of an autonomous household and thus favour a concentration of authority in the hands of the stayers. Conversely, migrants developing domestic units outside the village may accelerate the scission of the *ka*. As we saw in Chapter 2, these moves and investments away from the village can be interpreted as a desertion and generate feelings of abandonment; this is especially true at the household level.

Migration dynamics can play a role in internal divisions. Internal divisions or tensions caused or catalysed by uneven distribution of migrant resources are very common. There are many possible ways in which scission works; it is useful to recall at least one typical case. In Mande societies, the rivalry between agnatic brothers (Soninke: *faabarnmmaaxu* or *faabanbanaaxu*) is mentioned as a centrifugal force within domestic settings (Bird and Kendall 1980:14-6; Jansen 1996:661-2; Razy 2007a:73). *Faabarenmaaxu* denotes both the fact of being of the same father and the competition or disharmony emerging particularly between cohorts of children born of different mothers in a polygynous marriage. It contrasts with *maaremmaaxu*, that is, being of the same mother, or harmony[34]. Tensions may assume a visible form after the death of the father, the unifying figure, when a *ka* can split into more or less autonomous sub-units (*follaku*) along maternal lines. The different sub-units of the *ka* may collaborate for *biraado*, sticking to the minimal requirements of subsistence; but they may circumscribe the others' access to extra resources, such as buildings constructed by migrants, extra food supplies, and money. Internal and external divisions can work together. For instance, rural-urban circulation between a migrant's house in the city and the village *ka* may be restricted to his sub-unit of the *ka*. The *ka* may remain a unique household, with one hearth and one budget for *biraado*; but the urban compound would remain the preserve of the sub-unit alone.

Some of these divisions may be bridged and can be reversed. The conjugal unit formed in the diaspora may become more complex and dependent on the village *ka* when children and wives circulate back and forth to the village, and when parents and other householders of the

[34] The mother represents "peace and harmony in Mande" (Jansen 1996:661). Images of cohesion also draw on the imagery of kinship and maternal nurture, such as breast milk, a symbol of kinship.

migrant come and reside in their Serekunda houses. Urban *kanu* are still a minority, and not all migrants invest in Serekunda. In some cases, an urban *ka* starts off as an independent and individual property, then throughout the years of rural-urban circulation the compound becomes the urban annex of the rural *ka*. People may describe it as a 'family compound'. Upon the death of the owner, the heirs may wish to put an end to this translocality or sell the 'family compound', but this will probably raise lengthy family diplomatic struggles and negotiations. Some wealthy urban dwellers have maintained the 'family compound' as a collective property at the disposal of the rural *ka* and moved their own family unit to another property; others have split their compound into two parts, one for the extended family, and the other for the owner's family.

Having taken stock of the disaggregating potentials of migration, therefore, it is necessary to say that Soninke *kanu* have strenuously tried to mitigate the divisive effects of migrant resources and diasporization. In addition, it must be borne in mind that the diasporization of households can be reversible. Not only do a number of family units return to their village when the migrant man decides to retire from travelling; in the 1990s many could take refuge in the paternal *ka* when the civil war broke out in Sierra Leone and other destinations. Throughout the last half century, the paternal *ka* has constituted a safe haven against the 'perils of strangerhood'.

Overall, the Soninke's efforts or necessity to maintain social cohesion and strong transnational and translocal ties has had an impact on the position of non-migrant young men in their households. Although it is normal and expected that young men leave and find money away from their village, staying behind is not the preserve of women, children and elders. The very presence of these people who stay in the household implies that some young men have to stay too. Since domestic organization in migrant households is flexible enough to accommodate outmigration and diasporization, young men have a manly role to play at home. It is insufficient to see household activities simply as non-migratory activities; farming and supervising the *ka* acquire meaning in the light of the different relations and domestic arrangements which households organize vis-à-vis their expatriate members.

Fig. 3.5 & 3.6 – Complementing

Harvesting bicolour sorghum on the Sumbundu's communal field.
From left to right: Ibrahima (from Garawol, visiting his relatives in Sabi, puts himself at the service of his mother's elder sister—Tamba's mother), Tamba (tying bundles requires an experienced farmer), Ibrahima (the youngest man in Sumbundukunda), Amadu (a strange farmer from Guinea Conakry hosted by the Sumbundu)

(Fig. 3.6)

Tamba and his companions making bricks with cement bought with remittances from Sankung (Tamba's brother)

3.4 'SITTING' AT HOME

I shall now focus on how young men 'sit at home' (*taaxu kan di*), how they actively engage in the roles and functions that the migrant household envisages for them. Although Sabi *kanu* have remained quite cohesive units, there is a variation in economic conditions, relations with migrants and processes of household formation across them, to say nothing of possible internal divisions and rivalries. Young men also have to measure their career vis-à-vis migrants' achievements, or on the contrary their pitfalls, in the households. In other words, the process of 'sitting' at home is complex, and sometimes young men cannot or do not feel they can comfortably stay for the sake of the household even when the number of migrants and the level of remittances in their household are sufficient.

3.4.1 Juniors

Boys and young unmarried men are usually in a structurally weak position in the household. They are juniors under the authority of their senior brothers and their parents. The main way through which they become established in the household is by farming on the communal field and carrying out other tasks, such as collecting firewood in the bush, supervising the livestock, making repairs in the compound during the dry season, etc. (Fig. 3.5 and 3.6). Given the importance of agriculture as an economic, pedagogic and symbolic activity, householders commend juniors who make an effort to achieve self-sufficiency for the household. As a young boy comes back from harvest with a cartful of millets, he is greeted with a "he's a man now [*yugo ya ni sasa*]". By 'sitting at home' and farming in a migrant household, young men take part in a transnational joint venture epitomised by *biraado* and act as complementary figures to the migrants. This migratory context gives further significance on their role as household providers; as one young man pointed out: "Who feeds the [migrants'] parents and wives when they are away…when they are out of work and cannot send money?". Moreover, juniors may have to supervise children (including the migrants' ones) and teach them to farm in the fields. It is also very common for young men to warmly remember a senior brother who brought them up in the fields, and to express an obligation to take care of him in return.

At the same time, many juniors feel that their contribution to the household is not wholly acknowledged. Surrounded by nice buildings, money and presents which would never materialise through farming, junior householders are sceptical about their possibility of

satisfying their parents and making progress. The preponderance of what their agnatic brothers, their age mates and neighbours bring back from abroad not only generates admiration, but also produces comparisons between the achievements of the household's men. Comparisons may even degenerate into competitive *faabaremmaaxu*, making it difficult and frustrating for juniors to keep up with the rising standards of what it means to be devoted to their parents. Even when solidarity prevails over rivalry, young men may feel that the burden of agricultural and household work is downloaded on them. Yet there is barely any chance for them to skip farming. It would be seen as a sign of laziness at best, and at worst, a sign of worthless, lack of devotion to the parents and of the willingness to feed them.

Junior men have reasons to complain too. The following case study illustrates some of the common critiques that young men address to their seniors, and more generally it shows the position they hold in the domestic organization of migration:

> I. is a young man of about 18 years of age. He is the youngest male child of his father (who has had four wives). His father spent several years in other West African countries before coming back to Sabi in the late 1980s. Some of I.'s brothers and sisters were born abroad; I., however, was born and raised in Sabi. Most of his father's brothers have travelled, some have died, and he is the only elder left in the Sabi *ka* (numbering about 15-20 people). Although I. knows all of the migrants and the human geography of his *ka*, he does not personally know all of his classificatory fathers and brothers, or he does not remember them well.
>
> During his childhood most of his migrant fathers and some of his agnatic brothers established their households elsewhere and progressively decreased the frequency of their visits to Sabi. His household has nonetheless ensured some degree of relay migration, and can count on three migrants abroad and two in Serekunda, though only two of them contribute on a regular basis. Sometimes I. complains about his household travellers, especially the older ones: "our travellers have been away for how many years! How many travellers do we have here in this compound, huh!? And look at it, look at these houses [old and rundown buildings]: we are poor". I. often says that his senior brothers only help him occasionally. They send little money for him; on one occasion he managed to borrow some money and call one of his brothers; he wanted some money for the upcoming Tabaski, but his brother did not send anything. In contrast, his friends received new clothes that their migrant brothers sent them from abroad. I. thinks that, since the household's travellers have not done much, he cannot stay in Sabi and only farm. Yet he does not have much hope that his migrant householders will help him migrate. According to him, even his father is unwilling to help him migrate, even if he has good contacts: "he thinks that we [the sons] have to struggle for ourselves, like he did [in his youth]…But if you have no chance, what can you do!?"
>
> I. has spent all his life in Sabi, farming and taking care of the compound. His mother also relies on him for commissions and works in the household. In his turn, I. relies on her and her monetary handouts to pay for his clothes and petty expenses. At the beginning of the dry season in 2006/7, I. felt it was time for

him to go and find some money in Serekunda; but his father said that he wanted him to stay behind and help him and his mother running the compound. He complied with his father's will and stayed.

In the first place, I. reminds us that most young men have grown up in households with a two to three generation-long history of long-distance emigration, and that they engage with this history. There are even some cases in which young men born abroad were fostered to the paternal *ka*, and were never reunited to their parents again. In later years, this creates a paradoxical situation, almost an inverted intergenerational contract (Roth 2008): the father is abroad sending remittances and his son stays at the receiving end of the monetary flow.

In partitioned or loosely cooperative *kanu*, young men like I. often complain about the breach of the migratory pact, so to speak, between stayers and travellers. I. reproaches his migrant seniors for having forgotten where they come from and thus leaving the household in poverty: the old and rundown houses are an index of their abandonment. I. is very young, and his father probably encourages him to become self-reliant instead of counting on others; it might even be the case that, having ensured some degree of economic security for his household, the father does not feel pressured to solicit help from his other sons and contacts to enable I. to travel, and so adopts a liberal policy with him instead[35].

There is also a generational gap between I. and his father. In contrast to their fathers' generation, today young men can hardly help themselves to travel and make money. I., in fact, resorts to the ideal of relay migration in order to criticise his migrant agnatic fathers and brothers, who have not done enough to put him in a position where he can make a valuable contribution to the household. The moral economy that binds the juniors to their seniors can be a double edged weapon. Young men like I. argue that the seniors' care and upbringing should include the help to emigrate or to start a business as a sort of precondition for the juniors to be able to reciprocate in their turn. In fact, as the following chapters will show in greater detail, many young men think that rather than farming it is looking for money that leads to emancipation and self-reliance, something which is evident in I.'s desire to reverse the flow of money from his mother by going to Serekunda to *hustle.* This implies that they represent themselves only as temporary stay-at-homes, waiting for the help to travel or do business away from the village.

Having said that, it is fair to say that farming and the small daily activities that juniors perform at home are significant acts of devotion and care to parents and seniors, especially if other men are away from home. These enhance the position of junior men in migrant households,

[35] Once I.'s father explicitly told me that: "I wait and see how my sons can benefit me".

and eventually consolidate their reputation in the eyes of relatives who may help with emigration or with money in the future (see Section 4.2.3). On their part, senior householders often complain about the fact that young men have grown resistant to farming, charmed as they are by the siren of emigration. As pointed out, seniors can be ambivalent about their juniors migrating, both pressurising them to go and keeping them at home. Like I.'s father, they may even ask juniors to stay behind and assist them with everyday tasks, from managing the compound to going on errands on their behalf. They keep a close eye on their juniors, checking on their willingness to comply with authority and on their public behaviour. They control whether they 'waste time chasing girls', or even if they smoke a cigarette with their friends (see also Sections 5.4.1-2). In addition to money, in fact, in Serekunda young men like I. may look for new experiences and more personal and sexual freedom away from their relatives.

3.4.2 Married Men

Marriage is a central passage in young men's lives, a major step towards adulthood and household authority. On the wedding day they leave the 'boys quarters' and move to a proper house (*konpe*) inside their paternal compound, whether it is a hut or a room in a brick house. Marriage means having access to the means of social reproduction. Marrying a woman and begetting children is closely linked to being recognised as full personas[36]. In a lineage logic, it projects the descent group into the future. By naming children after their actual and classificatory parents, men carry forward the memory of the past generations, and their children will do the same with theirs. Through marriage, young men become more established in the household by creating a family unit (*dimbaya*) and assuming responsibilities as family men. This is also an important aspect of staying behind. Presiding over the migrant household can hardly be done alone. To preside is to be in charge of the household, as a mature man, and hence as a family man with wives and children who is also able to look after his classificatory wives and children.

The problem for non-migrant young men is to acquire sufficient finances to pay for their marriage. Bridewealth is only one expense (in the range of 4,500-7,000 D), to which they must add handouts and presents upon visiting the bride's family, some furniture, contributions to the dowry, and the cost of the wedding, that is, at least another 10-15,000 Dalasi, if they already have a room to house their bride (Fig. 3.7). That is why young men often wish to postpone their marriage until they travel or find a remunerative occupation at home.

[36] The importance of fertility for social recognition and subjectivity is even more crucial for women (cf. Bledsoe 2002).

However, because of scarce opportunities to make money, insufficient support, failed visa applications, or unsuccessful migratory experiences, years go by and the youth ages without having married. “I wanted to travel, I didn’t want to marry. But then my mother encouraged me to marry. Now I’m happy, because if I had waited, I would have not travelled, and I would not have married [and have two children]”[37]. This is how Mohamed, thirty-two years of age, gives voice to a commonplace: if you are not quick to emigrate, you should get married and have children. Elders sometimes dismiss young men’s priority for travel as lack of realisation of the fact that family union and continuity come first. In some cases, what also happens is that migrants are strongly encouraged to come home and marry even if they have no way to return abroad later on. Moreover, if the young men are not quick in having a child, they may have to wait months or years until they leave a descendant behind. Only then will they be allowed or helped to find a route again.

As we saw, in migrant households pressure may be put on migrants for them to finance their non-migrant juniors’ marriage. This can be taken as a sign that the household is willing to take charge of their young men’s transition to adulthood rather than marginalise young men lacking the resources to pay for the bride-wealth and the wedding (though young men may be encouraged to look for some of the resources). By the same token, it is a sign that, even if the family elders do not have funds of their own, they do not renounce their control of young men’s access to adulthood and their later household life.

[37] Mohamed (aged 32), February 2007, Sabi.

Fig. 3.7 – Private-Public Space

Staging a picture in a nuptial room (with dowry as backdrop). This is where women's visitors are accommodated and is a common setting for pictures to be taken of the women in their best clothes. Nice decorations are said to complete and beautify the person.

Becoming established as a married householder is not easy either. A married man should take responsibility for the well being of his wife, and then of his children. This can be problematic. Women's 'sitting' in their husband's compound is subject to the fulfilment of marital conditions. In many ways, marriage is a kind of migration for women. In the husband's compound, she retains the status of stranger[38]. A married woman would rarely represent herself as a member of her husband's compound: to her, *kaara* will always mean the father's *ka*, even when this is right in the same village. This sense of 'exile' in the marital compound is surrounded by nostalgia and creates the image of the wife-outsider under the authority of the husband and his senior kin. Thus marriage means enduring 'exile' for the sake of her children, paving the way for their blessed success in which she too will find her success. Enduring 'exile' is also subject to marital conditions. One of the most contested aspects of marital conditions is household sustenance. While the *kagume* is responsible for the granaries, husbands should also contribute by providing additional and particular food products, especially for the breakfast, and for the children. I also mentioned that married women have to provide some of the ingredients to cook the sauce (*maxafon*) for rice and millet. In Gambia, this is usually known as 'fish money'. Most ingredients of the sauce are now available on the market and in shops, and others have become staples (dried fish, tomato paste, certain spices, stock cubes, etc.). This means cash. Fish and, above all meat, are often provided by the *kagume* when he has money, but in general 'fish money' is a term of negotiation between the *kagume*, the woman taking the kitchen shift, and her husband. The *kagume* often takes responsibility for the granary and for providing a few other staples (sugar, oil), but steps away from the plethora of new needs which have progressively arisen in households (e.g. bread, butter, biscuits, etc.). There are grey areas between desires and needs, between something which can be considered the husband's responsibility and a personal wish to pay out of one's own pocket. As well as in food, grey areas appear in key issues such as children's clothing, school fees and medical expenses. Many women complain that their husbands turn a deaf ear to their requests for assistance on account of the lack of economic opportunities and employment in the rural areas. In many households, women pay for their children's school fees, believing that a better education will ensure a better professional future

[38] The figure of the wife as stranger can take an institutional form. For instance, brides coming from other villages are assigned a host (*jatigi*) *ka* in the husband's village where they take residence before the wedding night. As for a stranger in need of protection and representation, her *jatigi* will continue to be her official tutor outside the husband's compound, especially in the case of any serious problem in her marital relations.

for the children[39]. The overall result is that a number of rural women are plagued by chronic indebtedness to relatives and to shopkeepers.

Once again, migration dynamics have influenced such marital arrangements. Women staying in Sabi are very aware of the fact that their peers staying in the city can enjoy better conditions, for their husbands pay for most of their needs (including 'fish money'). Wives of migrants in Sabi may enjoy better conditions, and migrants may take responsibility for including 'fish money' in the *biraado*. Other women may use such examples as a lever to claim better treatment, and sometimes this can generate tensions.

As Skramstad (2008:123) remarked in relation to a Gambian town on the Atlantic coast, "In many marriages, husbands' insufficient economic support was one of the major sources of conflicts". In western rural Gambia, women disregard their household chores and go to their 'second husband', the horticultural garden that gives them money (Schroeder 1999:39). In Sabi, men bitterly comment that 'if you don't have money, your wife will not "sit" at home'; they fear she will go outside the compound and try to find assistance from others, thereby revealing the economic liability of the husband, or they fear that she may expose herself in public places, and hence risk being labelled as a shameless woman looking for adulterous relationships. In extreme circumstances, married women can return to their father's compound as a sign of protest. Going to Serekunda may be a milder, less dramatic solution. Women may obtain permission to go to Serekunda for a visit or to undergo medical treatment and may end up staying longer. This can be a holiday from heavy domestic workloads and strained household relations. Prolonging their stay can become problematic, however, an act of marital disobedience; on the other hand, it can be instrumental in forcing their husbands to come to terms with their entitlements.

In sum, if marrying and raising a family confers prestige on young men as household providers and carers in migrant households, and potentially reinforces their position as stayers, it can simultaneously put pressure on them to acquire the moneys to fulfil marital obligations. They may reach the same conclusion as their unmarried juniors: that they should go and find money in order to become self-reliant. As married householders, however, they can try to shift some of this pressure onto their migrant brothers, laying claims to their monetary savings as legitimate household 'sitters'. In this, they share similar preoccupations and strategies with the *kagumu*.

[39] Conversation with Maimuna S., April 2008, Serekunda. Of course not all women invest in 'British' education, and not all of them can invest money in all their children (see also Section 4.2.1).

3.4.3 The *Kagume*

The most prestigious position that men can achieve as household stayers is *kagumaaxu*. Being the eldest agnatic man of the *ka*, the *kagume* 'sits' at the top of the social, cultural and moral order and organization I have described. Migrants abroad can also be recalled home to assume *kagumaaxu*, especially, if not exclusively, when they have reached eldership and there are juniors abroad who can take up the relay of household provision. However, because of the pragmatics of succession, it may happen that younger householders, usually from their late twenties onwards, may effectively become *kagumu*. Alternatively some young men may act as *kagumu* when their seniors are too aged to administer the compound. They assume similar functions in autonomous *follaku* in need of a household head, or they may be asked to stay and take care of their parents and assist them in managing the household. By speaking of the *kagume*, therefore, I will describe the dynamics of staying behind that also apply to most of these cases of proxy- or quasi-*kagumaaxu*.

Governing the household involves diplomatic and administrative functions. The *kagume* is the highest authority in the compound, the one who should ensure peace and harmony, settle or mediate disputes, and liaise with elders of the *xabila* when the intensity of a dispute escalates. Although the women of the compound do most of the rearing, he supervises the children and has a say in their educational career and the work loads they can bear at a given age. He sends them to the fields to farm and sends them on errands. When the rains come, he passes word to the young men in the city for them to come back and farm on the communal field.

Daily acts of supervision and administration are also fundamental in the context of migration. Telephone communication is often difficult and expensive, so migrants cannot ensure they have a daily 'presence' in family affairs and, as I mentioned, they have to delegate much of the household administration to other stayers, particularly to the *kagume*. He supervises the activities and movements of their wives. He represents the authority and is the bearer of the kinship values in the eyes of their children.

At the economic level, it is the *kagume* who is responsible for *biraado*. He estimates the size of the plot to farm and either provides the implements to till the soil and weed, or has to make arrangements for borrowing them. If young enough to work, he leads the group of farmers to the fields and decides the timing of the tasks, and decides whether to take on *strange farmers*. He makes sure his juniors go to the fields, which is also a way of asserting his authority. In his survey of the Soninke of the Senegal river valley, Weigel (1982:72) pointed out that the decline of collateral seniority in agricultural production has reinforced the authority of the *kagume*. In

the early afternoon (about 2pm-4.30pm), juniors used to work on the plot of the next senior man to the *kagume*; in the late 1970s, all household men began to concentrate their energies on the *kagume*'s field only in order to maximise food crop production. As noted, this development also occurred in Sabi. In addition, Pollet and Winter (1971:397) reported that in Jafunu (Mali) in the 1960s, each man, especially if married, owned individual granaries and contributed to collective consumption on given days. As far as I could gather, similar arrangements existed in Sabi as well; now men are much less inclined to have individual fields and do not have granaries of their own. The *kagume* physically holds the key to the granary (usually a store house), so that every day he alone takes out the grain for the women to cook.

Accordingly, the *kagume* is the manager of *biraado*-linked remittances in migrant households. Weigel (1982:92) found that in the late 1970s the *kagume* managed around 65% of the remittances, which he used for buying food supplies and for covering other expenses. I do not have similar data for Sabi; from the receiving end of remittances, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of money remitted directly to *kagumu*, because few of them keep account books and because other householders receiving remittances may not disclose it. In any case, most of the *kagumu* in Sabi would probably deem such a percentage too high. Household heads often tend to downplay the amounts they receive, complaining that migrants keep most of the money for themselves and give only a paltry amount to their *kagume*. This is thought to be enough to cover the basic provision of *biraado* but not for extras. As the leaders of the *ka*, the *kagumu* believe that migrants should do everything in their power to honour them, and they readily give examples of neighbouring *kagumu* being pleased with money and prestige goods (e.g. mobile phones, motorbikes, houses, etc.).

Making comparisons and complaining can be a strategy to stimulate a greater incoming flow of money from abroad. Complaints that migrant sons or brothers do not send enough money for food can reach abroad and make these men ashamed in the eyes of the expatriate community, putting pressure on them to comply. For instance, during a visit to a compound the *kagume* complained that his brothers abroad were not doing enough for him and for the compound. A few days later, I returned to that compound and interviewed one of his migrant brothers who had come back on holiday. After a while we touched on the same topic:

> M.: People are never satisfied […] if you don't do it, some would say 'you don't wanna help me' and 'you are bad person'. [...] that would make me feel bad."
>
> Paolo: Do you hear these words abroad?

> M.: Of course, you hear that people in Sabi say 'Look this boy [young man] has been over there for long and he didn't do nothing. Look at the other boy in the other house, he did this and that […] Sometimes even my elder brother [the *kagume*] here [does that] […] I don't say nothing, but sometimes I say 'What about you? Why don't you go and try? I helped myself, nobody helped me!' […] Just last week I received a call from my [other] brother [who is abroad]. He said that he's helping the big [*sic*] brother here all the time, but [the latter] is still complaining. Maybe, he wanted to stop helping him. But I said 'You're not helping him, you're helping all the family. Don't be mad at that'. You know this man went nowhere and he thinks everything is easy over there, that you pick money in the street and you wanna keep it to yourself[40].

Thus, the *kagume* can mobilise discourses and even fuel competition for prestige in order to ensure an appropriate flow of remittances. These strategies must be seen in the light of declining incomes and forms of domestic saving in the rural areas, and of the simultaneously growing list of products which householders strive to include in the *biraado*. This forces the *kagume* to rely on migrant resources. Yet the urban polarisation of migrant investments is indicative of the fact that what reaches households is necessarily negotiated and partial.

Not all *kagumu* are in a position to voice their complaints. During one interview for the survey, I asked the *kagume* to say whether the remittance level was sufficient. He shook his head and whispered that it was not, he was not satisfied with the efforts of his younger brothers. After a while, he explained that he was whispering because he was afraid that the women in the compound might hear him complain and report it to their husbands and sons abroad. In contrast to the above case, he feared that this could have repercussions on him.

Like other householders, the activities and behaviour of the *kagume* are always under scrutiny. While some household heads are deserted by their juniors abroad, others mistake *biraado* and household remittances for personal allowances. In Sabi, discussions abound over the greed and amoral behaviour of some *kagumu* who squander the fruit of their sons' hard labour by, for example, inviting their friends to restaurant meals. For the migrant it would be extremely difficult to protest, partly because of the distance, partly because of the risk of causing a family row, to the detriment of his reputation. Villagers have developed transnational systems to prevent the misappropriation of collective resources. Some migrants have direct or indirect credit arrangements with local shopkeepers to buy and/or deliver rice and other goods directly to their compounds. Shopkeepers are then paid upon return or through informal remittance networks (usually external to the household). In this way, the migrant does not send raw cash to family members, who may spend it inappropriately. Sometimes, the mother or the brother of the migrant can act as the main contact and keep the migrant informed about the supplies. However, the

[40] M. (man, aged: late thirties), 14 February 2007, Sabi.

difference between prevention of misappropriation and marginalisation is narrow. Such systems can be put in place with the complicity of given household members to bypass the *kagume* altogether, thereby undermining the substance of his authority while leaving his formal position apparently intact for public decorum.

Thus, household authority cannot be reduced to the household head in an unproblematic way (Harris 1984:145) and so a more plural and relational concept of household authority emerges instead. The problem for the *kagume* is not only to control expatriate members and their resources; he also has to negotiate access to migrant resources with other stayers, and with their moral power, and willingness, to mobilise people and attract resources. Domestic organization may adapt to the actual distribution of economic power. A sub-unit of the *ka*, such as a cluster of brothers of the same mother in a polygamous marriage, may take advantage of the fact that it has the main provider and investor in a household, and manipulate domestic relations to acquire more decision-making power. On the other hand, they may strive to become more autonomous or privatise access to such de-localised resources as a house in Serekunda. In this respect, *faabaremmaaxu* may act as a centripetal or a centrifugal force, either kindling a virtuous competition among agnatic kin to stand out as zealous householders, or generating divisive frictions that gradually lead to internal or external scission.

The disaggregating potential of migrant *kanu* is a source of nagging concern for actual or prospective *kagumu*. Some young men fear to 'sit' in a *ka* fraught with conflicts and tensions which are likely to redraw internal boundaries in the near future. When the father, the unifying figure of the compound, dies, or even before then, rifts between agnatic brothers may come to the fore, and result in segmentation or variations in agreements regarding resource pooling and remittance levels. Migrant brothers may concentrate on their own family unit (*dimbaya*) and may eventually become established in Serekunda or abroad, thus reducing their contribution.

I should like to summarise the argument so far with the examples of two quasi-*kagumu*. These examples show some of the multiple outcomes of 'sitting' at home, as well as the different predicaments, relations and domestic arrangements that shape the experience of young men staying behind in Soninke villages.

> CASE 1. S. is a man in his late thirties. His compound is a relatively small one (14 people), though it belongs to a wider *xabila* in the village. It is composed of his father, S.'s step mother and some of her children (S.'s mother is deceased), S. himself, his wife and children; S's two brothers are in Europe, but one of them has his wife and children in the compound. His father's elder brother, who is now deceased, built a house in S.'s *ka* in Sabi, and then he established a *ka* in Serekunda, where his sons have grown up and now run a business. They send regular money to Sabi for *biraado*, while S.'s own brothers make only

sporadic contributions. S. too used to travel to Serekunda in the dry season, and find occasional jobs or do business deals. He stopped about four years ago (2002), when his father reached old age and household commitments fell on his shoulders. Since he is the only farmer in the compound, he hosts one or two *strange farmers* during the rainy season. However, this is still not sufficient to provide grain stocks for year round consumption. S.'s opinion about his position is best captured by a conversation we had on a evening spent in a gathering with men around 35-40 years of age. People were sitting on a bench drinking *ataya* (green tea) or dozing away on the mat while a cool breeze broke into the heavy humidity of the day. S. was entertaining me with loud and amusing declarations about what he could do, if he had a chance to go to Europe. He could work hard, and save and help his *ka*, and his wife and children in Sabi. As the conversation went on, he became more insistent and serious on his need to travel, until a voice from the mat burst out. It was one of his best friends: "What travel? Your father is alone in the compound; you have to 'sit at home' [*taaxu kan di*] and look after him and the people of the *ka*!". S. replied without taking his eyes away from me: "How can I 'sit', huh? My brothers have been out for how many years? And they are not helping me: how many times have I called them up? Yes, I have to stay and look after the family, but if I can't feed them, how can I 'sit'?".

CASE 2. M. is a man in his early 30s. He lives in a large *ka* of about 70 people, with three 'sides' or sub-units (*baŋu*) but only one cooking place (i.e. one household). Both his parents are alive, and he himself has two wives. The household has five migrants abroad: one of M.'s own brothers (same mother, same father), two of his agnatic brothers and two of his agnatic fathers. M. travelled for some years in West Africa, but he returned not long ago, having amassed only little wealth. In the Sabi *ka*, he and three of his junior agnatic brothers farm on the communal field. The compound had long been self-sufficient with agriculture for many years, though production has fallen recently. Although there are two elders in the *ka*, few adult men can assist them in household management. M. says that householders think that there are enough people abroad, and the travellers want him to stay home and look after the *ka*, the elders and the migrants' wives and children. Since his *ka* consumes dozens of bags of rice every year, the travellers suggest M. should open a rice store with their financial help, so the household can save by buying wholesale, and M. can have his income and be close to home at the same time. But M. says he wants to travel because he reckons he will not make much money with the rice store. Once he half-jokingly said: "One day I will just get permission from my wives and leave here [laughter]!"[41].

The cases of S. and M. show us different sides of household management. In their *kanu*, they do not assume leadership as parents, but as brothers, or even as sons in M.'s case. The sibling/seniority order is clearly disregarded (S. is not the eldest of his father's sons). The fact that they have not managed to travel and become established as travellers is a crucial factor in the fact that they stay behind, but not the only factor.

[41] Before they travel, men customarily ask permission (*sare*) from their wives since they may be away from them for a long time.

Both S. and M. are expected to manage the *ka* and look after its people. They do it from very different positions. S. clearly feels his brothers left him behind with the all responsibility of the household falling on his shoulders. S.'s *ka* is small and has two migrants in Europe. This potentially means prosperity. But his two brothers do not seem willing or in a position to increase their contribution to the household budget, even if their father is still alive, and even if S. is taking care of the wife and children of one of them. Somehow paradoxically, most of the remittances come from an autonomous household which long ago branched off from the Sabi *ka* and became established in Serekunda. This seems to confirm that not all fragmentation and delocalisation affects the *ka* negatively, and that household translocality can give rise to complex arrangements. S.'s father is the only close agnatic father for the household in Serekunda, and thus his agnatic brothers honour him and their attachment to their own father's *ka* by sending money for subsistence and other presents. On a separate occasion, however, S. stressed that those in Serekunda are already maintaining a large family, so that he could not think of leaning on them forever[42]. In sum, he does not think that he can fulfil his role either, because his household migrants do not honour it and enable him to remain behind. In a similar vein, some young men who stay behind as householders want 'guarantees' in order to 'sit at home', or at least pose preconditions to their stay: "if those abroad send everything for me, then I will 'sit'", as one man in his mid thirties put it.

M.'s relatives are eager to create such conditions for him to stay behind. They join together and provide sufficient *biraado* and extras for the compound. They have built nice buildings, the compound is relatively affluent and has a long-standing reputation for being very united in spite of its large size and also in spite of dispersal. Thanks to this situation, M. has no problem providing for his own two wives and his children (indeed, he has two wives despite being a young man). The travellers also want to create an income-generating activity for M., so he can acquire his own money; he can then be self-reliant vis-à-vis his own family unit and stay close to the *ka* at the same time. In contrast to S., M. cannot present a strong argument about his need to travel for the sake of the household. There are sufficient conditions for a comfortable 'home stay', and household commitments form a sort of centripetal force around him, which would make his attempts to elicit assistance from his relatives in order to travel all the more difficult. This is probably the reason why he fantasises about a flight, as happened in the early days of the diamond rush, when the *kagume* refused his junior men permission to go for *aventure* and they would leave secretly at night. M. is very aware that his situation is much better than that

[42] One of his friends also doubted that his brothers in Serekunda would continue to remit after S.'s father dies.

of some of his peers who are coping with more precarious settings. What seems to motivate M. to travel is not a precarious 'sitting', but something that partly goes beyond the dynamics of the household itself. It is the forceful drive to search for money, big money, and bring it back for the household *and* for himself.

IV
Looking for Money

If household organization requires some men to stay behind, it also envisages that others find the money to supplement agricultural production. Householders also put a premium on those young men who invest in their compounds and honour their parents with money and presents, let alone the fact that successful Soninke men are usually described as moneymen (*xalisi gumu*) who have multi-storey buildings in the capital. In other words, the quest for money (*xalisi mundiye*) is an imperative for Soninke young men, especially for those who have no binding household commitments that keep them at home. As we know from Chapter 2, migration is often described as *xalisi mundiye*, so it is not surprising that most youths identify international travel as *the* way to look for money. Can Soninke young men combine the quest for money with staying behind? In this chapter I argue that they can, though not all can and do. In many cases, a successful quest for money at home involves joining an organized setting such as transnational enterprises or investments which rely on partners and employees recruited in Gambia; sometimes enterprises and jobs are created ad hoc as a collective response to restrictive migration policies.In contrast to the household, however, such positions are not given in advance or 'ascribed' to the same extent. Young men have to actively co-construct their position from the bottom up, and often they have to fend off competition.

The 'quest for money' can be seen as a livelihood strategy, a notion that encompasses the social and cultural significance of economic activities (Fog Olwig and Nyberg Sørensen 2002). Focusing on young men's livelihoods rather than on 'migration strategies' or 'migratory projects' (cf. Boyer 2005) allows us to better disentangle the relation between work, self-realisation and mobility. While most young men aspire to emigrate, their practices and life trajectories are in fact more open-ended. Looking for money is a process that can yield both mobility and immobility: looking for a route to leave the country may eventually result in finding a business opportunity at home, while staying in Gambia to do business for some time can be a way of making contacts in order to travel out of the country in the future.

4.1 *XALISI MUNDIYE*: WHEREVER MONEY IS TO BE FOUND

The expression *xalisi mundiye* contains two elements: money and searching. Let me begin with money. Throughout this dissertation, it has become abundantly clear that money is a central element in social relationships, and it is woven into complex reciprocities and moralities[1]. If money is everybody's preoccupation in daily life, for young men this preoccupation is closely linked to becoming and continuing to be considered a man. Distributing money is crucial to fulfilling household and intergenerational obligations. By buying food, gifting presents and solving others' problems young men can assert their voice in the family and nurture social relationships more generally. Youths need money to pay for bride-wealth, but even after marriage they have to find the resources to sustain a growing household and are expected to provide for their wives. Even the men that 'sit at home' as *kagumu* (household heads) often want or must look for their *own* money rather than simply relying on remittances sent by their migrant brothers. Redistributing money also enhances male sociality and accrues honour to men in their community. Among the very young, charismatic persons are usually the ones who can honour their guests and friends by buying and distributing cigarettes, tea, candies and other commodities. They can attract people to their place, rather than going to other people's meeting points, and they can make presents to the girls, possibly winning over their sympathies and developing a loving relationship. As youths grow older, money is equally significant, in sociality as well as in community affairs. Money alone is not sufficient to achieve prestige, but given the liquidity of cash it can easily be circulated through socially sanctioned channels, such as making gifts to local dignitaries and helping people according to the logic of patronage, or investing in the 'advertising agency' of praise-singers (*jaaru*) (cf. Janson 2002). It is sufficient to listen to one of Ganda Fadiga's cassettes to realise this. Ganda Fadiga is an internationally famous Soninke *jaare,* who sings about the story and achievements of *diamantaires* and traders across Soninkaara; his clients give him presents of cars, compounds and thousands of Euros to be featured in his lyrics[2]. Lest I am misunderstood, I must say that there are other less monetary models of successful masculinity among the Soninke, some of which I have illustrated in the previous chapter[3] (see also Section 5.3). Nevertheless, this is a very pervasive one.

[1] The ubiquity of monetary exchanges in kin and friendly relationships is not per se an index of monetisation in social relations. As Bloch and Parry (1989) point out, monetary transactions are often enveloped in moral exchanges.

[2] Ganda Fadiga came in Gambia to perform and record tapes for the Banjul-based businessman Musa Njay. I was told by a young man that he received $30,000 for his performance, though I could not verify this.

[3] Many 'professions' in which specialist knowledge is required are high in status, particularly those of religious scholarship and traditional or state politics, as well as other professional careers. Given the fact that the Soninke have invested little in schooling, the civil service and other professional careers are for a few only.

The problem for young men is not simply one of finding money, but of accumulating it. As Timera (2001a:42) puts it, highlighting a more general principle of social exchange, "l'affirmation individual se réalise à la fois dans l'acte d'avoir et de donner"[4]. Accumulation is not only the necessary precondition to redistribution, but also the creation of personal savings that ensure self-reliance. Quiminal (1991:142) has described migrants' savings as "the money of autonomy", which means primarily an emergency fund against accidents and unpredictable events during one's life time—from failing crops to fires to illness—thus shielding one against the shame of having to ask money from other people. Ideally, money consistently accumulated can be partly distributed, partly set aside. In the long run, this transforms the emergency fund into a more permanent financial security asset, which can be invested in business, housing or other *fangkanta* investments. In sum, money does not only hold out the possibility of success; it is often a necessary condition for progress in socio-generational terms and in terms of personal achievement. What varies is the type of spending a man is expected to perform at different stages of his life, but in actual fact *looking* for money constitutes a lifelong process for most men, at least until they can 'sit' as seniors or household authorities and legitimately demand money from their juniors.

The term *mundiye* is also worth analysing further. As I noted in Chapter 2, the emphasis on *mundiye* (searching) is also rendered by the term *hustling*. *Hustling* conjures up ideas of hard work, smartness and determination to obtain something (wage or sale) from work, the ability to overcome obstacles and adapt to new opportunities and positions. *Hustling* is a precondition (though not always a guarantee) of success, and it is conducive to the ideal of self-reliance. Searching thus implies a certain degree of entrepreneurialism, which people usually expect of young men. *Mundiye* also conveys the sense of adventure and risk-taking that is implicit in the experience of travelling (*terende*) in a foreign land (*tunŋa*). The quest for money in fact transcends mere economic calculus; Soninke travellers also cultivate a cosmopolitan attitude as an openness to exploring new places. In its turn, this sense of 'opening up to the unexpected' (De Boeck 2009) is important in tracking new economic opportunities, as the following case shows:

> B. (a man in his late fifties) left Gambia in 1974. He went to Sierra Leone, then to Ghana, Nigeria and Ivory Coast to trade in African art objects. He was back in Gambia in the first half of the 1980s, when he became involved in trading general goods between Banjul and Basse. Eventually he began to enlarge his business circuit by embarking on business trips to the US. In New York he found a job in a Jewish store, though during his days off he kept on peddling in the streets. After a year in New York he heard about

[4] "Individual self-affirmation ensues from the act of having and giving at the same time" (author's translation)

some people going to Jamaica to work in the plantations. He did not know whether he would make much money that way but he seized the opportunity. He worked in plantations for half a year and then returned to New York, resuming his old job. After 1994 B. retired in Serekunda, where he had built two compounds.

Changes of direction and unpredictable diversions, such as Jamaica (certainly off the map of Soninke migrant destinations) in B.'s quest for money, often underpin migrants' narrations and are sometimes deliberately emphasised. There is no need to reify this disposition into a cultural trait to appreciate that the history of Soninke trade, travel *and* commercial farming throughout the 20th century offers many such instances of adaptations and explorations. For instance, there are the pioneering adventures of some traders who after World War II opened new routes for successive waves of migrants 'rushing' to diamond-rich countries and other money rich markets. Even today, young men animatedly discuss emerging opportunities as they learn them from people abroad or from friends. In effect, the very opportunity of emigration is the most discussed topic. Youth talk about looking for or seeing a 'route' (*nan kille mundu/wari*), which often revolves around finding a visa or an alternative way to reach Europe, North America or Angola. As in other parts of the world, what makes travel so relevant to the young men's quest is that it provides an "enhanced relationship with money" (Osella and Osella 2000:122), a way of tapping into financial sources, whether in the form of salary or commercial sales. At the same time, B.'s story warns us against conflating *xalisi mundiye* with travel and it highlights his readiness to find opportunities at home. While most young men experience the lure of travel (and this is not due to monetary factors alone), their aspiration does not seem at odds with being open to other opportunities to make money, wherever these might be. This is the reason why I prefer to analyze *xalisi mundiye* as an open-ended livelihood strategy rather than as a migratory project.

The Soninke associate two broad categories of working activity (*golle*) with *xalisi mundiye*: waged or 'monthly' work (*xasongolle*) and trade/business (*julaaxu*) (indeed this is all some parents know about their sons' activity abroad). Waged work is sometimes referred to as 'Whitemen job' (*tubabunun golle*) (cf. Diawara 2003:77), both because the idea of a wage is attributed to the arrival of the Europeans and because in European countries Soninke are mostly employed as labourers. Soninke young men tend to see the Whiteman salary as a synonym for regular income. Regular income means regular savings. A migrant on a visit from Spain told me he could set aside more than half of his salary, remit some for *biraado* (subsistence) and other household needs, and keep the rest for himself[5]. This yields a virtuous cycle of work and accumulation which becomes manifest in village and urban housing investments.

[5] B. (man, aged 35), March 2007, Serekunda.

Julaaxu comprises most commercial and entrepreneurial activity geared to reaping a profit from the goods or services sold to a third party. The English word *business* is also very much in use. If business too is associated with regular saving, it also offers the prospect of *big* money. It does not escape anybody's observation that the very rich among the Soninke are all businessmen rather than waged labourers, and most of them are based in West Africa, if not in Gambia itself. As a consequence, some youths prefer Angola to Europe, with its thriving commercial capital or its Lunda regions where finding the right diamond can change one's fortunes overnight. Others see the West as a temporary destination to accumulate enough capital to invest in African business, either by staying abroad or by coming back to Gambia[6]. The flipside of business is that it can bring big gains as well as big losses. After all, the ebbs and flows of the diamond sector in the late 1970s and 1980s were a common reason for migrants to send their children to Europe and America rather than take them along to the diamond mines.

Agriculture used to be a way of earning money, but it is barely so now. As one young man put it: "Here in Sabi, we farm. It is our *laada* [tradition], but I want to look for money now"[7]. In his words, farming is praised as a customary activity, but it has been divorced from *xalisi mundiye*. Since male householders concentrate on subsistence farming, they rarely make individual plots to sell groundnuts after the harvest.

Not all salaried work and business lead to accumulation and progress. Although working for a wage in Gambia is widespread among seasonal migrants and employees, these are often unimpressed with the pay (see Section 4.3.2 below). For them, local salaries are barely sufficient to cover immediate needs. It is just 'hand to mouth' money: "as soon as you get it, it is finished—you pay back your debts and you eat [spend on food] the rest"[8]. Young men are aware of the periods of unemployment and high costs of living in Europe, though they still rank European jobs higher than those of Africa; in response to my observations about hardship in Europe, young men provokingly asked if I had ever met any Gambian worker who had managed to build a compound.

Business too involves a lot of hand-to-mouth activity. The stratification of commerce, especially import business, from the late 1970s, poses significant entry barriers to many petty traders. While many try their luck in the commercial hubs of visa-free ECOWAS (Lomé, Cotonou, etc.), I met a number of young men who returned during my fieldwork because they could not find enough capital to import a bale, let alone a container. Accessing or amassing that

[6] Timera (1996:219) finds that Soninke labourers in France also envision this possibility.
[7] T. (man, aged 27), November 2007, Sabi
[8] A. (man, aged 28), March 2007, Serekunda.

kind of capital is tantamount to stepping out of the overcrowded low strata of retail trade and skipping to the level of wholesale, whereby one can afford to import a bale or a container of goods from China or elsewhere. Indeed, as noted in Chapter 1, Banjul and Serekunda are not substantially different from other West African commercial ports; accordingly, the problems faced by young men staying in Gambia are similar to those of their peers who have tried their luck in other West African countries. I could still find a few examples of self-made businessmen, setting aside even as little as 10 Dalasi per day on a constant basis until they had sufficient capital to open a shop or buy more goods to trade. But the most common image associated with their experiences is one of a self-perpetuating situation. It is 'just managing', balancing on the brink of subsistence. In this 'world of management', as an acquaintance qualified it, there is no easy way out of a hand-to-mouth existence towards a trajectory of socio-economic escalation.

Although looking for money abroad is fraught with uncertainties, young men deem emigration, particularly to Europe and America, a likely exit from this situation, as it seemingly offers the possibility of making *and* saving money, provided that one is willing to work hard. As doors to Europe and America have almost closed, youths are faced with the need to look for other routes and opportunities, including those in their home village and country. Although this is far less desirable for young men living in an environment dominated by the presence of their peers' remittances from other countries, the prospect of doing business at home is all but disregarded.

4.2 PRECONDITIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

What kind of training and support do young men need in order to find money at home? How do young men learn to adapt and find opportunities? Which factors impinge on accumulation? In this section, I will try to describe some preconditions, and constraints, that the Soninke identify in undertaking the quest for money in Gambia and exiting their hand-to-mouth situation.

4.2.1 Learning to *Hustle*

It is safe to say that, up to now, rural Soninke have thought the best way to train for *hustling* is farming. This is apparently paradoxical. Farming is not a quest for money and it is the

essence of sedentariness. But most elders I spoke to insisted that only after having learned to farm (and learned the Quran), can young men venture out in search of money (Fig. 3.4). As I detailed in the previous chapter, farming is central to the upbringing of children. Through farming, children and teenagers are trained to work and are brought to an experiential awareness of the hardship needed to obtain subsistence food for the household. Handling the hoe, bending down on the ground, weeding or uprooting groundnuts, are all associated with effort, fatigue and sufferance. Not only will the body be trained to endure fatigue, but the person as a whole will become acquainted with the idea of a Spartan life and sacrifice. This is conducive to self-knowledge and stronger moral fibre (Whitehouse 2003: 35), so that the young man will be able to make a living and obtain money by his sweat (*futte*), a metaphor of this work ethic. People often emphasise the nobility of sweat by wiping a finger or hand across the forehead when describing an honest job. Young men themselves make reference to their training to emphasise their potential for *hustling*:

> October 2007, Sabi. Tamba and I had a conversation about his time in the *maisi* ['upper Quranic school']. At that time, boys were spending the whole day in the bush, from seven to seven. Back from the fields, he had to haul water for the senior boys. Lunch time? They would eat little, not even enough to feel satisfied. Then they would go to town and find somewhere people would offer them food. At times there was not enough room in the huts. Boys would sleep on the veranda, shaking all night in the cold season: "Eh my friend, we suffered. But it's good. Now that my body has become stronger [*tenko*], I am fit for *hustling*. I can go and find money. I can work hard, I fear no job".

The pedagogic value of hardship is also apparent in other educational strategies. When I asked a household head how he prepared his sons for travelling, he replied: "When they ask you for 10, you give them 5, so they have to struggle to get the rest"[9]. Too indulgent a father risks spoiling his child to the point that he may not grow up respecting seniors and be willing to work; whereas the skilful parent will cultivate entrepreneurialism and cunning in his son.

Equipped with strength and self-conduct, the young man is said to adapt to any job and living conditions. According to Mamadou Diawara, the concept of farm work in Mande applies to a host of other working activities (*golle* in Soninke) because "Tout doit être préparé, provoqué, ou du moins catalysé grâce au travail qui, de ce fait, devient une nécessité impérieuse"[10] (Diawara 2003:72). The capacity to provoke, transform and catalyse is *senbe* in

[9] Baba Silla (man, aged about 70), 11 January 2007, Sabi.
[10] "Everything has to be prepared, caused, or at least catalysed through work, which, because of this, becomes an imperative need" (author's translation).

Soninke. *Senbe* is a multivocal word referring to a 'force' of different natures. A rain can have more or less *senbe* depending on its intensity; a fertile soil is described as having *senbe*; so is a powerful motorbike; and so on. The *senbe* of a labourer can be approximated as his bodily strength and endurance[11]. In fact, the *hustler* needs strength as a sort of stamina to obtain something from work, not only in farming, but also in other jobs. 'I am able to work, I have *senbe* [*n ra wa gollini, senbe wa in maxa*]' youths often say when asked about work, often accompanying the sentence with the gesture of closing the fists and raising the elbows to indicate bodily strength.

Effort and strength is not simply a question of muscularity, however, but of embodying and expressing a pro-active disposition and entrepreneurialism. A busy person is often described as someone who is not sitting (*ake nta taaxunu*), referring either to the erratic character of his trade which keeps him going from place to place, or the dynamism implied by his activity. Sitting, in this context, is the opposite manifestation to *hustling*, the capacity to make a productive effort and catalyse situations through physical or other engagement. It is a synonym of unemployment, whereby lack of work is described as a still stance—'I'm just sitting [*n wa taaxunu tan*]'—the absence of occasions to unleash one's *senbe*.

In sum, versatility and endurance are the key to the quest for money. Timera (1996:219) has argued that the Soninke in France do not associate any professional career with their migratory project; they are prone to accepting *any* job in order to earn a salary: the type of job is secondary to the amount on their payslip at the end of the month. This attitude has been reinforced by the segmentation of the capitalist job market in advanced industrial economies, in which the lowly qualified and menial occupations are left to immigrants (Piore 1979; Sassen 1991). When the French automobile industry retrenched in the 1980s, the Soninke factory workers moved to equivalent, unskilled positions in the service sector (cleaning, restaurants, etc.) (Timera 1996:221). Since Gambian Soninke are employed in similar jobs in other Western countries, this raises the plausible hypothesis that educational strategies back in the village are not maintained simply because of an alleged traditionalism, but as a pragmatic adaptation to this segmented job market. Farming does not provide qualifications, but from a Soninke point of view it provides the general life skills to make men more adaptable to *any* job in the unskilled

[11] 'Intellectual' activities such as studying, marabout work and office work also imply effort, work. The kind of *senbe* expressed in this case differs, though it is still pertinent to speak of force. Graw (2009:98) mentions that the Mandinka equivalent term *semboo* is a central attribute of the diviner: "Mandinka-speakers refer to [the] general ability of the diviner to read the divinatory signs and to come to know and reveal what could not be known from the consultational context itself as 'having force'(*ka semboo soto*)". See also the discussion on knowledge below.

labour market, and more resistant to the harsh living conditions that immigrants have to endure in the 'travelling bush'.

In a village where the first school was built in the mid 1990s and where the emphasis on 'traditional' education has been so strong, formal training has had only a minor impact on the prospects of today's young men. Although Basse schools are a riding distance from Sabi, education and skills training programs have mainly been concentrated in Banjul and Serekunda. Only a few village-based Sabinko have managed to send their children to Banjul to study. Most of today's village youths have gone through a Quranic education; some have even received formal Islamic schooling, but their studies are not recognised in either the job market or the public sector, except for some teaching positions in Arabic and Quranic schools.

Some of my interlocutors resent not having had the opportunity to learn in 'Western' schools or that their father did not keep them in, say, Sierra Leone to study, instead of sending them back to the village 'school of farming'. Some of them maintain that with a diploma they could find a good job in Gambia, rather than having to go and look for business and jobs elsewhere. However, many other people doubt the relation between education and employment, especially now that many educated Gambian youth are sitting jobless in the country. While the value of formal education may be held in high esteem, it is not necessarily felt to be sufficient to secure a job with a proper salary in the country:

> November 2007, Sabi. I visited H., a middle-aged woman, at her compound. We talked about how she raised her children and what she envisaged for them. One of her sons went to school. She spent a lot of money on his education. She sent him to Serekunda, and asked relatives to help her with lodging and feeding him. She had thought that schooling would have given him a good job. But after he obtained his high-school diploma, he found no job and returned to Sabi. Feeling disappointed, she said that in the future she would send her children and grand-children to the *xaranyimbe* (Quranic school).

Some educated men can find employment in their father's or relatives' family firms. We must remember that members of the elite send some of their children even to Western universities. The complexities of current commercial and financial business are said to require some degree of formal education (cf. Marfaing and Sow 1999:207). Once they complete their studies, most of the children are reabsorbed into their father's enterprises. They may help with accountancy and the bureaucracy, and develop the business through the internet, something that businessmen are increasingly using for their transactions.

Absorbing children and junior relatives into the father's firm is part of a widespread strategy of conducting business based on kinship and on a system of inheritance to successive

generations. It also acknowledges the fact that formal education alone is often insufficient to run a business in West Africa. As many businessmen and return migrants pointed out to me: 'trading is knowledge [*julaaxu ni tuwaaxu ya yi*]'. It is hands-on knowledge, acquired through direct experience: how to evaluate diamonds or beads can hardly be learned through formal training. Marfaing and Sow (1999:204-5) rightly stress that West African business requires a practical knowledge of transaction conduct, social contacts, cultivated relations of trust and a general savoir faire, which has usually been transmitted through 'informal' apprenticeship even for those who went through higher education. As I shall detail later, apprenticeship in local or transnational enterprises continues to play an important role and it has acquired further significance, offering a first entry into business to youths who do not manage to travel to Western countries where unqualified labour is still required and to other countries where they enter business directly.

Apprenticeship in artisanal work is, in contrast, rare. Although informal training in trades other than those associated with status groups is widespread in West Africa (e.g. Viti 2005), in Sabi very few young men and teenagers have joined existing workshops, which are run mostly by strangers anyway. Seasonal workers going to Serekunda mostly learn to mix cement and make blocks, but they seldom go beyond assisting masons, let alone becoming one. Many nonetheless maintain that learning a '*métier*' (the French for trade, skilled labour) is useful. Acquiring skills is not necessarily thought to be the alternative to migration, but its refinement; as one man put it:

> *Métier* is good. In Senegal, if you don't study [in school], you have to learn a *métier*: carpenter, mason, tailor…But here, we don't. If you know a *métier*, when you go to Europe, they will see you. Plenty people work as [unqualified labourers]—too many! But if you know a *métier* you can find a job easily, and they will pay you good money[12]

As skills training and skilled labour visas seem to have become buzzwords in migration governance discourse and policies, these words leave room for future adaptation in educational strategies. A safe conclusion is, however, that so far the versatility of a worker has resulted less from acquiring specific qualifications than from training in general life skills—endurance, hard work and self-discipline—so as to work restlessly and avoid the temptations of the foreign land.

[12] Chagu Sumbundu (aged about 37), January 2007, Sabi.

4.2.2 'You Can't Get Money in Your Home Place'

There remains a paradox to the Soninke quest for money: if young men are willing to take up any job, how do they account for the fact that strangers come to Sabi to work and do business? This is indeed one of the points on which the President of The Gambia has insisted in his speeches on Gambian youth attitudes, prompting them to learn from immigrants and take advantage of local opportunities (see Section 1.8.1). The phenomenon of immigration in a land of emigration is not new to the Soninke milieu. Manchuelle (1997:102-6) has documented that since the late 19th century Soninke men have emigrated in search of more promising opportunities and hired immigrants at home to make up for the loss of labour and to expand agricultural production. In Chapter 1, I showed that this has occurred in Sabi in more recent times as well. Nevertheless, I often questioned my interlocutors about this apparent paradox; sometimes I explicitly provoked them when they complained about the lack of opportunities in the village. By far the most common response was to point out that 'you can't get money in your home place'. What surprised me most is that many elders shared this viewpoint, readily giving examples of stores forced to close down because of the incessant requests for help and credit, from friends and family. In other words, a young man can make some money in the village, but he cannot accumulate it.

The problem is not one of entrepreneurship (something that is not missing among the Soninke) but of social capital. Alejandro Portes (1998:16) speaks of 'negative social capital', one instance of which occurs when "group or community closure may, under certain circumstances, prevent the success of business initiatives by their members". Perhaps the label 'burdensome' proposed by Whitehouse (2007:139) is preferable to 'negative' when describing relationships that are constraining primary accumulation on the one hand, and are supportive and productive on the other. In home villages, the potential entrepreneur lives face to face with several kin and acquaintances; he is drawn into a web of solidarities and obligations that he can hardly escape: "everybody comes with his/her problem […] you would not know if they are telling the truth, but what can you do? You can't refuse, they will say you're a bad person [*sere bure*]"[13]. If someone can consolidate his presence by giving out money, the redistributive pressures can be simply overwhelming for local pockets. It is difficult to hide money. People will know who has what and when he receives it. And they will know when someone refuses to help others; although this may not automatically lead to an accusation of stinginess or badness, it may easily affect a

[13] Babu (aged 34)., December 2007, Sabi.

person's reputation. The fact of being face to face with people's everyday hardship is also mentioned as a factor that forces one to take pity and do whatever one can to help a friend or a relative even without an explicit request[14].

Outsiders with no kinship ties in the village are external to redistributive pressures. By the same token, by venturing into *tunŋa*, Soninke migrants are likely to find the same conditions of anonymity that are conducive to saving money. This is what Jónsson (2007:35) calls the 'stranger logic' among the Malian Soninke she studied. Building on the work of Whitehouse (2007), she argues that in order to make money, one has to become a stranger, a person who is not fully integrated into society but appended to it (cf. Simmel 1964 [1908]). He or she is thus relatively free from the social obligations by which members of the society have to abide[15]. Away from home, the migrant can be more secretive about his earnings and savings. The householders will not know his exact salary and savings, and he will be able to put their requests on hold while he reaps a sufficient profit from wage or business. He will send some home and keep some to top up the business capital and his savings. Mobile communication and transnational networks circulating information have not completely removed the distance from face-to-face relations and from the close scrutiny of one's availability of money. As Whitehouse (2007:143) explains:

> It is hard to say no to any request from family, but the more distant the origins of a request, the easier it becomes to practice artful deflection and deferral. Excuses which might not sway a demand made face-to-face (e.g. "my goods are stuck in customs," "nobody's buying," "the tax office just cleaned me out," etc.) can be much more effective when the person hearing them cannot verify whether they are actually true.

The belief that someone cannot find money in his home place is not solely the product of a cultural logic; historical factors have influenced it. In the first place, the burden of social capital has increased in the context of the collapsing rural economy. Most farmers had the

[14] The importance of going far enough from one's own milieu is also highlighted by strangers and Gambians in general. Some urban dwellers also stress this point, especially when they run a shop or business close to home. The more mixed composition of the clients does help in running the business. Willems (2008:297) reports an interview with a Senegalese young man invoking redistributive pressures as a motive for emigration: "At home, you can't [economise]..because your mother, your sisters, your brothers-in-law who haven't got a job are there […] You can't not share […] When you're there, you can't just do what you want with your earnings. The people in your family know where and when you've got money. They come and look for you and you can't refuse them." (author's translation).

[15] By way of chain migration, clusters of co-ethnics and kin often form in the receiving context, reproducing solidarities and obligations in the foreign land. This may indeed be the cause of re-migration further away. However, entrepreneurial egalitarianism to some extent supersedes obligations and reciprocities in the diaspora, because "everybody is there to hustle, you have to try for yourself", as a former migrant put it. Having emigrated to look for money, people are urged to be self-reliant and to curtail their requests for help.

possibility of working and earning some money in groundnut agriculture, whereas farming and *xalisi mundiye* appear antithetical activities now. Deprived of local income, they have been forced to fall back on mutual aid networks in case of need, even for petty expenses. Secondly, doing business in Sabi, as in most of Gambia, necessarily means to provide credit arrangements for customers lacking liquidity and expecting to earn cash after the harvest, or from migrants abroad. If recovering debts is a complex negotiation even for strangers[16], one can just imagine the difficulties arising when kin and acquaintances come to ask for discounts, favours, postponing or forgetting debts. This is the most common explanation given for the failure of villagers' businesses, which in the past knew a period of success, especially in Sillakunda and Jabikunda. Business ventures like 'video clubs' and transportation where clients have to pay a fee or ticket at the entrance seem to have had fewer problems in terms of credit (Fig. 4.1). Third, and related, in the last twenty years, the growing commercial immigration of Guineans and Mauritanians in the Basse area and surrounding villages has probably accelerated the exit of the locals from the retail trade.

Another reason why 'you can't get money in your father's village' is that some menial jobs are believed to be shameful. Dependent work for another villager is generally looked down on, at least within the bounds of the village. In the past, parties of young men would tour other villages offering their labour in return for a share of harvest or pay. These kinds of labour contract arrangements (*sassi*, also *dabowo*) are today practised mostly by *strange farmers*, or immigrant workers during their days off from the landlord's farm (see Section 1.7.1). In the dry season, some jobs in construction work are available in Sabi, but it is again strangers who do them, while the youth leave for the city to look for similar jobs. Part of the reason is rooted in the fact that many menial jobs have been associated with low status origins and dependency[17]. In contrast, Diawara (2003:77) observes that Mande societies maintain that 'the foreign country ignores the social status', recasting low status jobs because "une fois a l'étranger [l'homme] accepte les dures conditions de l'aventure"[18] (see also Whitehouse 2007). References to status are less explicit among youths today[19], though doing odd jobs and getting dirty makes them ashamed, especially if companions sit nearby and act as 'small patrons', as some say. For those who do actually take up any available job, the problem of fair and timely retribution constitutes

[16] In February 2007, I was informed that a foreign merchant who had closed down his shop months before was still in town, as he had to collect about €5,000 from his debtors.
[17] Some recollections of the 1950s and 1960s suggest that there was continuity between servile and free labour: when day labourers were recruited among the villagers, these were mostly *kome* (e.g. Bafula Kamara, 15 December 2008, Sabi).
[18] "Once abroad [the man] accepts the hard conditions of the adventure" (author's translation).
[19] When I posed this hypothesis to a young man, he did not fully endorse the issue of status; he drew my attention to a *hoore* ('noble') young man working for a *kome* (former slave) mason in that period.

an additional deterrent. The employer may take advantage of the ambivalent nature of dependent work to postpone the payment and eventually pay the worker's father instead.

It may be argued that, having survived redistributive pressures and inhibitions, there is still little chance to *hustle* in Sabi because 'there is no money here' (*xalisi nta yere*). The availability of cash is an old problem in rural areas, and migration has been one of the main means for procuring it (cf. Phillips 1981). The monetisation of rural economy dates back to the early days of groundnuts (mid 19th century); so does its corollary—indebtedness. Indebtedness meant that farmers were easily faced with chronic scarcity of money as their sales were used to pay debts and complement subsistence. And if the remittance economy has arguably raised the standards of living in Soninke villages compared to the surrounding ones, liquidity remains a problem for most people. For instance, Tamba (the young man from my host compound whose upbringing was illustrated above) was offered a job, to supervise a newly opened shop on behalf of a friend dealing in clothes and other accessories in Serekunda, and he would have a percentage on each sale. Tamba appreciated the generous offer of the friend. However, the relatively high quality T-shirts and trousers sold in the Sabi branch were probably too expensive for Sabi youth. Though of lesser quality, Asian made clothes sold for less in the Basse market. Sales were slow, and a few months later Tamba decided to pass the business on to another young man and leave to find work in Serekunda. In truth, even many stranger traders and artisans in Sabi resent the fact that they can only make marginal profits, which moreover fluctuate considerably according to the seasons, and are concentrated around the festival periods and after the groundnut harvest when people, particularly women, have more money to spend on new clothes and extras.

Fig. 4.1 – Investing at Home?

Testing a satellite dish connection in preparation for starting a 'video club' (Sumbundukunda, Sabi)

Finally, the problem for men is not only to have and handle money, but to have *their own* money. This is a matter of pride as well as of emancipation from ties of socio-material dependency. In Chapter 3, I showed that young men raise this point in household management. Even those who hold a formally recognised position may fear becoming over-dependent and subject to changes of redistributive patterns in the future. Thus it seems that in stable households there is still the belief that earning one's own money by the sweat of one's brow is more honourable than depending on help from others. During a visit to Numyell, I had the opportunity to visit a large plantation. This was described to me as a household activity, the yields being used to buy rice and pay for extras for the family. The managers were some household men, one of whom, Abulai, was accompanying me. Abulai had a generous share of the profits, enough to satisfy his needs and keep the rest. Yet he wished to migrate, or rather re-migrate (he had been deported from Angola in 2004). He said he would not have many benefits from this business, not so much because he could not save, but because:

> I will not respect this money. When I get money easily like that, I will be spending, buying things and showing off. We are Gambians, you see, we don't want to work here [laughter]. I would go to Serekunda to enjoy life and stroll around with boys and girls. Instead in Europe we do what these boys [stranger workers] are doing for us in our garden. Our boys in Spain go and pick apples from the trees. At times they get their pay, at times they get a share of the yield. When you have two or three buckets of apples you go around town and sell it. Perhaps 1kg may earn you 1 or 2, or 3 euros. You pay your rent and electricity. You sleep in a small house, with many people. You eat little to save up. The one euro that you finally save and put in the bank, you respect that because you worked hard to get it and save it. You go on like that for five, ten years—bit by bit, bit by bit—until you have something on the side. You build a house here, you bring vehicles, you solve your family problems[20].

Abulai's words show that *xalisi mundiye* goes beyond acquiring cash. It is also how one obtains it and saves it that accrues social value to it. Far from idealising Europe as El Dorado, his acute representation of *campo* (as farm work in Catalonia is known) and living conditions in Spain reveals an understanding of *mundiye* as simultaneously rigorous conduct, sacrifice and hard work, preconditions for people to say that he has *hustled* money for himself. And if his words are normative about how to spend money, they precisely show the normative value that travelling has achieved as an almost self-evident authentication of the way one acquires money.

In sum, 'looking for money' in the village is constrained by social and cultural factors. This is due not only to lack of work or lack of skills, but also to the possibility of accumulating

[20] Abulai K. (aged about 33), January 2008, Numuyell.

enough capital to run one's business and save money. Men raise money in multiple and creative ways in Sabi, from making mud bricks at the swamp for sale, to cutting and selling elephant grass for roofing, to trading sweets and cigarettes on a portable tray. When social and cultural inhibitions are overcome, local employment offers some possibilities. However, these ways are often considered just that: a way of raising *some* money, but not a permanent solution. In the past, Tamba was earning decent pocket money from odd jobs before he migrated to the city in the dry season and earned more; but then he stopped working in such jobs a few years ago. Now he does not need to enjoy himself with his friends but has to think of a more stable way of *finding money*—money to support his newly married wife, to make improvements to his house, to bring gifts to his mother, to think about a future. Given the discourse and the reality of (not) making money in their father's village, it seems very hard that young men like him can stay behind. Indeed some try and do so, but for most others looking for money at 'home' implies moving to Serekunda, where constraints are fewer, and opportunities greater.

4.2.3 The *Supporter*

We might say that moving away from burdensome social capital implies relying on the very same social capital. Young men may wish to have a visa to travel to a foreign country or they may want to obtain a sizable amount of business capital that enables them to separate long-term investments from everyday profits and redistributions. In both cases they need to find a relative or, more rarely, a close friend willing to help, a sponsor or *supporter*. The progressive stratification of business in West Africa and the barriers to emigration in North America and Europe have made both commercial and labour migration more dependent on *supporters*. To ask how someone has managed to emigrate is to ask the question '*ko da a denge* [who took him there]?'.

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, many youths see the help to migrate or start-up capital as a necessary *precondition* to begin *hustling*. They say they need to be put in a condition or a place to 'try for themselves'. Young men often borrow money to make international calls or try to have a word with a migrant or affluent relative, furthering their plea for migration. When asked about their attempts to find potential supporters, others may instead reply that there is no need to insist because "[that relative] knows my situation; he knows the 'suffering' [*tanpiye*] I am in"[21]. However, social capital is not equally distributed among the young men. Access to social

[21] K. (man, aged 24), April 2008, Serekunda.

networks is mediated by a complex mix of factors—from kinship ties, household formation and solidarity, and of the specific migratory histories of potential *supporters*—which make it difficult to formulate general statements or patterns. In those households and *xabilanu* in which there are many migrants and solidarity prevails over internal divisions, they may have more chance of being helped. As the case of M. analysed in the last chapter has shown, however, the high number of migrants in a given household can also be a disadvantage. Nor is the fact of having a migrant father a guarantee of relay migration, for young men may not wish to go to the same West African destinations, if indeed these are still viable destinations. Last but not least, young men may be expected to find their own route or ways of *hustling* before being helped. In order to persuade a potential supporter to help them, they may have to demonstrate that they are good householders and farmers, and also that they make an effort to *hustle* at home. Although the direct passage to international travel or capital-intensive business does occur, young men often have to wait a long time before their papers are ready, and in the meantime they cannot sit idly on a promise of *support*.

Migrants and businessmen receive many requests for help. Urban and international migrants face the dilemma of whom to choose among the many candidates, and this is where what young men do at home and how they approach staying behind can make a difference. On the other hand, restrictive visa conditions may hamper *supporters'* attempts to help. In response, migrants and businessmen have begun to create temporary or permanent opportunities for their relatives to earn a living at home.

In other words, whether it is because of the lack of a *supporter*, or of attempts to find or convince one, or because of taking advantage of local opportunities created by relatives, young men have to *hustle* in Gambia. In the remainder of this chapter, I will therefore describe how young men have devised ways of looking for money at home. The focus will move progressively from the rural areas to the urban ones, where youth migrate seasonally to find work and link up with potential *supporters*. Indeed, the quest for money at home and the quest for a *supporter* to emigrate often overlap.

4.3 LOOKING FOR MONEY IN GAMBIA

4.3.1 Commercial Horticulture

Although the current state of agriculture in the upper river does not breed optimism, some men still try to make money in this sector. Despite the near absence of water in the Sabi creek—compared to other nearby villages such as Dembakunda and Numuyell—commercial horticulture and orchards have attracted the attention of some Sabinko. Musa 'Degume' Silla's plantation is surely the most developed one. After travelling throughout West Africa for some years, Degume, who is now about forty, returned to Sabi and sat at his *ghetto* for some time. Tired of wasting his time with the usual "lies and jokes", as he put it, he began to consider cultivating a garden. He cleared some land by the swamp and little by little he planted bananas, mangoes, papaya, and vegetables. The local branch of YWAM supported him and advised him throughout, as they too experimented with banana gardening in the village. The biggest support came from Degume's two brothers in Spain, who paid for or co-financed some infrastructure and machinery. Without their help, he would probably not have been able to have metal net fencing and a water pump. But most Sabinko acknowledge Degume's effort and persistence. In contrast to Abulai's garden, Degume's is not a household property passed down to him. It is his and he *hustled* very hard to start it up. He spends most of the day in what he ironically calls "my house". Only a couple of his older sons (in their early teens) and a year-round stranger worker (*surga*) staying at his compound help him out. If anyone embodies the example of the governmental discourse about going back to the land, Degume is surely the one. Although the motivations that led him to gardening are not political, it is interesting that he leads the Sabi Youth Committee (SYC). As we shall see in Chapter 5, the state discourse is very relevant to the history of the SYC, and the SYC is partly framed as a non-migrant youth response to the call for self-reliance.

Degume's case remains an isolated one, but other people are intrigued by his example. One of his age mates is trying to start a garden too. As he explained to me, "not everybody can go travelling, so I thought I'd better do something here"[22]. Other men discussed with me the possibility of making a garden, or better, they expressed the wish of starting a plantation but did not have the economic means to fence, dig plant beds, dig a proper well and provide irrigation[23].

[22] C. (man, aged: late forties), March 2008, Sabi.

[23] Most men and women make do with shallow wells dug close to the swamp, where the water is one or two metres below surface. They draw out water with a bucket tied to a rope. It is a time and labour consuming method of irrigation, and the banks of the well often collapse, so that new ones have to be dug. Fencing is another major problem: most small scale gardeners have to periodically remake and repair their fences with sticks and prickly shrubs that ward off grazing animals.

It must be said that most of these men are in their late thirties or forties; one gardener is an elder[24]. They are usually men bound to 'sitting at home', if not already household heads (Degume is the first son of his elderly father—Tankoro Janke—who was the vice-chief of Sabi at the time of my fieldwork). In a village rich in gardens like Numuyell, this pattern is even clearer. Although there are male and female entrepreneurs in horticulture, many gardens are run or supervised by senior men. A number of gardens are maintained as household commercial farms, as the example of Abulai showed.

In contrast to Sabi, in Numuyell many migrants invest in gardening, both for generating subsistence income for their households and as private investments. As a consequence, a system of *support* has been put in place for locals acting as partners of migrant investors by managing gardens they would be unable to finance otherwise. I was able to speak to one of them, Ibrahima, a man in his late thirties. Ibrahima supervised his sister's son's garden (i.e. a nephew supporting the maternal uncle). The initial investment was considerable: Ibrahima estimated it at D120,000 (about €4,000, early 2008 rate). His nephew spent D40,000 just on the land (about 60m by 40m) and the rest on metal net fencing (including concrete pillars), labourers for soil preparation, fertiliser, two water pumps and pipes[25]. At the time of my visit (January 2008), the garden was about to start producing bananas, and Ibrahima was confident his nephew would quickly recover the initial investment.

According to my interlocutors, there is no indication that the flourishing horticultural sector in Numuyell is mitigating against emigration compared to Sabi. There is no incompatibility between the two ways of looking for money, and gardening may be a more appropriate solution for senior men who do not travel and/or have household responsibilities that keep them at home. Most junior men do not find gardening attractive and are reluctant to work in their elder brother's plantation, especially when this is a private venture and they work almost for free. Instead of spending the dry season in banana plantations, they prefer to go to the city and find their own money.

[24] Besides Degume's garden, an elder—Mari Dambele—owns a banana plantation, and during the time of my stay he was working on making a permanent well.
[25] Ibrahima K. (aged: late thirties), Numuyell, January 2008.

4.3.2 Seasonal Rural-Urban Migration

In the last thirty years, Soninke seasonal labour migration has been polarised by the Serekunda area[26]. A complex setting, Serekunda is half way between a *hustling* place and a second home, between a labour destination and a transit point where one can make contacts and find a *supporter*. The following example shows some of the different aspects of rural-urban migration:

> February-May 2008, Serekunda. After harvesting groundnuts, H., a 27 year old man, manages to find the money to pay for a ticket to Serekunda and off he goes. In the city, he joins some friends from Sabi, living in a room attached to a store in the middle of a large construction site where a Sabinke in America is building a series of commercial outlets. Having previously worked as a labourer on that very site, one of his friends is employed as a supervisor, keeping an eye on the workers and managing the supply of building materials. Unlike many other youth staying at their relatives' compounds, the young men living on the site have to carry out domestic chores and provide meals out of their pockets. No mother and no wife is around to wash their clothes and cook for them. They use to say ironically they are living a 'bachelor' life, just like when one is abroad.
>
> The site provides a natural setting for organizing a work team which, like other teams, goes to town in search of contracts for mixing cement, making cement blocks or digging foundations, by far the most common jobs for the seasonal migrants. The daily pay ranges from 75 to 125 Dalasi, depending on the task one is able to carry out. When a team acquires a contract, the margins of profit may be slightly higher. However, by March, the inflow of young men from the provinces swells the pool of the available workforce, fuelling competition and lowering the rates. All agree that the 2008 dry season is at least better than the previous one—I was in Sabi then and I actually saw young men coming back from the city because no job was available.
>
> Apart from earning contracts, H. and some friends kept an eye on land for sale while they worked on construction sites on the frontier of urban expansion. They acquired information about land sellers and made contact with the local chiefs (who also take part in the land transaction). An opportunity to mediate a land sale between a Soninke buyer and a local seller can yield a commission of thousands of Dalasi. The possibilities for this to happen are remote, given the numerous full time land dealers in town. Nevertheless, some youths discuss it at the site.
>
> The construction site is a meeting point for Sabi youth in Serekunda. They gather in the late afternoon and during off-work periods. The group is highly diverse with respect to age and to the target of their migration: one teenager is a day labourer and would be happy to go back to Sabi with some new clothes before the rainy season; youths in their late 20s like H. are more likely to find money for their family and for their marriage; one of their peers with more established connections stays permanently in the urban compound of the father and engages in occasional land dealing and other business transactions.

[26] A few youth from Sabi went to the Central river division, in the Jaxali Pachaar area, to work as agricultural labourers in the dry season rice plantations.

Due to its status of 'second home', spending the dry season in Serekunda to work does really not count as *terende*. By the same token, young men are subject to redistributive pressures, even though they are usually able to keep their savings. Their urban relatives are normally in a better economic position than most villagers, and the low density of the urban community reduces the frequency of encounters with other relatives. Most important of all, there is a common understanding that young men have go to Serekunda to *hustle* and they can more legitimately turn down requests for help on that account. H. and his friends finding themselves amidst piles of sand, scaffolding and half finished walls pictorially convey the bachelor experience of rural youth coming to town, enduring sacrifices to bring money back to the village. Those with better connections may live a more comfortable life in a relative's house. Nevertheless, when the harvest is over, they come to Serekunda, taking advantage of free food and accommodation, and look for menial jobs or for a business opportunity. They work as labourers, shop assistants, watchmen, peddlers, etc. For the youngest ones, rural-urban migration is certainly a continuation of the training received in the fields, a first approach to the world of *xalisi mundiye*, where they can show they are able to endure hard work and come back with some money and trophies, such as new clothes and goods. This is perhaps the young man's best CV in the eyes of a potential *supporter* in view of more important quests in Gambia or abroad.

In contrast, it seems that rural-urban migration can no longer be considered the first stage of a self-fashioned, stepwise migratory project[27]. When seasonal migration to Serekunda began to grow in the late 1970s, wage work and petty trade were funding travel to West Africa, sometimes even to European and American destinations. The most recent instance of this stepwise trajectory that I could find was that of a man in the second half of the 1990s doing construction work in Serekunda for some seasons, then migrating to Ibadan (Nigeria) to join the gemstone trade, thereby amassing enough money to pay for a visa dealer and reach Spain at the beginning of the 2000s. Narratives like this are less common among youths today; the first move out of the country is associated with a *supporter*. Young men usually see seasonal labour migration as a way to solve short term problems and more rarely to save some money for longer-term projects (e.g. marriage). In other words, seasonal labour migration tends to be of the survival type rather than of the upward socio-economic mobility type.

At the end of the dry season, most young men return to Sabi to farm, and some are explicitly pressurised by their seniors to do so, regardless of the fact they may wish to stay to

[27] For a discussion of the concept of stepwise migration see: Conway (1980).

take advantage of greater job opportunities left by the counter rural exodus. Being subject to the seasonality of farming/travelling in the age of international a-seasonal migration is a confirmation of the fact that their quest for money does not make enough difference back home to justify their absence from the fields during the rainy season. Unless their migration turns into a more stable activity and they are able to send some money home, their stay in Serekunda is met with suspicion. Seniors may think of their quest for money as a an excuse to skip farming and indulge in a comfortable urban life, enjoying electric fans and cold drinks from the fridge, as well as the amusements and greater sexual licence. Somehow paradoxically, seasonal migration may shift from being a *hustling* experience to its opposite: depending on others, resistance to work and lack of ambition.

Young men may counter that they stay in the city to look for a route or an opportunity to do business, and thus break free from the cyclicality of seasonal migration (Fig. 4.2). Serekunda is a good place to look for a *supporter*, to link up with more affluent relatives or to find an occasion to tap into the resources of Soninke investors, as H. and his friends tried to do. 'Travel news' about visa opportunities in Gambia or elsewhere in West Africa circulates more quickly in the urban circles, which are traversed by Soninke migrants from all over the world. The several shops run by Soninke throughout Banjul and Serekunda are information crossroads and meeting points for different people and several types of business transactions. One must not be deceived by the number of young men sitting at these shops and stores; while many people are surely wandering jobless, sitting is an active participation, a way of keeping one's ears tuned to the travel or business news and observing transactions, perhaps seizing the opportunity to jump into a deal as well. Spending time at the shop, they may earn the friendship and the trust of the shop owner. The latter may give the young men some merchandise on credit as a way of helping them to try and do business, or may assign them tasks and commissions.

Sitting and socialising is also a way of making one's situation known to others, weaving or reactivating solidarities which distance had thinned out. In the flow of money, businessmen, migrants and investments which interconnect in the urban Soninke circles, one hopes to make contacts, visit old friends and relatives living in the city or on a holiday from abroad, seeking a chance to speak to them in private and eliciting help to migrate or start a business. For men older than their thirties, and less inclined to join teams of juniors working in construction sites, having a chance to talk to a more affluent relative or friend is often a more appealing prospect. As we shall see next, it is in relation to this complex matrix of social and economic networks that youths can eventually structure their most stable trajectory of *xalisi mundiye* at home.

Fig. 4.2 – Exiting Seasonality?

A very basic 'wedding pole' (manyontole) erected by the groom's age mates (cf. Fig. 2.5). He is supervising the construction of this house on behalf of a migrant, and will stay in Serekunda with his wife for the time being

Fig. 4.3 – Remittance Economy

A view of the central avenue in Serekunda's market area. The photograph was taken from the first floor of a commercial building (under construction) belonging to a Sabinke migrant in the US. His junior brother is the manager of the construction site.

4.3.3 The Remittance Economy: Constructing (Im)mobility

The nexus between migration, remittances and investments in and around Serekunda has created an 'allied sector' of services and commercial companies. The Soninke have been pioneers of this remittance economy, whose ramifications have had implications for the overall economy, going well beyond ethnic and even national affiliation. The creation of small and medium enterprises by migrants and their resources have been read as a possible engine of economic development in countries like Gambia and Senegal (cf. Barro 2008). The interesting aspect of the remittance economy is that it constitutes a pool of business and employment opportunities for more or less young men to (re)compose their *hustling* career in a period where international travel has become more difficult to practise. It is an organized setting of staying behind, with varying degrees of organizational inclusiveness and, consequently, different 'types' of stayers. Small transnational enterprises, for instance, are built on a clear organization of mobile and immobile resources and people. They cannot work without loyal people who stay behind and manage the local side of the business. Middlemen brokering between a migrant buyer and a local land owner organize mobility and immobility only in the looser and more temporary sense; they occupy a position in the socio-economic field that is growing out of migrant transnationalism.

It is crucial to underline that some investments, partnerships and jobs are explicitly framed as an adaptation to the strict migration policies confronting Soninke mobility strategies. The micro political economy of *supporting* is changing, offering non-migrant youth alternative paths of *xailisi mundiye*. Facing increasing difficulties to meet the requests for travel support from nephews and junior brothers, migrants have begun to set them up in business or entrust them with investments in order for them to 'try for themselves'. Although this phenomenon is mainly concentrated in Serekunda, it is also emerging in Sabi, where some stores, workshops and video-rooms have been built and opened by migrants for their junior brothers:

> January 2007, Sabi. I meet M. [aged about 35], a migrant visiting from Angola, at the *lumo* (market area). He has almost finished building two stores, and he is making arrangements for plastering. He is planning to open a fashion shop with nice clothes. He says he has done this for his brothers because "travelling is very hard these days. People try, try, try, but it's very hard. Before you waste your time, it's better you stay [*taaxu*] and manage little by little at home".

> January 2008, Sabi. Y. [M.'s junior brother, aged about 28] is in charge of the two stores. In the store he sells cosmetics, which are supplied by his agnatic brother's (FBS) shop in Serekunda, as well as some

clothes and accessories for tailors. The other building is a tailoring workshop entrusted to a foreign tailor, probably working on a commission. Through time, Y. has expanded the range of products he sells and the business more generally. Y. acknowledges the difficulties of making money in his village, but he sums up his activity as "It's better than sitting [i.e. sitting idly]. You have to go little by little, little by little."

Kinship remains a privileged idiom for organising enterprises, recruiting a workforce and accessing credit, especially when distance and informal contracts pose an extra organizational difficulty and require trust between partners. In this respect, the contemporary remittance economy does not appear entirely novel. Kinship has provided an idiom for creating commercial and business activity in the region, and particularly within Muslim societies in West Africa, both in the past and in the present (Amselle 1977; cf. Eades 1993; Grégoire and Labazée 1993; Marfaing and Sow 1999:ch.5). As I mentioned with respect to young men's training, commercial enterprises may envisage institutionalised roles and activities, such as apprenticeship, that are relevant to the organization of migration, as we shall see.

For the children of wealthy returnees who set up businesses in Serekunda, the father's enterprise clearly represents an opportunity to stay behind. Some of them are explicitly encouraged to take over when their father retires[28]. However, for rural youth, with whom I am concerned, inheriting a family enterprise is usually less likely an option.

This point enables me to add some considerations on the issue of social capital. Let me return to H.—the seasonal migrant. H. has very few potential *supporters*. His household does not belong to a large descent group with many diasporic ramifications; at the household level, his full brothers (same mother and father) are non migrants, while he cannot count on other agnatic brothers abroad, who tend to concentrate on their sub-unit instead. His matrilateral uncles live in Sabi or in other villages and have no means to *support* him. Nevertheless, his example shows how young men with scarce social capital try nonetheless to weave or manipulate relationships with potential *supporters* in the remittance economy so as to construct an opportunity to travel and/or to do business. For young men with better connections than H., these business opportunities can be an interesting prospect for looking for money at home. In the following section, I illustrate a case study of a transnational enterprise and the different positions this has created in Gambia.

[28] As Marfaing and Sow (1999:200-2) have shown in their study of Senegalese entrepreneurs, two modes of transmission are commonly employed. The son is encouraged to take over the father's activity and, along with it, the leadership of the family. Alternatively, after a period of apprenticeship, he is helped to set up his own business, and thus become autonomous.

Fig. 4.4 – 'Container Shoes'

Second hand shoes on sale at the gate of the Kairakunda Store. Second hand ('container') shoes from Europe or America are often deemed to be better quality, and more authentic, than new ones imported from East Asia, though they can be more expensive, and hence more difficult to sell (starting from ca. Dalasi 350)

4.3.4 Kairakunda Ltd: a Transnational Family Enterprise

During my fieldwork in Serekunda, I used to meet and visit my friend and collaborator Amara at his urban compound close to the central market. This is one of the compounds of the large networks of the Sabi Kaira's compounds, a descent group I have already mentioned in the previous chapters, especially in relation to the legacy of Biagi Sirandu, one of Sabi's most prominent farmer-traders in colonial times (see Section 1.4). I also mentioned one of his sons, Tali, as an early urban migrant and then as a *diamantaire*. Biagi's sons and grandsons travelled extensively and today they can be found abroad and in Serekunda; some of them are prominent businessmen. In Sabi, Amara's household was founded by Hortoma, another trader during colonial times. Hortoma and Biagi were close agnatic brothers, and the two households are related by ongoing marriage ties. In Serekunda, Amara and his brothers stay in this compound, originally built by a son of Biagi Sirandu now deceased. Throughout the years, it has become almost a 'family compound' for household members coming from Sabi.

The façade of the compound is made up of commercial stores, while the interior is composed of two parallel rows of self-contained houses. Two of Amara's elder brothers have their base here: Saibo lives in the compound with his wife and his daughter; Musa is in Angola, but his two wives and children stay in the compound. A group of agnatic brothers and sisters from Biagi's side occupy another house, while the rest of the compound is rented to strangers. Yasta (Musa's first wife and Tali's daughter) owns an atelier, which is run by a Sierra Leonean tailor whom the family met through shared contacts in Gambia and Sierra Leone. Another store was let to a Guinean who ran a video club, but after he left it was rented (April 2008) by a Nigerian wishing to open a clothing shop. Musa has bought a taxi car for one of his sons, who is attending a Masters course in administration and accountancy; the taxi driver takes him to and collects him from the university, working to pay his fees off for the rest of the day. Finally, the largest store is a commercial business run by the Kaira themselves. An agnatic brother of Amara's (Abdu, son of Tali) in the US operates a shipping company for Gambian expatriates. Once or twice a month his container is offloaded and stocked at Kairakunda where the receivers come and collect their parcels. Abdu fills the rest of the container with second-hand materials (mainly office furniture) and with different kinds of paint which are kept and sold at the store. Saibo is the main point of contact at the store. He takes charge of the customs duties at the port, the transport for the container, the contacts with the recipients, and anything pertaining to the management of the business. Since the container arrives only once or twice a month, this is only

one of his activities: he also supervises and collects rents from the urban buildings of his brother Musa; he acts as a middleman in land deals and transactions; he recently bought a *gele gele* (25 passenger van) and he is making agreements with a Sabinke driver to operate it.

Abdu has also employed a shopkeeper/accountant (not a relative) and two of his junior agnatic brothers (in their twenties) living in the compound to take care of the stock of paint and sell it. Another junior sells second-hand shoes imported through the container (Fig. 4.4). He has the shoes on display on a small rack at the gate of the store. Next to him is a small stall of second-hand electronics run by a long-time acquaintance of the family, a Mandinka man from Baddibu district. This man's son, in contrast, works as a shop assistant for another Kaira man, a returnee from Norway selling building materials few kilometres away. Amara too has begun to work in connection with the shipping/import company, exploring the marketing potential of a brand of soft drinks on behalf of Abdu. He takes samples to supermarkets and food stores and makes arrangements with the owners for supplies.

The investments and the position of the Kaira in this particular setting do not follow one kind of logic. Some businesses are established to provide an income for the household, or for specific purposes such as paying for the education of a son. Taxis and vans are a typical example. Following the collapse of public transport in the 1990s, taxis and private vehicles constitute a highly profitable business: unless accidents and breakdowns occur, the investor can usually pay off the initial investment within a year and begin generating profits (cf. Fig. 4.3). As for commercial horticulture, profits can be put into subsistence for the household. Not infrequently, the vehicles are supervised by the migrant's wife or the head of the household, who periodically collect the yields from the driver. Having provided an income-generating activity for the household, the migrant investor is partly relieved of requests for money and help, and possibly accumulates savings for more personal projects.

The shipping/import company has a more complex organization and its goal is more clearly framed as an investment business. Abdu owns the business capital and organises the supply side. At the receiving end, a number of figures revolve around the enterprise: the main partner (Saibo), a clerk (the accountant), two employed shopkeepers, and at least two self-employed traders working on commission. The clerk is employed for her technical expertise, but in the case of the agnatic brothers, two sets of motivation prevail. On the one hand, the business requires an experienced and reliable partner who stays at home, someone like Saibo who has spent years doing business and knows the business-bureaucracy nexus very well. On the other, the segmentation of an enterprise like Kairakunda, and the multiplication of figures at the lower ranks—shop keeping, petty business and other tasks—owes probably less to the functional

organization of business than to offering a chance to the many young men sitting jobless and having no opportunity to travel. The latter are equally putting pressure on relatives and acquaintances to establish a business for them or at least to find them a place in an enterprise, eventually with the prospect of developing a more autonomous business or constructing other opportunities in a similar way to what Saibo has done.

Kinship appears to be the main means through which partnership is established in Kairakunda[29]. Though based on a core of kin ties, at Kairakunda there are more complex social networks built out of specific and general histories, some of which have developed over two generations (the Mandinka man and his son). Connections reflect also multiple migratory flows and intersecting trajectories embedded in the history of Kairakunda. The legacy of the family's many *diamantaires* in Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leonean war refugees who fled to Gambia is particularly illustrative of the complexities at play. The connection with the Guinean and the Nigerian is, on the other hand, a matter of impersonal economic transaction.

In relation to transnational investments, stepping outside kinship can be a deliberate strategy. The ambivalences and rivalries I have described in household relations are present, if not amplified, in transnational economic transactions. Migrants and non-migrants alike readily point to actual experiences of known cases where money entrusted to relatives was 'chopped' or was invested and suddenly lost in a failed business deal without the owner knowing about it; or worse still, young relatives who found a wad of cash in their hands seized the opportunity to pay a visa dealer to be able to travel out of the country, though some of the successful ones repaid the debt once abroad. Recovering a debt or loss can prove extremely difficult in a tightly-knit context like this: in the name of family unity the question is abandoned and no legal action is taken, not least because of the informal nature of the transaction itself. It seems that migrants often prefer to recruit contractors, middlemen or managers from outside the family precisely to avoid such problems. A similar logic lies behind the emergence of professional figures in the remittance economy. Kinship, village membership and ethnicity still constitute important bases of trust and recruitment in Soninke transnationalism; but elective solidarities per se are not sufficient. It is given individuals, businessmen and entrepreneurs who have earned a reputation on the ground who become key actors in the transnational field. The multiplication of transnational investments has also led to the emergence of agents, intermediaries and companies operating particularly in money transfer and real estate.

[29] The main business, gravitating around the import trade, is constituted around agnatic relations. However, matrilateral relations are equally frequent in this kind of business venture.

Saibo is precisely the kind of person who straddles kinship and non-kinship networks. After spending nine years in France as an unskilled worker, he returned in 1990 and established a trading company in Gambia. His partner was a Frenchman and he was importing yeast powder from France. A few years later, he joined a relative's business in Serekunda, and, passing through ebbs and flows, he eventually settled in his current situation. At the age of 43, Saibo still feels fit enough to re-migrate, but he does not wish to do so because the experience and connections he made by operating in Serekunda provide him with enough security to stay behind. He is the main 'administrator' of investments made by his two brothers (Abdu and Musa), and he occasionally engages in the land business as a middleman. Ethnic, village and personal ties are important, in order for him to win over the trust of buyer and seller, particularly when the buyer is abroad. But it is sufficient to take a walk with him in the streets of Banjul to realise that his forte is his thorough knowledge of the city and his personal relationships with clerks, officers, agents and businessmen gravitating around it. Knowledge and contacts are of course essential for the shipping company as well as for dealing in landed property. It is through his multiple and simultaneous incorporations (Levitt and Schiller 2004) in the transnational field, linking Serekunda's bureaus and businesses to the diaspora, that he manages to carve out a fairly stable economic trajectory.

4.3.5 Home-Grown Moneymen

The plethora of figures ('managers/administrators', dealers, middlemen, business partners, etc.) making money in the remittance economy has made a sufficient impact on youth imagination to earn the status of *xalisi mundiye* proper. When I was in Sabi, a young entrepreneur from Serekunda visited his father. This was how H.—the seasonal migrant—commented on his career:

> You see that boy [A.]? He is a very young boy [about 26]. I'm older than him. But he's got money now. He has three or four brothers in America. They send money for him to build houses. He didn't sit on that money *de'*! He went, he organised the work, he spoke to the mason…and he gets his percentage [on the contracts]. Now people see he is serious and send money to him to build houses for them, or [send him] cars to sell. Now he has his own money. You've seen that pickup truck? He bought it with his money. He got himself to England, but then he said he doesn't like it there. He gets money here in Gambia.[30]

[30] H. (man, aged 27), December 2007, Sabi.

H. represents A. as a young man who has made money at home, beginning by just playing a small part in supervising construction sites and progressively building a reputation until he became a general contractor and middleman whom migrants willing to build or sell goods in Serekunda trust despite his young age. His case suggests that thanks to good initial support, someone can set in train a linear trajectory of accumulation without travelling. Two of the finest houses built in Sabi have been constructed by young men like A., who have found their fortune in the transnational remittance economy and have eventually developed their own business and financial autonomy. The kind of support that A. had is not available to everybody, and the demand for it far exceeds the supply. Nonetheless, conduct is again crucial. H. stressed how A. *hustled* instead of satisfying himself with a commission on the contracts. He showed he was reliable enough to manage complex business transactions. It is not just a question of learning the trade, but of being tested for honesty, reliability and the capacity to work hard.

4.3.6 Apprentice Traveller, Apprentice Stayer, or Both?

If the young men integrated into the lower positions in a transnational enterprise have to learn their trade and proper conduct, they can be thought of as 'apprentices'. In this context, apprenticeship usually refers to a relation of dependence: the apprentice provides almost free labour to the master, and the master assumes responsibility for the wellbeing and training of the apprentice. Upon 'graduation' the master can also help him set up his workshop or store (cf. Amselle 1977; Viti 2005). As I noted above, the knowledge of the business environment is acquired through practical work and experience of dealing with other businessmen. In Chapter 1, I also mentioned that in Sierra Leone recent immigrants often worked as apprentices for their senior relatives until they had acquired sufficient expertise to evaluate diamonds and enough capital to start 'supporting' teams of diggers. In a similar vein, some shopkeepers work for a relative as apprentices, expecting to be assigned a portion of business or start-up capital in the future.

However, a number of 'apprentices' are paid a salary or receive a percentage or profit on the sales[31]. It is not clear whether the introduction of salaries is a social remittance from labour migrants in Europe and America, or a strategic tool used by migrants to resist having to take full charge of their juniors as apprentices while accessing cheap workforce controllable through kin

[31] A common agreement is that the owner (the migrant abroad) of the merchandise sets the price he wants to receive for an item, and the person selling it on his behalf or on credit can keep anything he makes above that price.

networks and ideologies. What is certain is that neither the salary nor the percentage necessarily represent an impersonal contract in the eyes of junior kin. They generally think of it as an allowance to cope with everyday expenses, and do not forgo the expectation of a more consistent support on account of the dependent work carried out for their seniors. It is also in relation to this socio-moral expectation that I speak of 'apprenticeship', not simply of shop keepers, employees and business partners.

> Serekunda, April 2008. I. is a man in his early twenties. His uncle (MB) in Spain has charged him with supervising the construction site where he is building a house. I. was promised a salary of about 1000 D/month, but he accumulated arrears for seven months. Instead of insisting on being paid, he did other jobs, and took pride at being able to manage by himself. He planned to ask his uncle to forget about the arrears and take him to Spain instead.

I. was less interested in collecting his economic credit than in turning it into social credit, or at least using the arrears issue to give weight to his demand for travel. The aim of following an 'apprenticeship' may not in fact be to climb up the organizational ladder of the enterprise or to develop an independent business. It may not be to stay, but to travel. Some young men see these opportunities as a temporary occupation, literally occupying a position in a purposeful way in order to create an opportunity to move on to a more profitable activity. By working for a relative and showing they are hard-working and reliable, youths establish a preferential channel of communication with the *supporter* and possibly ask to be helped to migrate, especially when the relative is abroad[32]. Some others are instead more ambivalent in their attitude towards petty business and employment when there seems to be no support beyond the salary. They fear they will become stuck in Gambia in a hand-to-mouth situation, while relatives and other people will be led to believe that they have had their chance and do not need further assistance.

For a more mature man like Amara, who has already been through this kind of pro-travel apprenticeship in the past, trying out products in the market is instead a way of testing an opportunity to do business at home, irrespective of the fact that they may prefer to travel out of the country, or do so whenever the opportunity arises. Amara does not see the two ways of *xalisi mundiye* as mutually exclusive. After his experience in DRC and Angola, he would rather try and go to Europe, accumulate enough money to return or open an enterprise in West-Central Africa, a place where he knows the business environment and can make good money. If he happens to

[32] This kind of pro-travel apprenticeship has been in place since the 1980s at least. It does not concern solely migrant investors, but also Serekunda based businessmen who have their junior kin working for them for some time until they can help them to finance their own travel or enable them to find a business visa.

leave the country, his business or position in Kairakunda can simply be passed on to a junior relative.

Hustling as seasonal migrants, as 'apprentices' or as businessmen implies an openness to opportunities and sudden diversions. The openness is the result of a cultivated disposition and self-discipline. Likewise opportunities do not emerge overnight, but must be constructed and socially organized. Well worn strategies for conducting business and training would-be *hustlers* provide young men with an occasion to become established as stayers, something which may actually pave the way for international travel instead. Whatever the objective and the actual trajectory, it is significant that some young men have to become stayers in order to become travellers.

V
Sitting and Waiting

Not all young men can find money in Gambia. Streets and compounds are full of unemployed young men sitting in small groups, brewing tea, chatting, and discussing emigration. Sitting goes with socialisation, but also with frustration and a sense of social stasis. It is not 'sitting' as I have used it so far, but 'just sitting' (*nan taaxu tan*), as young men often describe it. It is the opposite of *hustling*, and is a metaphor for joblessness and resignation, or even laziness, depending on one's point of view. Sitting goes together with a suspension or expansion of unstructured time, a time of waiting for better opportunities, both social and economic. 'Sitting and waiting' thus stands for the time-space of geo-social immobility, in which young men have not (or feel they have not) become established at home, nor have they managed to find a route by which to leave the country. In the first part of the chapter, I will rely on a case study to introduce young men's experiences and discourses about this problematic aspect of immobility. In the second part, I will describe some of the ways in which young men do stay behind and try to pass from sitting to 'sitting'. Rather than looking at surrogate quests for money, I will focus on alternative social and cultural practices that allow young men to achieve social recognition.

5.1 Neither Travelling, Nor Staying: The case of Mohamed

Mohamed is a man in his late twenties. Like most of his age mates, he grew up in Sabi and received a Quranic education. He studied up to some level of *maisi* before he dropped out. Ever since he left education in his late teens, he has been farming for his compound during the rainy season, and going to Serekunda during the dry season. At the time of my fieldwork, Mohamed lived in a small-medium size *ka* (of about 15 people) made up of two units or sides (*baŋu*) currently joined together as one hearth (i.e. one household). This *ka* belonged to a large descent group (*xabila*) in Sabi and had a two-generation-long history of long-distance international travel. Many members of the household had travelled abroad, and some had moved to Serekunda. While the many travellers had made Mohamed's *ka* relatively secure in economic terms, the distribution of travellers was uneven across the sub-units, and the relation between his

unit and some of the migrants and the compounds in Serekunda was only a loose one. The two units are also quite autonomous, except for *biraado*. In Mohamed's unit, all sisters married out except for one, and Mohamed's only elder brother had migrated to Angola at the end of the 1990s; he was one of the main migrant sponsors of *biraado*, the only one from his domestic unit. Mohamed's father was elderly and had withdrawn from household affairs, so Mohamed was the only man on his side of the household, hence the one catering for his mother and his brother's wife and children. The *kagume* (Mohamed's agnatic father) belonged to the other unit of the household, which also comprised Mohamed's other three agnatic brothers, two older, one younger. Mohamed and his brothers all farmed on one communal field. Having grown up in Sabi, Mohamed was one of the most expert farmers of his compound and led the work party to the fields when his elder brother, the other 'expert', was in Serekunda.

When I began to know Mohamed well enough, his wedding with a kin woman was already approaching. His brother had paid for the bride-wealth and other expenses—"Where am I going to find that money!?", he replied to my question on the subject. More money was however needed, especially for the wedding ceremony. Because of the numerous transactions and handouts that had occurred throughout the previous months, Mohamed could not tell me how much he had spent on the marriage; he estimated that by the end of the wedding the sum would easily have exceeded 20,000 Dalasi, the average cost for a marriage without much pomp. I often saw Mohamed trying to find credit to call relatives abroad, especially his uncle, in the hope they would help towards the expenses. Mohamed was lucky enough to find an empty room in the compound to host the 'nuptial house/room' (*manyon konpe*). He had to do some repairs and whitewash it, but he could not afford to replace the corrugated iron sheets on the roof, which the rust had made leaky. In the end, the wedding day arrived and the preparations were ready: the guests were fed and given presents, and the *manyon konpe* was nicely decorated (if one just avoided looking up at the ceiling).

Mohamed did not hide his puzzlement, or 'confusion' as he said, about his marriage. He was happy to marry and to get settled instead of wandering about town like a 'boy' to kill time and drink *ataya*[1]. He often joked with his friends about becoming a *xirise*, a senior man, with family responsibilities and self-restraint. In the past, Mohamed had been quite popular among his friends, and with girls too. He did not mind *hustling* either in Sabi or in Serekunda, as he usually had pocket money to entertain his guests in his meeting place. When he began to come to terms with the idea of marriage, more than a year earlier, 'he stopped playing around', as some of his

[1] On the significance of *ataya* see Section 5.4.1 below.

friends jokingly observed. Yet domestic and conjugal responsibilities were not a joke for Mohamed. Money was uppermost in his thoughts even after the wedding. After the marriage had been paid for, he now had to take care of his wife and manage for himself. Even petty requests from his wife like providing bread and butter for breakfast constituted a problem: "Money. I'm thinking about money too much […] sometimes I don't even feel hungry: I take two or three handfuls [of food] and then—ah!—I stand up and go". Thus, Mohamed's conversations with his friends about 'being broke' (*koriye*) were as common as jokes and light-hearted conversation. He was worried that other villagers talked about his capacity to provide for his wife, and in general to fulfil his social obligations: "People say 'ah, look at those boys, they are not grateful to their mothers'".

This is the reason why Mohamed did not want to marry in the first place. He wanted to *hustle* first and then marry. But when he asked his brother to take him abroad, the brother remained vague and sided with the rest of the family, who wanted Mohamed to marry first. They said he had grown old enough and should think about having a family of his own before embarking on other ventures. Mohamed could hardly refuse his family's invitation; he eventually tried to propose to a bride of his choice, but she was unknown to the family and was turned down: "I had no money, what could I say? They made plenty of talk, and I could not speak. They could say 'What do you know, you're just a boy [*lenmine*]'". Now that he needed money for his wife, Mohamed bitterly remarked, they were all silent. His brother's intentions were still unclear, but Mohamed did not want to insist there either. Seeing that he could manage on his own, the brother would perhaps appreciate the fact he was trying hard at home and consider him fit for travel. But Mohamed also reasoned that his brother wanted him to stay in Sabi to look after the household since there was no other man from his unit to look after his parents and the women. Moreover, as a newly married man, he was expected to stay close to his wife for some weeks at least[2].

Thus, Mohamed stayed in Sabi after the harvest ended (December) for about four months. Sometimes he helped a friend in a shop, but this did not constitute a regular income by any means. Whether he was at the shop or in one of the youth gatherings with his friends, he was not very busy, except for occasional work at the compound. In the meantime, his 'confusion'

[2] After the wedding, brides undergo ritual seclusion in their marital house and compound. They are fully integrated into housework 6 to 12 weeks later, when they officially enter the women's rota in food preparation. This period of initiation into marital life is punctuated by fertility rituals (premarital sex is forbidden), which should ideally lead to pregnancy quickly. Therefore, the husband should make an effort to stay close to his wife, ensuring conjugal harmony and enhancing probabilities of pregnancy.

increased and he had no news from abroad. The abundance of free time possibly made him more uncomfortable, increasing the pressure to do something about his condition.

In the end, the imperative of looking for money prevailed over staying at home. Mohamed reached the city well into the dry season and struggled to find available jobs. One of his agnatic brothers (FBS) finally found him a place as a watchman in a migrant's house under construction. When I met him in Serekunda, he said he would not go back to Sabi and farm this year: "What am I going to do there, sitting jobless at the *koranlenme* [seating platform] to waste time? I'll stay [in Serekunda]: in the rainy season there are more jobs here. When I have some money I'll send it to my parents and to my wife. That's it". He also wanted to take advantage of the presence of his agnatic brother visiting from abroad to check the possibility of getting some start up credit to open a small shop in Sabi.

Shortly after my return to Italy in May, the rainy season began. I called Mohamed over the phone and he replied while he was right in the middle of the fields. He let me understand that he had to comply with his household's requests to come back to Sabi and farm. In the meantime, his wife had become pregnant, and later she had a baby. A few months later, I received more news from him. He was in Banjul, waiting for his travelling documents to go to Angola. His brother had found a visa for him. Mohamed was finally on the move.

5.1.1 Discussion

What I have described is how a young man copes with the time-space in which he both waits anxiously to travel and (necessarily) cultivates ways of staying behind. A critical rite of passage like marriage brought to the surface and emphasised the different and contradictory predicaments of (im)mobility which Mohamed experienced. His aspiration to travel was balanced against domestic commitments and power relations. Instead of indefinitely hanging onto the hope of travelling, his family preferred him to marry and have children first, to settle as a mature man and contribute to carrying on the lineage. Conversely, from the point of view of young men like Mohamed, relying on others for one's own marriage means entering a relation of dependence, or at least increasing social indebtedness towards family members: to what extent was Mohamed able to refuse what his brother wanted him to do after the latter had paid for the bride-wealth and the wedding?

As a good farmer and as the only man left in his household unit, Mohamed could legitimately assume a position as a 'sitter' in the household. He farmed and he supervised the family, liaising with his brother in case of need. He went and collected remittances from his

brother's contact some miles away, and in the past he organised the work for the housing improvements his brother sponsored. Mohamed and his friends often emphasised the importance of 'sitting at home' on behalf of the household as a whole. Some of them were able to exert considerable influence on their brothers abroad, particularly the juniors who shared the same mother and father with them. At home, they sometimes took their role as male authorities very seriously, perhaps sticking to a source of respectability in the absence of other resources (e.g. money). They could be authoritarian with junior brothers living with them, increasing the load of pressure they had to bear. Mohamed did not have many juniors to impose his authority on, nor did his seniors with him. Rather, he was aware of the dilemmas and preoccupations of some friends and senior acquaintances turned *kagumu* or household managers in other compounds. They were coping with internal tensions and rivalries and painted a less optimistic scenario for his stay. Though Mohamed did not disdain 'sitting at home', he could not count on many other household members except for his brother, because they either lacked resources or because he had only loose and nominal relations with them. Pre- and post-wedding financial difficulties gave Mohamed an example of the possible hardship occurring whenever a household problem arose and he had to take charge of it.

If the marriage consolidated his position in the household, marital obligations placed an extra load on Mohamed's meagre resources, threatening his *substantial* transition to, and the embodiment of, manhood. To be men is to be self-reliant, to have and circulate money. Being broke (*koriye*) comes close to social immobility: inability to be autonomous and to help people, inability to fulfil social obligations to maintain parents and wife, even the inability to have a voice in personal and family matters, as Mohamed stressed. 'If you don't have money, people do not respect you' many young men complain, highlighting the importance of money in their quest for respectability. Although this is somewhat of an overstatement, the fact that many young men have to rely on their mothers to have some pocket money, or have to borrow even shoes and clothes from acquaintances, can undermine their self-esteem.

Mohamed's preoccupation with his people's opinions reveals the importance of honour and shame for young men. People make comparisons between the achievements of men, and the latter certainly feel that their agricultural exploits do not earn them as much prestige as do buildings, presents and paid journeys to Mecca. People use words of commendation for the young men trying their best abroad. They make prayers and supplications in the mosque for the travellers, so as to bless and ease their quest. They are less likely to spend so many hopeful words and supplications on those who stay behind, at least not in such a public way. Many people express pity for the condition of non-migrant youths, though they keep an eye on their

ability to take on the normative role as household providers. Gossip is a mechanism of control (Gluckman 1963), that checks on youths' dispositions and adds to the burden of expectations and pressures weighing on them.

Even if unable to send their parents to Mecca and build houses, young men are 'tested' on minor issues and duties. Household seniors often prompt their juniors with petty requests for help and ask them to perform more or less important household tasks in order to check on their commitment and readiness to comply with their authority. Conduct is monitored at a distance and young men often complain about gossip and the 'tests' they are subjected to in order to bring their intentions and dispositions into the open. In the case of Mohamed, his compliance was tested when he went to look for money in Serekunda. He both wished and felt compelled to leave in order to find money because he did not think his 'sitting at home' was either secure or acknowledged enough. He also knew that people around him were checking on his concern or ambition (*hanmi*) to 'look for money', the purposeful capacity to *hustle* and become emancipated from dependency. Yet he was forced to abort his longer-term plans to stay in Serekunda. Perhaps his quest did not yield sufficient money to justify a prolonged absence, or simply he was expected to fulfil the role of 'sitter' as he had done in the previous seasons. He had to come back, help his brothers in the fields, work and go on errands for his parents, and stay close to his newly wedded wife. Not complying would have upset his brother and probably hindered the possibility of receiving his support.

It has to be said that becoming established at home was not completely at odds with Mohamed's plans to find *his own* money in the long-term. He showed reliability and compliance with household authorities and a willingness to farm, and this probably enhanced his reputation in the eyes of his brother and of other householders as well. Moreover, we can speculate that his brother wanted to ensure Mohamed had married and begotten a child before deeming him ready for travel.

Mohamed responded dynamically to the simultaneous forces that pushed and pulled him between home and away, continuously reconfiguring his options. His attempts to find a sponsor to open a shop in Sabi is an example of this. Nevertheless, he lived in a sort of limbo between 'sitting' and 'travelling'. The problem with this limbo was not only the direction to take—whether to stay home or to travel—but the fact that its nature was social and closely linked to masculinity. In this respect, Soninke young men's preoccupations echo those of many other African youths. For instance, Dorothea Shultz (2002:811) describes Malian urban youth as a generation-in-waiting, forced to hang on indefinitely in the transition to adulthood due to the lack of opportunities to marry and take charge of the household economy (for men). Similarly, Henrik

Vigh (2006) describes Guinean youths as suspended in 'social becoming', struggling to affirm their 'being' in society.

For Mohamed, however, staying behind was not a complete descent into abjection. Because of Soninke households' ongoing ability to provide welfare, Mohamed's and many other Soninke youths' experience tend to differ from the reading of African youth as being stuck in transition. He managed to marry and make *some* progress in life along 'traditional' avenues to emancipation—such as householding and apparently devalued activities like farming—all of which are directly related to the dynamics of staying behind. This does not detract from the fact that Mohamed still felt precarious, or slow, about his autonomy and progress at home. As he 'sat' in Sabi, he constantly had ambivalent feelings, which combined with the uncertainty about the possibilities of travelling, generating disorientation and frustration.

5.2 TALKING ABOUT LEAVING AND STAYING

Young men like Mohamed have specific ways of describing their aspirations and frustrations about travelling and staying. Discourses about travelling and staying behind draw on a broader repertoire of representations through which people make sense of their situation. I shall try to provide a sense of the plurality of such discourses, reading between the lines of young men's aspirations to travel in order to reveal the existential poignancy of staying behind. Frustrations about the inability to secure a place at home can further increase the wish to leave the country and hence to leave a difficult situation behind. Simultaneously, I will counter views on youth despair that are too narrow, by showing that young men continuously reconfigure their hopes for the future and the possibilities of staying at home.

5.2.1 The *Nerves Syndrome*

One of the most widespread expressions used for talking about migration is the so-called *nerves syndrome* or simply *nerves*. The *nerves syndrome* is primarily a discourse about emigration. Feeling *nerves* (as in 'I'm *nerves*') is described as having a craving for travel continuously lingering in one's head. The use of the word *syndrome* must not deceive the reader into thinking that this is a disease; rather, *syndrome* here conjures up the idea of a contagious fever for travel that has affected Gambian youth for at least twenty to thirty years. In spite of its

common usage, only a few works have tried to explain the phenomenon. Among these exceptions, Mamadou L. Jallow (2006), a Gambian professional and independent political commentator living in the US, has written an article which tries to account for the origins and the etymology of the word *nerves*:

> In the summer of 1984, a group of Gambians on short holiday from Oslo, Norway came with a swagger and attitude that forever changed my generation […] Legend has it that in the summer of 1984, a youth in Banjul was so taken by these semesters in their fancy clothes, expensive cars, gold chains, the money and the life style [that he] remarked that the overwhelming feeling he experience get his NERVES up (*sic*). Hence the origin of [the] word nerves. The word eventually evolved into the embodiment of the longing to travel, to explore, to hustle, to study abroad, to go beyond the Gambian shores, to try new opportunities and above all to return home and make a difference to yourself, your family, friends and your community[3].

Although Jallow's etymology may be a just-so story, it highlights some interesting points for discussion. In the rural areas, many youths do not know the word *nerves*, which probably originated in Banjul, as Jallow says. But they readily recognise its 'symptom', the longing to travel, explore and bring wealth and new experiences back home. It is the driving force underlying the 'quest for money', beginning with the diamond fever, if not earlier, and continuing throughout the successive migration rushes that have thrilled Soninke youth since the 1950s. The *nerves syndrome* was therefore a well known phenomenon before the term *nerves* became popular. In fact, Soninke young men translate *nerves* as *hanmi*. In common usage, *hanmi* refers to a concern about something, especially a positive outcome. When talking about migration, youths usually translate it as 'ambition' or 'aim'; after all, a purposeful individual has to be concerned about improvement and self-realisation. A person without *hanmi* (a *hanminloxe*) is deemed lazy and even helpless, someone bound to depend on others. This is in line with the meaning of 'getting one's nerve up' (people often use *curasi*—from the French *courage*—as a substitute for *hanmi*). As in Jallow's story, migrants' achievements are said to give young men *hanmi* to go and *hustle* in order to attain similar goals. Would-be-migrants actually prefer to be known as *hustlers* than *semesters*, because of the slightly ironic and derogatory meaning attached the latter term. Thus the *nerves syndrome* can be seen as a variant or elaboration of the discourse on *hustling*, emphasising pro-active attitudes as a precondition to socio-economic success.

[3] Scandinavia is a destination for Gambian migrants, especially for Banjulians. This is probably due to tourism, as Scandinavian tourists come to Gambia in European winter time—in fact the first tourists in Gambia came from Scandinavia. Linking up with foreign tourists on the beaches has indeed become a way for a number of youths to earn a living as guides and to make friendships which many hope will develop into a visa to Europe.

There is another meaning, or phase, of the *nerves syndrome*. Too much focusing and ambition may lead to the opposite outcome. Someone being *nerves* may be described as a person who keeps on sitting most of the day, haunted by thoughts about Babylon (the West) and becoming vexed about the inability to fulfil his aspirations; 'he sits over his concern' (*a do hanmi wa taaxunu*). The overwhelming stream of thoughts may generate confusion (*jaxasiye*), and even loss of focus in the daily quest for survival and money. Losing focus and determination is tantamount to having no *hanmi* and thus having no nerve to keep up with life's challenges. In Serekunda, I learnt that some youths affected by such an advanced state of *nerves*, so to speak, were so frustrated as to openly confront their parents and threaten them to help them find a visa. Others withdrew from social life into isolation, sometimes losing sleep and appetite—see Mohamed's case—because of the mental stress. Except for such extreme cases, the experience of having so many thoughts and preoccupations is an ordinary one, certainly alternating with moments of relaxation and peace of mind, but not an insignificant one. Young men describe it as a burden (*likke*) adding to daily 'suffering' (*tanpiye*).

Cindy Horst (2006a) has described a similar phenomenon among Somali refugees in a Kenyan camp. *Buufis* "indicates a longing or desire *blown* into someone's mind" (Horst 2006a:143, my emphasis); the unrealised desire for emigration, and failed attempts at it, can increase the blowing of the *buufis* to such an extent that it becomes a form of spirit possession and a cause of madness (Horst 2006a:146). Massimiliano Reggi (in press) has found that failed desires and attempts to travel are not the sole cause of *buufis* in Somalia; the highly volatile political, social and economic conditions that impinge on everyday life in Somalia can cause psychological distress, which may be labelled *buufis*. Brad Weiss (2005) has described similar phenomena in his study of Arusha (Tanzania) young men. Although he does not deal with migration directly, Weiss finds that everyday hardship generates a *stream* of thoughts in young men's minds, which is perceived as pain and which Weiss also likens to spirit possession. The *nerves syndrome* is not described in terms of spirit possession[4]. At best, when distress becomes unbearable or when confusion calls for an answer, youths may go and see a marabout or a herbalist, who may administer herbal and other treatments to them. I have not done research on 'mental illness', but in everyday discourse being *nerves* does not seem to be associated with a

[4] People tend to distinguish mental distress provoked by recurrent preoccupations from mental malfunctioning caused by marabout work or by *jinns*. Spirit possession is less religiously tolerated in the region (Soares 2005:200ff).

pathological state; nor is it described by the Soninke terms for illness and mental disease[5]. Public and medical discourse do not apparently frame the *nerves* as a bio-medical phenomenon either[6].

In line with Reggi (in press) and Weiss (2005), I must emphasise that the *nerves syndrome* is rooted in everyday hardship or 'suffering'. Rather than solely articulating an aspiration to travel and a frustration about the inability to travel, it reflects a more complex plethora of 'thoughts'. As Mohamed himself put it: "*nerves* is not only about travelling. No, no. It is also about money", and on a different occasion he added: "you keep on thinking [*simme*] about money, how your wife can eat, how your children can eat, [how they] can have clothes and other things. You keep on thinking". His words bespeak gendered anxieties about keeping up with normative ideals of manhood, and within the wider frame of his life experiences, they also reveal that the inability to 'sit' at home. As an element of daily hardship, this contributes to increasing the burden of 'thoughts'.

Therefore, the *nerves syndrome* also articulates a discourse on staying behind. As I showed in Chapter 2, the idea of 'suffering' is central to representations of staying behind. For some youths their country is 'lagging behind' in a global world and is not even competent to move forward and offer youths a prospect for the future. When young men speak of travelling and of having thoughts reminiscent of the *nerves syndrome*, their words are almost invariably associated with place-bound images of hardship. For instance, on one occasion Mohamed and his friends were discussing one of their age mates whom a relative had managed to take to Spain. This reminded the youths to catch up with their friend. The conversation having aroused one young man's concern about travel, he commented "we are ready to go, there's no time to sit [*taaxe nta di*]…but no chance, no help", and then emphatically uttered: "*n tanpi yere, n tanpi Africa!* [I 'suffer'/am fed up with here, I 'suffer'/am fed up with Africa]".

Thus, the strong aspiration to go elsewhere reveals not simply the ambition to embark on a very real quest for money and knowledge, but also the youths' despair about the here-and-now. The *nerves syndrome* articulates in psychological and cultural form the social oppression—the burden—to which young men are subject in their settings and network of relations. It originates from the structural violence (Farmer 1997) inflicted on young men's lives, from the societal

[5] For instance: *saha* (health), *jangiro* (disease), *tuuri* (madness). Youths can use references to madness and losing their temper especially to describe social and moral conduct that is wrong, such as confronting parents and smoking marijuana.

[6] I once had a conversation with a chief executive of the medical services in Gambia (H.N., February 2008, Serekunda), and asked him about the *nerves syndrome*. He made no use of medical terminology to describe it and did not mention any case of treatment. He linked it to the country's poverty and the lack of prospects for young people.

pressures to conform to normative models of male emancipation, to poverty and economic depression and also to migration policies blocking their movement in space and hence in social time. To leave is to leave behind the burden of concerns weighing down on them and to get out of a place which offers no hopes for the future (cf. Vigh 2009). In this respect, by putting travel at the centre, the *nerves syndrome* assumes an escapist function. It is significant that young men praise the fact that in Europe they can be among people who 'mind their own business', that is, away from inquisitive relatives and acquaintances who check on their attitudes and promptness to fulfil their social obligations. Longing for travel can be a way to imagine a purposeful self, gaining mastery over one's life, injecting movement into the inertia of the here-and-now in which sitting prevails, and projecting oneself into the dynamic there-and-then of travelling. As a young man (aged 30) told me once: "You see me [sitting] like this now. If I reach there, I will not sit! *La illaha*! I will wake up early in the morning and work till night!". At the same time, while feeling *nerves* is somehow necessary to express concern about self-improvement, the over-indulgence in this projection and postponement of pro-active engagement often leads to further sitting, despair and withdrawal from everyday life.

5.2.2 'God's Time is the Best'

Young men have alternative ways to describe their situation as stayers. Although everyday life may be fraught with hardship and uncertainty, they are surprisingly resilient to totally giving in to despair. They continuously rekindle hope and are prompt to taking on purposeful engagement. Religious imagination is an important dimension in their discourses, so I have chosen the sentence 'God's time is the best' (*Allah waxati sire ya ni*) to represent them. 'God's time is the best' is a popular sentence, an encouragement to patience when one is faced with a strained situation or a pending outcome marked by uncertainty, such as hardship and migration. While the *nerves syndrome* reveals young men's impatience to travel and frames their stay in the Gambia as a poignant wait for being elsewhere, the discourse on 'God's time' praises appropriate timing and engagement with the here-and-now. It frames the wait for emigration in more positive terms and encourages endurance. Waiting for 'God's time' implies more than a fatalistic acceptance of the status quo. It calls for a continuous engagement with reality, produces fresh hopes for the future, and eventually helps to reconfigure one's options in the present.

In contrast to the *nerves syndrome*, this is not a specific discourse on emigration. Rather, it is a part of a wider body of views and ways of interpreting reality, including the strained situations created by migration dynamics. As we have seen in Chapter 2, religion is central to

moral life and represents a pivotal element in the socio-political relations in Sabi as well as in national society. Referring to God or to God's will is very frequent in daily life, whether it is in conversations and music or graffiti on a wall or a motor van[7] (cf. McLaughlin 1997).

'God's time is the best' means that everything will happen in due time as established by divine will, no matter how *nerves* one may be to leave. When someone's time finally comes, especially if unexpectedly, he is said to have found his 'luck'. 'Luck' is "what God has destined for you. You will not die until you get it"[8]. 'Luck' is the Gambian English translation of the Soninke word *warijaxe*, which can be translated as allotment, sustenance, bounty or providence bestowed by God on each individual. The kind and amount of 'luck' one will be allocated in life is an element of personal destiny (*rakuto*), and is decreed during pregnancy together with one's lifespan and the fruits of one's efforts[9]. 'Luck' can be several things, but in ordinary discourse it usually refers to begetting children and, more frequently, to obtaining wealth (see also Bledsoe 2002:164ff). Each person is born with his or her 'luck', which partly accounts for the vagaries of destiny and individual differences. Not that other contingent factors are disregarded, but disparities of outcomes and achievements may be attributed at least in part to personal destiny[10]. Interestingly, the concept of 'luck' was mainly brought home to me through an example from the history of migration. Many people insisted that diamond mining is 'luck': one person may dig several pits (in alluvial mines) and sieve a lot of gravel for months, but find no diamonds; another one may find a big diamond at his first try, even from a contiguous pit [11]. As Whitehouse (2003:25-7) also stressed, 'luck' is directly relevant to young men's quest for money and more specifically to travel[12]. It underpins the view that opportunities are erratic and the very undertaking of migration can be planned only to a certain extent. In this respect, a visa

[7] One only has to think of the frequency of the word 'inshallah' (God willing) in daily conversations.
[8] Baba K. (man, aged 28), September 2007, Serekunda.
[9] The decree implied here is the existential determination of destiny, or predestination (Arabic: *kadar*). This is one of the most debated concepts in Islamic theology, concerning the extent to which human actions are determined by God beforehand and, consequently, what room is left for human free will (see Gardet 2009). Free will is accorded to human beings to obey or disobey, to discern the right or wrong path (e.g. Quran 7:43, 18:29, 76:3), although, in the Sunni interpretation, God's power and knowledge is not conditioned by time and space, so He will know the outcomes of human choice (Rabbani 2005). This view is popular among Soninke youths, particularly among those with formal Islamic education. In a similar vein, theological interpretations differ with respect to the role of human agency in securing and managing *rizk* (see Bosworth and McAuliffe 2009), the Islamic concept which is closest to *warijaxe* (cf. Whitehouse 2003:26). In broad terms, *rizk* means the lot of good and ill fortune allocated to people.
[10] Fortes (1983 [1959]:7-10) found that concepts similar to *warijaxe* are widespread in West Africa. In Ronald Cohen's (1966:134ff) analysis of personal success and political power among the Muslim Kanuri of Bornu, the very similar concept of *arziyi* is used to account for achievements and disparities among individuals. Other Muslim societies outside West Africa, like the Somali, adopt similar concepts and rationales (*nasiib*) to explain the vagaries of events and fortunes (Horst 2006b:38ff).
[11] Examples of *warijaxe* also include farming (see also Whitehouse 2003:26).
[12] I part company with Whitehouse (2003:26), however, in that he maintains that 'luck' works in a similar way to the English concept, which is close to the meaning of chance.

application involves some degree of 'luck', for money and good contacts cannot account for the fact that some well connected and wealthy applicants still fail to obtain it.

As we know from Chapter 3, religious imagination is important for framing the process of staying behind as householders too: 'God will not allow all men to travel and leave no one at home'. This does not mean that young men maintain that they were destined to stay put. On the contrary, delegating the ultimate decision about migration to divine agency—which is unknown and above human will—can be a way of denying that householders—that is, human beings—decide on their destiny as either travellers or stayers.

In addition, making reference to fatalistic views of predestination does not mean that one has to wait passively for God's providence. Although God may ultimately set the limits of what one can and cannot have in life, the previous chapter has shown that fortunes (diamonds, visas, money, etc.) must be actively searched for, *hustled* as it were. Thus, some people say that God will reward hard-working people: "God decides whatever you will have in your life; but if He sees that you try hard, he may add more to that"[13].

There seems to be little point in seeking internal consistency in views on free-will and predestination. In everyday conversation, views are often varied and even contradictory; nor should we expect that people, most of whom lack in-depth knowledge of Islamic texts anyway, necessarily have a clear cut position with respect to multivocal theological concepts. It is perhaps the case that, as Fortes (1959) argued half a century ago, such contrasting positions are co-present in West African religious systems, combining views of ineluctable, predetermined destiny, and views emphasising free-will and divine rewards for good conduct. The plurality of interpretations in 'popular Islam'[14] should warn us against the commonplace that Islam is inherently fatalistic, especially with respect to misfortune and socio-economic deprivation (cf. Acevedo 2008). Among the Soninke, references to God's will abound and it is common to ascribe events to a preordained order of things, often playing down self-determination in speaking of one's own fate. However, this is often done to provide an *ex post facto* explanation whereby "views on fate and destiny assist people to rationalise and justify the course of events or the impossibility of changing it" (Horst 2006b:45).

The public debate about boat migration to the Canary Islands provides an apt example of the multifaceted discourse on destiny and of its relevance to youth despair. Much of the debate

[13] B. (man, aged 37), December 2007, Sabi.
[14] The term 'popular Islam' is derived from Steward (1985). Steward used it to describe non literate interpretations of Islamic notions. Popular interpretations do not stand in contrast but in a dynamic relation with literate and erudite ones. The spread of reformist Islam among the Soninke (which is far from a unified interpretation of Islam and Islamic concepts) adds to the plurality of interpretations.

depicts the stakes of boat migration as being no less than life and death (Hernàndez-Carretero 2008:45ff). In Senegal, the risks entailed by the *voie piroguière* have been captured by the sinister motto 'Barça amb Barzak'[15] (Barcelona/Success or Hereafter/Death), which the media have used to dramatise the desperation of candidates to migrate. In Gambia, much less public debate has ensued on this phenomenon, but people, and youths in particular, often discuss about it along similar lines, highlighting the diverging, often contradictory views on destiny.

During my fieldwork (2006-8), in order to avoid coastal patrols in Mauritania and northern Senegal, boats began to depart from further south, thus reaching Gambia and lower Senegambia. In Serekunda, there were several brokers spreading news of imminent journeys and making arrangements. Yet many youths deemed the route too risky, even lethal, because of the many boats capsizing at sea; a man described those who attempted to sail to Spain as suicidal people (*du kallaano*). Some other youths, however, rejected the charge of suicide (a forbidden act in Islam) because boat migrants were legitimately trying to improve their situation and redeem their household from hardship: as a godly domain, they argued, death was outside their control—lifespan (*kuyu*), and hence death, is an element of predestination.

One of my acquaintances, B. (aged 37), had tried the 'water route' (*jin kille*), but the boat became lost at sea due to an inexperienced captain and it was forced to come back after many days at sea. He said he would not try this route again because it offered no guarantees (regarding the reliability of the captain). On the other hand, he was not afraid of death because, whether he boarded the boat or not: "if your day has come, you'll die anyway". This is the same person who proposed a dynamic interplay between free will and predestination in the quotation above; here he seemed to justify his decisions by sticking to a much more fatalistic interpretation of destiny. It is not unlikely that B. borrowed the phrase from others during discussions on boat migration. In her study of Senegalese aspirant boat migrants, Hernàndez-Carretero (2008:47) found, in fact, that informants were prone to giving similar replies with respect to death. What seems significant is that fatalism, rather than passive resignation, is used to justify a hazardous action. Similar discourses are relevant in other Muslim contexts such as Morocco, where young men risk their lives by hiding in and under trucks that board the ferries crossing the Strait of Gibraltar (Pandolfo 2007). As Pandolfo (2007:335-6) shows, Moroccan youths too are divided over the issue of whether illegal emigration should be considered as a will to suicide generated by despair or as a legitimate response to poverty and socio-political oppression.

[15] Tall (2008:47) states that Barça refers to the Barcelona Football Team, which is a symbol of success. Thus the motto could be translated as: "success or death/hereafter".

It has to be said that hazards are implicit in Soninke migration. Venturing into foreign countries (*tunŋa*) means facing uncertain conditions as the vivid memories of recent civil wars and deportations remind would-be migrants. Youths cannot achieve success without taking some risks. This is part of proving fit to *hustle*. At the same time, they must assume personal responsibility for the risks they take, and the nature of the risks as well. The case of boat migration shows that the perils of dismay and excessive urgency may engender not only physical hazards, but also moral and religious ones. How much can someone push his 'luck'? Should one migrate at any cost? And therefore: what should one do in the meantime? Answering these questions along the lines of the discourse on 'God's time' will lead us away from emigration and towards an alternative discourse on staying behind.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I have shown that 'suffering' and hardship can have a positive or pedagogic value, and contribute to qualifying the nature of staying behind. From the religious viewpoint, hardship, 'suffering' and uncertainty make sense as a divine plan. They are a trial in which forbearance (*sabari*, from the Arabic word *sabr*) is sanctioned as a virtue, revealing perseverance and reliance on God[16]. As Hamdy (2009) has noted in relation to a different Muslim society (Egypt), even when accepting affliction, forbearance and reliance on God must be actively cultivated through work-on-the-self and prayer. While God's will is constantly called upon among Muslims, responsibility for one's actions is held to be an important element in the actualisation of personal destiny, particularly when making reference to the deeds (*baraji*) that facilitate or impede access to heaven (see Fortier 2005:200ff). From this perspective, being overwhelmed by thoughts and preoccupations may be even more dangerous than non-migration itself for Gambian youths. Over-indulgence in the aspiration to travel may lead to a state of aloofness, deflecting attention from the here-and-now. Frustration and impatience drag young men into utter despair and hopelessness, leading them to embark on hazardous ventures such as boat migration, or to withdraw from social life. This taints the moral and religious standing of the individual.

In addition, if the indeterminacy of destiny can induce the feeling that people cannot control the future, it also creates a space of possibility for unpredictable changes and sudden twists of 'luck' where things change for the better. This keeps hope alive. Hopes of leaving the country are seldom foreclosed entirely, even when one has no *supporter* and no money. Many young men trust that 'no condition is permanent', and that, God willing, they will be able to emerge from hardship. Therefore, the opportunity to travel is somehow distant, unreachable, yet

[16] As many informants stressed, a situation of 'good luck' or material abundance is also a trial for people: they should not sit back and renounce worshipping and praising God.

imminent or at least always possible. It is these kinds of sudden changes of pace that one finds in Mohamed's trajectory, where an opportunity to travel with a visa to Angola suddenly emerged. Of course, for Mohamed there was a realistic possibility that his brother would help him, but in daily conversation these hopes often seemed to evaporate; after all, he waited in uncertainty and frustration until his late twenties.

Mohamed's case reveals that moral conduct is important during the wait for emigration. Although Mohamed's hopes sometimes gave way to despair, he never represented himself as hopeless and destitute. He demonstrated endurance and patience under pressing circumstances and uncertainties. He gave voice to his frustration, yet I often heard the phrase 'God's time is the best' within his group of friends. For Mohamed, endurance was not a matter of religiosity per se; it was 'not to give up' (*nan dudoxoto*), to maintain enough *hanmi* to tackle everyday hardship and obtain subsistence. That is why he continuously engaged and constructed other opportunities as a way of waiting for his 'time' to travel. He worked in Serekunda and tried to look at other possibilities in loco, such as the shop he wished to open with a relative's help.

In other words, waiting for 'God's time' goes well with looking for money at home, and may actually provide an ideological base to its undertaking. It is an encouragement to occupy the time of immobility in a productive and pro-active way, something which will also enhance young men's reputation in the eyes of potential supporters. As my friend and assistant Bakauru told me once over the phone: "I don't believe you have to fold your hands and wait for God's time: you have to create 'time'. Of course, you have to accept whatever God designates for you, but you have to work towards it: that's better than sitting under the mango tree all day drinking *ataya*"[17]. By searching and *hustling*, someone may eventually find out that the best route to his 'luck' is not travel but doing business at home.

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[17] Bakauru Silla (aged 27), August 2009, telephone conversation.

Fig. 5.1 – Sitting—'Sitting'

Mohamed, one of the young men working for the Kairakunda Store
(cf. Fig.4.4)

Fig. 5.2 – Precarious Sitting?

Haji waiting for the kettle to boil so as to prepare green tea (ataya) for his friends

5.3 'SITTING' WHILE WAITING

So far I have dealt with the problematic condition of non-migrant young men who have secured neither a way to become established at home, nor one to travel out of the country. I have shown that although emigration continues to be the most desirable means to move beyond this uncomfortable in-betweenness, young men discuss what they should do in the meantime and how they can stay behind. This can give them purpose and moral force to occupy and create 'time', continuing their quest for money at home and striving for a honourable stay. In this section, I will further describe some of the alternative, non-monetary ways of living with immobility and the wait for emigration. Describing these ways of staying behind implies taking a step backwards with respect to the previous two chapters. Young men do not become part of an overarching organization of migration like in the household or the transnational enterprise. These ways of staying behind are not alternatives to the quest for money either. For young men these are attempts—more or less concerted, more or less successful—to become established at home as mature and respectable men, while they also try to find ways of solving their economic problems. The current migratory context helps in qualifying these practices as particularly relevant to the dynamics of staying behind. What is more, young men do not simply reproduce societal norms and models of masculinity; although their practices are shaped by society's norms and relations of power, they try to change the terms and conditions of social recognition

5.4.1 The *Ghetto*

> "*Ataya*, *ataya*, *ataya* all day. I don't like it this way. I'm young, I'm fit and I want to work"[18]

Youth gatherings, known as *ghettos* or *vous*, are a central feature of the experience of 'sitting and waiting'. The label *ghetto* actually lumps together disparately different forms of youth gathering and socialising patterns in Gambia, predominantly male ones. In contrast to women, young men are free to stroll around town, and they rarely spend their days in the compound, unless this becomes a meeting point for their friends. They go to see their friends in the *ghetto*. In general terms, a *ghetto* consists of no more than ten to fifteen young men sitting on benches and chairs, whether at the gate of a compound, or on the veranda of a friend's

[18] Baba (aged 28), March 2007, Serekunda.

(work)shop or more frequently in the 'boys quarters' inside the compounds. Those present are roughly, though not exclusively, the same age, and spend long hours chatting, listening to music, playing games and cards, and usually brewing green tea (*ataya*) (Fig. 5.2). Jónsson (2007:70ff) has argued that similar gatherings—called *grins* in Mali—in the Soninke village that she has studied represent a form of adaptation to involuntary immobility. Unable to access migrants' 'hegemonic masculinity' and stigmatised as lazy people and even deviants, disenfranchised youth take refuge in *grins*—which she defines as 'spaces of freedom'—which lie beyond elders' control and provide them with contexts of agency and presence. With respect to Sabi, *ghettos* are more ambivalent phenomena. They can provide a refuge from societal pressures where young men create different codes of respectability, but one where the price for 'freedom' is often more stigmatisation. Moreover, they can be places where the dominant discourse on migration is reproduced and where feelings of dismay and inactiveness are nourished.

The *ghetto* is not a new phenomenon. In Sabi, several gatherings take place at the *koranlenme*, the 'minor *kora*' or platform usually consisting of logs placed on wooden stands. These platforms have been places of socialisation for young and elderly people for a long time. The *vous* (from the French *rendez-vous*) is the urban version of this kind of gathering, but it is also linked to the history of neighbourhood associations in Banjul; *vous* have often become public forums where current affairs and politics are discussed (Hughes and Perfect 2006:201). In *ghettos*, young men of roughly the same age socialise, find leisure time and exchange news. *Ghettos* are places in which to relax and have free time, to ease the pressures of everyday concerns about money, travel and strained household relationships. *Ghettos* are identified with one person or his place (*X banŋe*, at the site of X), where a group of friends usually gather. The 'host' will buy the ingredients (sugar and tea) to make *ataya*[19], and to some extent his renown as a *ghetto* leader depends on his ability to attract members to the gathering, and to show hospitality with goods and treats. Regular attendants contribute with money or by bringing tea, cigarettes, candies, batteries for the cassette player, and other commodities which they share as an act of male bonding. This micro political economy of sociality is the basis of mutual aid networks between mates. When a young man is broke, he will turn to some of his close mates and explain his situation to them. He may plead for a handout, or he may be able to borrow a phone to make a call, or borrow a bicycle, or other kinds of support. At the very least, in the *ghetto*, he will be able to release his frustrations and drink some *ataya* that he could not afford otherwise.

[19] *Ataya* is part of hospitality. It is normally offered and prepared to honour guests coming to visit a friend from another village.

Ataya is perhaps the most representative element of *ghetto* sociality. Adopted from the Mauritanians, this way of brewing China green tea has become a tremendously popular drink and past-time during the last twenty to thirty years[20]. In *ghettos*, *ataya* 'makes the conversation sweeter', as the youths say. It attracts people and keeps them sitting. Some young men may pass by and pause to spend some time while they wait for the first serving of *ataya*—the strongest one—and then stay for longer. Preparing *ataya* also makes the politics of sharing manifest: even when there are many people, efforts are made to serve some *ataya* to all of them.

Young men have a love-hate relationship with *ataya*, as the epigraph to this section shows. From being an object of sociality alone, *ataya* can become a symbol of unemployment and laziness. Making *ataya* is an accepted form of leisure, but when it occupies most of the time, it becomes a problem. In fact, in his comment reported above, Bakauru associates passive sitting and waiting with 'drinking *ataya* under the mango tree', a typical location of *ghettos* in Sabi and Serekunda. Most young men say that prolonged sitting in *ghettos* can yield the opposite effect of leisure: it can generate a lot of thinking, brewing *nerves*-like feelings that burden and concern young men.

The association between *ataya*, and hence *ghettos*, and the *nerves syndrome* seems to have become consolidated in popular imagination:

> April 2008, Serekunda. I accompany S. home, and along the way we discuss migration. S. says he is not *nerves* about travelling: he is satisfied with his tailoring workshop. As we approach his place, he points out a group of youngsters sitting at the gate of a compound, brewing *ataya*. He does not seem to know them personally, but he nonetheless whispers: "You see? those boys are really *nerves*. They spend the whole day there only thinking about travelling".

In Sabi, during the dry season youths spend most of their days in the *ghettos* with their friends. Farm work is over and work at the compound is irregular. The days become long and repetitive, with *ataya* sessions punctuating the passing of time in an almost cyclical manner. Friends go to Serekunda, leaving behind fewer and fewer people as the season advances. For some, plans to join them in Serekunda are imminent in words, yet departure can be postponed to weeks or months later, not least because they often lack the money for the fare (200 Dalasi). Every day feels the same, except for Friday, the day of prayer; indeed it is not unusual for youths to lose count of the days. The monotony of village life can slowly, but inexorably, lead to

[20] Green tea is usually brewed in a small tea-pot on charcoal, and abundant sugar and sometimes mint leaves are added at some point in the process. A portion of green tea (measured by the glass used to drink it) can be brewed three times. The art of making *ataya* consists also in serving the tea with dense foam, obtained from repeatedly pouring a glass of tea, from a height, into another glass that is standing on a tray, if possible without spilling it.

boredom. The experience of boredom becomes more poignant because young men are aware of more promising and exciting perspectives existing elsewhere, to which they constantly make reference (cf. Schielke 2008:258). The overabundance of non productive time heightens young men's perception of not making much progress in life. It is time spent sitting, not *hustling*. This is how a young man described this situation and related it to the *ghetto*:

> I don't know what's wrong with me. When I sit like this, doing nothing, I feel like going to town [village] […] When I go to see my friends [at the meeting point] it is a waste of time. I realise that. I go there and just talk: *yala*, *yala*, *yala* [blah, blah, blah]. When I leave, I realise it is useless, but when I am there, and even before going, my mind is not thinking the same way[21].

The very fact of spending time in *ghettos* instigates reflexivity. When asked, youths describe how the attendance of their *ghettos* changed or how *ghettos* waxed and waned as a consequence of friends and charismatic leaders going abroad or settling in Serekunda. No man from his mid twenties onwards fails to remember a friend or group of friends visiting his *ghetto* or stresses that he used to stay at another *ghetto* before his mates travelled and he had to go elsewhere. By staying in *ghettos*, I learned how *ghetto* stories can be woven into biographies and narratives of travelling and of staying behind. Young men often use such stories to remark on the lag in social time between *hustling* and sitting. Those who travel work, accumulate money and send it home, whereas those who stay wait and contemplate time passing while their condition does not change.

The *ghetto* provides youths with a shield from societal pressures much as it exposes them to public scrutiny. It is often surprising to notice how attentive people are to others' movements through town, to the places they go to and the people whom they visit, even for a brief time. Sometimes strong inferences are made from these observations. Some people view this as a confirmation that 'black people' (*fatanbinnu*) are fond of minding other peoples' business and of backbiting. In actual fact, being seen in a particular place or in the company of given individuals is directly perceived as a way of associating with those people or taking part in the activities of that place, and 'sitting' in *ghettos* is precisely this kind of activity.

One of the most compromising activities associated with *ghettos* is the consumption of marijuana (*kali*). Marijuana is relatively cheap and widely consumed in Gambia, in urban areas as well as rural ones. Reggae culture also seems to play a role in its widespread consumption. The use of marijuana is not necessarily confined to the very young and can continue after the age

[21] M. (man, aged 32), February 2007, Sabi.

of thirty, or even forty. Needless to say, elders and many other people view cannabis use as moral depravation. For them, it is a clear sign of laziness, lack of moral fibre or even uselessness, which can only become worse if the smoker has a chance to go to Babylon, the land of vices and bright lights. Therefore, youths often hide when smoking and camouflage the smell of smoke coming from their gathering.

Some young men associate the use of cannabis with relieving the burden of their thoughts. Smoking eventually becomes part of everyday consumption patterns, almost a normal pattern of sociality, possibly leading to addiction. By the same token, many youths view smoking marijuana as a consequence of frustrations about travel, as a way of giving in to despair. Some young men counter that they smoke just to relax or to give them appetite to eat unpalatable food served in their compound, but they are still able to wake up early and work hard the following morning—the nature of their argument revealing nonetheless the crux of the matter. I must stress that the link between being *nerves* and smoking cannabis is not so direct. Many successful migrants also appear to use it, while many youths feeling *nerves* do not. Many *ghettos* adopt a explicit anti-smoking policy, though selection is almost a natural outcome of the fact that youths who want to smoke tend to associate in *ghettos* in which there is marijuana.

Fig. 5.3 & 5.4 – Global Imagination and/as Local Practice

Hannover ('Anoba') Boys at their ghetto and at a DJ-set party

(Fig. 5.4)

5.4.2 Transnational Youth Cultures

Having outlined the pros and cons, the experiences and the dangers, of sitting/'sitting' in *ghettos*, I would like to remark that *ghettos* are also laboratories of youth cultures, some of which have a global appeal. Youths in their teens and early twenties often choose 'exotic' names for their *ghetto*, inspired by migrant destinations and the imagery of American hip hop, reggae and European football. They are sometimes painted on walls and signs: Atlanta, Los Angeles, Hannover Boys, Barcelona Team, etc. (Fig. 5.3)[22]. Interestingly, although religion is an important aspect of youth culture and imagination, references tend to draw on other repertoires. Migration itself is one among other imaginaries, which are similarly connoted by a logic of 'cultural extraversion', whereby foreign products and images are used to express and shape local meanings (Fouquet 2008). Rather than local-global connections, however, it seems more productive to speak of how youth inhabit the wider world and participate in it through imaginative praxis. Weiss (2004) has argued that imagination is not the sole result of global connections and flows of images; it is an integral aspect of social life that enables people to represent and experience social reality. The urban Tanzanian male youths whom Weiss studied use images and icons from rural society as well as from American rap. In particular, these refer to the toughness embodied by American gangsta rappers singing about *ghettos*, as a way of imagining, and hence inhabiting, everyday hardship in Arusha streets. In a similar and comparative way, some (rural) Soninke youths told me that the word *ghetto* comes from American rap or akin genres of Jamaican reggae saying that "life in the ghetto is not easy, just like here"[23]. A similarly evocative power sometimes lies behind apparently arbitrary *ghetto* names. For instance, a group of Sabi teenagers named their *ghetto Mafia*, a term they had learned in school, in order to represent themselves as a tough and thuggish gang. As I argued, what makes life hard in a Sabi youth 'ghetto' is not only the 'suffering' (*tanpiye*) they face in daily (rural) life, but the load of pressures, gossips and concerns weighing on them. Since youths spend most of their free time in *ghettos*, imagination linked to such places represents an important aspect of staying behind.

Thuggish appearance and illicit activities are not simply dangerous for youths' public reputation; they can be appropriated in order to create an inner space of complicity and recognition. We have seen that illicit activities such smoking joints are condemned by village

[22] Some names are local instead (e.g. *xaxache*, the name of the tree under which is the meeting point).
[23] Ibrahima S. (aged 19), January 2008, Sabi.

society, but they constitute a bonding element within the group of peers. The same goes for sexuality. For young men, especially young unmarried ones (later teens, early twenties), having a girlfriend before marriage is hard and risky in a setting where girls are closely controlled and are expected to preserve their virginity until the wedding night. Young men are often accused of spoiling girls' honour and causing pre-marital pregnancies, thus shaming their families. Although young men too can be highly moralistic about pre-marital sex, they can often make a name for themselves by challenging and eluding controls to have sentimental or sexual relations with girls.

The trope of the *ghetto* is also used to create a public space for youths. Although there have been occasional violent clashes between *ghettos* of very young men, confrontation usually takes place on different ground. A *ghetto* acquires renown from sponsoring DJ party nights at the outskirts of the village, which are attended by hundreds of boys displaying their hip hop gear, swaggering around, trying to impress the girls; here *ghetto* groups and groups of friends 'hire' the dance floor for a song and dance together (Fig. 5.4)[24].

From their mid twenties, youths do not usually participate in such parties, and do not bother to give fancy names to their meeting place. This does not mean that imagination, and in particular music and music cultures, are less important to them. Perhaps the most important music genre relevant to young men's experiences is Reggae. Reggae is extremely popular in Gambia as in much of West Africa; some informal tourist guides to the coastal areas like to call Gambia 'the small Jamaica', not least because the use of cannabis is so widespread. In the urban areas, reggae icons and Bob Marley's face are painted on walls and particularly on the façades of the numerous music stores in town. Some youths wear Rasta dreadlocks and some are well versed in Rastafari culture and in Patwa. A number of contemporary Caribbean reggae stars include Gambia in their international tours and Gambia also has a small but thriving reggae production. McNee (2002:214) has argued that from the 1980s "The identification of West African youth with reggae and Rastafarian ideals…takes place through a double movement, one that is marked both by local concerns and by a specifically inflected cosmopolitanism". The idiom of reggae has enabled West African youth to feel connected to a wider world while critiquing local manifestations of the oppressive postcolonial regimes and the ongoing imperialism of Babylon (as Gambians influenced by Reggae culture call the West) in Africa. Furthermore, African reggae singers send messages of self-respect and honour for

[24] Though less numerous, *girls* attend these parties; for young men, these are occasions to flirt and eventually seduce girls, who are otherwise confined to their compounds most of the day and night.

disenfranchised African youth to symbolically reverse the highly unequal social order in which they live (McNee 2002:214).

For Soninke youths, reggae imagery is also important for inhabiting immobility. At the time of my fieldwork, no Sabi youth wore dreadlocks and there were no experts in the Patwa lexicon and in reggae that could articulate ideas of resistance and salvation accordingly. Wearing dreadlocks would be the most effective way to attract the stigma of being useless individuals (*hanminloxe*) and accusations of moral depravation[25]. Nevertheless, reggae music and style has been popular among youth and some of the adults who grew up in the 1980s. As one young man put it:

> Rasta is not in the hair, but in the heart […] It is respect. You see, people here [in Sabi] love backbiting others too much. If you are a Rasta man: backbiting? No, you don't do that. You have respect. You don't flatter your friend, and then, when he's gone, spoil his name. You are easy, you respect yourself and respect the others[26].

A Rasta heart is a 'clean/clear heart' (*sondonme senne*), having an honest character and avoiding backbiting others. Given the ambivalent reputation of *ghettos* in society, fears and complaints of villagers' badmouthing surfaced time and again in my conversations with young men. Backbiting is common even among friends, but by showing to have a Rasta inclination, young men try to articulate an idiom of mutual respect and honour. This idiom is relevant in a context where dominant and monetised forms of honour tend to overshadow non-migrant youths' presence. It articulates a form of bonding through which youths can construct alternative codes of respect, trust and brotherliness. Having said that, it is important not to see too much counter-culture in such discourses and practices. They coexist with norms that most Sabi youths are far from overtly contesting.

5.4.3 *Sunna* and Piety

The importance of religious imagination for young men suggests that religious practice is a possible way of staying behind. Staying amidst hardship can be a virtue, an expression of forbearance and steadfastness, which must be cultivated through piety. Piety can be more than prayer and public signs of devotion (cf. Soares 2004b); it can imply the re-alignment and daily

[25] Because of the Islamic requirement to shave and keep hair short, long dreadlocks are also seen as a sign of impiety.
[26] Kantara S. (aged 23), December 2007, Sabi.

cultivation of attitude and social conduct. In the case of Moroccan youth, as described by Pandolfo (2007), religious movements and preachers address youth despair. Some activists and at least one youth speaking in her article propose a struggle with the self (Arabic: *jihad an-nafs*) to tame the feeling of emptiness and hopelessness that is driving youths to attempt hazardous migration routes or even to commit suicide (Pandolfo 2007:343ff). At the present stage of research it is only possible to point to the relation between piety as work-on-the-self and immobility as a possible direction worthy of further exploration. Nonetheless, I would like to sketch some general reflections.

Although expressions of piety are independent of specific doctrinal traditions, the case of reformism is particularly interesting. *Sunna* is very popular among Soninke young men, and a growing phenomenon among Gambian youths more generally. In her study of the Gambian branch of the Tabligh Jama'at movement, Marloes Janson (2006b) argues that militant reformism can be thought of as an urban youth culture characterised by patterns of sociality and specific understandings of the situation of youth in Gambia. Some of the Tablighi activists frame the movement as a response to the malaise of Gambian youth. In particular, one of her informants clearly sees the Tablighi way of Islam as a reaction to the disorientation and immoral temptations caused by the unfulfilled aspiration to travel to Europe, while another reiterates that "we don't despair, since we know that Islam is the truth" (Janson 2006b:11).

Among the Soninke, *Sunna* is not an organized movement, and neither age nor urban residence are strong determinants of *Sunna* adherence due to the fact that many (adult) migrants have been active proselytisers and that *Sunna* is widespread in the rural areas too. Conversely, it remains true that reformism provides youths with an avenue to religious knowledge and practice that can earn them a respectable position in their community. For instance, during my fieldwork there was a young assistant imam performing in Sabi's *Sunna* mosque; his scholarly preparation had priority over seniority. We shall see in later sections that reformist ideas of modest and plain ceremonies contribute to legitimising the discourses of the Sabi Youth Committee.

On the other hand, the relation between immobility, piety and reformism appears a complex one, particularly when we shift our attention away from the relatively few militants and scholars, and proceed to analysing the larger number of self-identified *sunnanko*. Focusing on discourses of piety or on religious activism conveys only a particular point of view, and sometimes fails to describe the plurality of non-militant Muslims' understandings and cultural models (Schielke 2009:S37). Even though cultural models may be competing with *Sunna* and contradict religious precepts, most self-identified *sunnanko* sit in *ghettos*, and listen to reggae, and some even smoke marijuana, like other youths. Religious adherence and self-identification

as pious Muslims may mitigate the *nerves syndrome* and despair, but it is not necessarily an alternative to the quest for money, including emigration. As one young man who identified himself as a *sunnanke* put it: "You can sit all day in the mosque, but you still need to eat. You still have to look for your subsistence; even the Prophet said that."[27] (cf. also Janson 2006b:11, note 26).

5.4.4 Patriotism?

Youth cultures and discourses about migration must be located within the wider political context. The APRC government has selectively drawn on and re-elaborated the societal discourse on youth to buttress the need to reform their attitudes. For the ruling party—the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC)—reorientation of youth attitudes is fundamentally linked to patriotic engagement, which translates into participating in the government's campaigns. Inviting people to stay means inviting them to take part in the renovation and construction of the country, to 'go back to the land' and become self-reliant, the only solution for leading Gambia out of poverty and dependency .

Although the migration question is not central in the public debate[28], government controlled media have sometimes criticised youths' aspirations to emigrate. Sitting in the *ghettos*, drinking *ataya* and day-dreaming about Babylon have become the emblematic image of Gambian youth grown idle and disaffected in relation to agriculture and work in Gambia. A revealing example of this is a music video I saw on GRTS TV (Gambia's only TV channel), containing one of the many praise songs composed for the president that the TV channel broadcasts during intervals. The video juxtaposed one of Jammeh's speeches on youth laziness with images of young men meeting at a *ghetto* having a good time and brewing *ataya*.

In an article appeared in 2007, *The Observer* newspaper blamed the *nerves syndrome* on the migrants' 'display rituals' and warned against the perils of the 'illusion' of migration:

> [The] herd ambition to leave is so strong that a lot of people are now entrusting their lives to profiteering traffickers, whose perilous sea journeys have all too frequently ended in catastrophe. No amount of advice seems capable of dissuading these "hustlers" from making their hazardous journeys. The promise of El Dorado has befuddled the minds of many would-be adventurers, and the glazed-over vision of the West

[27] Musa S. (aged 33), April 2008, Serekunda.
[28] In 2009 (i.e. after I left the field), the government began to address the question of undocumented boat migration (see Section 1.8.1).

> which such a befuddlement entails, is nothing but the glow of an illusion; soon to be dissolved by either death or the disappointing lineaments of the Western world (The Observer 2007).

During a speech at the Opening Ceremony of the National Assembly on 30 March 2008, President Jammeh took issue once more with those young men wishing to go to Europe and allegedly refusing to take advantage of opportunities in Gambia. For Jammeh, this attitude is conducive to what he calls self-imposed poverty—as opposed to 'natural poverty' due to causes beyond one's control. Self-imposed poverty occurs "where you sit down, you don't want to do anything, but you want to become rich". Young men who work in their country are thus purportedly derided by their friends as being those who prefer to sit in *ghettos* and dream about going to Babylon.

Contrary to my expectations, the young men I knew (in Serekunda) did not pay much attention to Jammeh's speech. The speech was broadcast for a few days and dubbed into all national languages, so young men had plenty of opportunities to see it. I was expecting my closest interlocutors—at least those who were forthcoming about politics—to have comments and/or critiques about it. Yet most of them shrugged their shoulders, and scoffed at the president's proposals, dismissing them briefly as nothing but words. Some of the supportive ones commended his words but did not pursue the argument any further. Most Serekunda *ghettos* I attended did not seem to have taken notice. It might have been a coincidence, or perhaps the Soninke's proverbial lack of familiarity with politics. But it seems to me that the enthusiasm and hopes for change following the regime change in 1994 have given way to disillusionment again. Jallow (2006) finds that, in contrast to the past, the *nerves syndrome* is motivated by the political climate today. Thus, rather than engaging state power either by articulating an ironic critique or through conviviality (Mbembé 2000), youths would seem to choose an exit option with respect to socio-political oppression (cf. Hirschman 1970). In truth, most of my informants did not explain emigration as a political act, though Gambian asylum seekers appear to be a growing phenomenon. Indeed, political orientation does not seem to make a difference with respect to aspirations to travel, nor are governmental discourse and initiatives seen as a sufficient reason to stay.

Things were probably different in the mid 1990s, after Jammeh and his companions toppled Jawara's regime. Back then the lure of emigration partly reflected the disaffection of many Gambian youths towards the old ruling class, which had left them with few social and economic resources to become respectable members of their society (Bellagamba 2008:255). Youth mobilisation under the banner of the *22nd July Movement* did much to recast youth

perspectives. The new regime prompted young people to stay and invested them as agents of change in national and local politics (Bellagamba 2008:256ff). The movement appropriated symbols of renovation such as the *set setal*—collective cleaning operations of public places—which in Senegal had been pioneered in the late 1980s by civil society organizations reacting to urban degradation (Diouf 2002). Through 'cleaning the nation' youth paraded (and still parade) in the streets of the cities and villages, performing responsible citizenship and spectacular, almost ritualistic support for the new regime. Provoked and emboldened, in some cases supporters of the movement kindled local disputes and openly confronted local dignitaries and leaders identified with the previous regime. No longer were they merely a labour force at the disposal of the elders: they now commanded respect and intended to take over decision making. Some of the young Sabinko participated in the movement and brought back ideas about how young men could acquire some respectability and demonstrate civic maturity in their localities. In any event, generational tensions never escalated to an alarming degree in Sabi and in other Soninke villages. In 1999, the movement was outlawed and the regime began to work towards reconciliation and patronage with local dignitaries, pragmatically ensuring governance in the rural areas: the time for radical change was over. The political space for youth activism has since been reduced, and many of the Sabi mobilisers have eventually managed to travel out of the country. Youth mobilisation has continued, though in a much more controlled and institutionalised form.

The wane of spontaneous youth mobilisation, the persistent attack on youth attitudes and in particular the persistence of youth disenfranchisement seem to have undermined young men's confidence in the APRC regime and in the idea of staying for the sake of the nation; as it is, Soninke aspirant migrants need little external prompting to go back to the land and to try and *hustle* in their country. The most significant impact of the government's discourse on migration does not appear to be at the level of livelihood strategies, but at the socio-political one. It sanctions civic engagement as a way of affirming presence and maturity and, as we shall see next, it provides a useful idiom to negotiate the terms of staying behind.

5.4.5 The Sabi Youth Committee

The Sabi Youth Committee (SYC) is the main youth association in Sabi and the most developed attempt to put into practice the discourse on youth civic participation at the village level. It represents a public form of youth activism which, in contrast to some *ghettos* and youth cultures, lays claims to presence and respectability mainly within the existing social order based on seniority and status hierarchies. In this section I will show how the SYC represents a relevant organization through which non-migrant young men can collectively reconstruct a purposeful sense of staying behind.

The SYC is an adaptation of the long lived institution of age-based associations in Soninke village societies. Until the mid 1980s, there used to be an overarching system of age groups for men in Sabi, which was divided into four or five groups (*sappanu*, sing. *sappa*). The system distinguished rather neatly between elders and junior men, and in the latter category between married and unmarried[29]. The system was functional to policy making and implementation at the village level. Decision making followed seniority, the lower ranks being charged with the more labour intensive activities. The junior men (married and unmarried) carried out communal work: cleaning ditches, clearing bushes, controlling bush fires, etc. Participation in the age groups was compulsory, and began after the boys were circumcised[30] (back then at the age of 13-17). As an overarching, totally inclusive system, age groups have disappeared, and mandatory participation has been lifted[31]. Despite the structural weakening and the decreasing participation in age groups the then chief Nene Fatumata Silla encouraged greater political activism on the part of village young men, especially under the banner of the ruling party (PPP)[32]; indeed it was rather common that political parties were grafted onto existing age groups to mobilise support, sometimes transforming them into youth wings of the party (Weil 1972). This has helped to define the age group of junior men as 'youth' in Sabi[33]. In contrast,

[29] Among the Jafunu Soninke (Mali), Pollet and Winter (1971:261-5) described the *iire*, age-group or "groupe d'age", a village-based association involved in collective activities as well as in assisting their peers especially during rites of passage. I could not find any similar term among Gambian Soninke. Weil (1972) also provides an analysis of Mandinka age grades in Wuli, an Upper River district, reviewing other literature on the age grade system.

[30] Circumcision or initiation rituals (*munonwutte*, trouser-taking ceremony) also disappeared in the mid 1980s. I was told that the main reason behind the decline of initiation rituals was a religious one: children are now circumcised in early childhood according to the Islamic praxis.

[31] According to Amara Kaira, some parents began to oppose mandatory participation. At that time, participating in age groups implied conformity, and could be enforced with violent methods.

[32] Nene Fatumata had strong political connections (he is also remembered as the head of the Farmers Association in the Sabi Ward – see Chapter 1).

[33] Amara Kaira (aged 37), January 2008, Sabi.

what might have further decreased participation is that many young people in Gambia increasingly grew resentful of party politics and the government at that time. Moreover, international migration to the West was still relatively accessible and West African countries still relatively popular in the late 1980s. Youths were probably more intrigued by the idea of leaving the village than that of joining age groups. In the 1990s, Sabi youth participation in age-based associations seems to have reached a low point, though groups based on age have continued to be an important feature of village society, and most villages in the Upper River have a 'youth committee'. Some charismatic leaders who participated in the post-coup mobilisation reinvigorated the youth committee in Sabi, but this has suffered from internal problems and mismanagement.

The institutionalisation of Sabi youth as the Sabi Youth Committee did not occur until 2002, when the APRC government rescued the discourse on decentralisation through the Local Government Act. The Sabi Village Development Committee (VDC), the coordinating body for development initiatives and policies, was revitalised and was also the catalyst for the greater formalisation of the SYC. It is possible that the creation of the SYC was influenced by the VDC and/or local APRC representatives in order to mobilise youths in support of government initiatives by resorting to the well-worn strategy of exploiting age-related structure. On the other hand, while flirting with party politics, the SYC cannot be seen as either a client or wing of any party, and it perceives its involvement with politics as a temporary and instrumental activity. In 2006, the SYC campaigned for President Jammeh during the presidential elections, but only four months later it voiced its dissatisfaction with the unpopular Basse MP, whom the APRC had chosen again to stand for the parliamentary elections. Most SYC members rallied behind the opposition (UDP), though they maintained cordial relations with the local sections of the APRC. On no occasion did I hear the SYC making a political discourse on migration policies or migration related issues like boat migration and repatriation[34].

The activities of the SYC mostly concern the village, and to some extent are a substitute for the state in supplying certain public services[35]. The organization of the SYC adopts the template of a typical village association or *sappa*. Leadership is accorded to the village hierarchy, and probably because of this, the *komo* do not seem to be as numerous as other classes. Village membership is also a critical factor for those of other ethnic origins (mainly Jaxanke, and some Fula), who are rather marginal to the SYC as Sabi is a Soninke village. At the

[34] Due to public attention on boat migration and repatriation of boat migrants, there have emerged 'civil society' associations in countries like Senegal and Mali (Bouilly 2008)..

[35] As Chauveau (2005:22-3) shows, similar forms of youth organization reveal not only an absence of the state, but also a pragmatic form of governance negotiated between the government and the rural authorities.

same time, decision making within the SYC is rather diffused, and *nyaxamalo* and *komo* can be vocal participants in collective decisions (some of them have also been appointed as neighbourhood leaders). SYC members appear to both acknowledge continuity with the past system of 'age groups' and capture the changes that age groups have undergone: they informally call the SYC *yuttin sappa* (youth *sappa*). Continuity is also expressed in the relation between the SYC and other village institutions. During SYC meetings and ordinary conversations the VDC (made up of male elders) is sometimes referred to as *xirisu* (seniors, elders), while in VDC meetings the SYC is addressed as *lenminu* (children, juniors). The types of communal activities carried out by the SYC also fit into the schemes of the 'age group' system. The SYC is mainly responsible for communal work (*sappan golle*) and implementation of village policies (Fig. 5.5). For example, its members clean the streets and communal areas in preparation for festivals and have built small stables where stray donkeys and horses found wandering in the village at night are kept whilst the owner is identified and fined.

It is important to note that the VDC does not include all the elders of the village, neither does the SYC include all the young men. In contrast with the 'age group' system, subscription to the SYC is voluntary and registered in a notebook, which listed around 65-70 members at the time of my fieldwork, including myself and a member of YWAM (Youth With A Mission, the charity organization with a branch in Sabi). The SYC includes young men between the ages of 20 and 45, and there is no subdivision according to marital status; the majority of members tend to be around or above their thirties. Even though the SYC is now less able to enforce participation compared to the past, subscribers' presence at meetings and activities is mandatory. During the weekly meetings, a long session is usually devoted to scrolling the register, counting the presents, administering fines to absentees who have not asked for leave of absence, and collecting fines accumulated by members[36]. The money is thus kept in a bank account and is used to finance activities and buy materials.

[36] At the time of fieldwork, fines were: 5 Gambian Dalasi for being late, 15 D for unjustified absence, 50 D for unjustified absence at collective work. Interestingly, absence due to travel (urban or foreign) is considered an automatic justification.

Fig. 5.5 - The SYC at Work

Restoring the fence of a stable for stray horses or donkeys caught wandering in the village at night. Each member has had to come to the appointment with ten sticks

Most young men agree that, since its 'creation', the SYC has boosted youth activism in the village. The reason why the youth association has been successfully recruiting members is, I argue, that it has provided a useful institution to negotiate a role for youth in village society under changing socio-political conditions and the continuing importance of seniority. Youth mobilisation in the 1990s did not significantly affect the power base of the elders, though it loosened their tutelage on youths; in the 2000s the political space for youth has been shrinking at the national level. However, at the local level, the discourse on the patriotic involvement of youth in development and self-reliance has remained an important frame of reference. It has meant that collective action could be organized within the bounds of socially sanctioned institutions such as the *sappa*, while acquiring wider significance. For instance, during my fieldwork the SYC took to organising *set setal* on the 'clean the nation day' scheduled by the government. Participation in the *set setal* suggests that youths have appropriated the call for 'patriotic participation' in their localities and legitimated their activities within the larger national sphere, to some extent bypassing the intermediation of the elders.

The incentive to civic engagement through village associations is also related to migrant transnationalism. In Chapter 1, I have showed that Soninke hometown associations in the diaspora have been at the forefront of the governance discourse on migrants as stakeholders in civil society and co-development initiatives. Migrants on a visit to Sabi often commend the SYC's activism, and youths are permeated by the message of active involvement and self-reliance conveyed through migrants' development initiatives. Some SYC members see their objective as 'playing our part' and 'doing something to take our village forward' in a joint effort with the village migrants. This is important: it suggests that youths envisage the participation in the SYC as a collective form of complementariness between stayers and travellers. Cooperation with hometown associations in the diaspora is, however, uncommon; such activities tend to be coordinated by specific individuals and elder members of the community, not necessarily active members of the VDC. At the same time, SYC members strongly desire contact with foreign supporters and NGOs. YWAM has seen the SYC as a potential partner, and it has lately cooperated with it on a project to work on the problem of soil erosion and the related problem of flooding caused by heavy rains. The SYC and YWAM staff have begun to plant vetiver grass uphill and have produced a video in Soninke to raise awareness about the soil erosion project.

The different strands of the discourse on self-reliance and on active citizenship articulated at the local, national and transnational level constitute a frame[37] in which youths that stay behind

[37] The concept of frame is derived from new social movement studies and refers to an understanding of social reality together with a language to communicate and a set of strategies for action (Della Porta and Diani 1999:69ff).

can assume a positive role in society as mature and responsible men. So far the SYC represents the most articulate collective achievement in this respect. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, it is significant that someone like Degume Silla—the youth trying hard to earn money at home through commercial horticulture—is the leader of the SYC. To be sure, Degume has the family credentials and the right age (about 40) to hold leadership; but he has also led by example as a hard-working and committed young man. A number of active members of the SYC are, like Degume, young men in their late thirties with fewer prospects than the younger ones to travel or to travel again. The association provides them with a respectable activity and position in village affairs. In addition, some of them have had significant travelling experience in West and Central Africa. Although I could not ascertain the correlation between migratory experiences and participation in the SYC, some travelled members appeared to emphasise the fact that they could harness the wisdom and 'awareness' they acquired abroad for the sake of the village wellbeing. On the other hand, among the active members there are also people who still look for a route or think of moving to Serekunda in the near future. By participating in the SYC, they seem to suggest that, whilst in Sabi, young men can assume an active role as stayers instead of leaving the initiatives to the migrants. As is the case for other ways of 'sitting', therefore, I must emphasise that the SYC is not a substitute for migration.

5.4.6 Legal Innovation and Socio-Moral Reform

When I arrived in Sabi in October 2007 for my second period of fieldwork, the SYC was very busy trying to implement a series of new regulations, mainly about life rituals. This initiative had been introduced by the VDC chairman, but the SYC immediately became involved and began to amend the regulations and propose new ones. The regulations were designed to ban the 'party element' at ceremonies and encourage villagers to organise plain ceremonies and keep ritual steps to a minimum. Excessive display was to be curtailed, while the customary distribution of money to *nyaxamalo* and *komo* was explicitly forbidden, except for payment for indispensable tasks such as slaughtering the sacrificial ram and cooking. Accordingly, praise-singers were prevented from performing and asking for money. All subjects who were not directly related to the ceremony holders by kin or by other close ties had to abstain from attending, so as to avoid putting pressure on the organiser to honour their presence with money and food. The regulations also concerned the DJ-set parties sponsored by adolescents' *ghettos*. A complex system of fines was drawn up, and youths began to stand at the gates of the compounds where the ceremonies were being held, controlling the attendance and the proceedings.

Although the regulations lasted only for about six months, this case is an interesting one to analyse. It condenses most of the issues around the problematic 'sitting' of youths discussed throughout this chapter, from self-reliance, to expensive ceremonies (e.g. marriage), to social and moral conduct. Moreover, it shows how the SYC has both remained within the assigned bounds in village government and tried to shift those bounds in order to acquire more decisional power. By drafting and implementing regulations, the SYC also reinforced its self-image as a village vanguard that tries to reform antiquated village customs.

One central element of these regulations is certainly Islamic reformism. The head of the VDC—Hamme Silla—readily admitted that he was inspired by similar policies concerning ceremonies in Serekunda, where the association *Sunpu do Xati* had long tried to raise awareness about ritual proceedings, and circulated a protocol which gathered a number of subscriptions among urban Soninke households. The *sunnanko* condemn lavish ceremonies and noisy dances and music during naming ceremonies and weddings. They sanction more sober ceremonies to preserve the religious meaning of the ritual (cf. Janson 2005). In Sabi, people did not go as far as replacing praise-singers with religious preachers, as occurs sometimes in Serekunda; yet the religious underpinning of the reform was important for some youths of the SYC. The popularity of *Sunna* among Sabi youths played a role in catalysing interest around the legislation; moreover, some of them explicitly referred to Islam to support and legitimise their attempts to implement the rules, which sometimes caused arguments with other villagers.

On the other hand, due perhaps to the religious heterogeneity of the SYC and the VDC, and to the delicate nature of religious issues in village politics, the 'anti-party' rules were framed rather in terms of social inequality and unproductive squandering of resources. The rationale went approximately as follows. People are not equal in terms of wealth. The men who cannot afford to spend big sums on naming ceremonies or weddings would be either forced to contract debts or to beg from more affluent relatives. Crowds of attendants demanding to be accommodated, fed and honoured with gifts at the ceremony have to be satisfied; otherwise the organiser will be subject to the shame of not having provided hospitality. Money is thus dissipated for the sake of ostentation and renown. After the celebrations are over the man is broke again, and he will struggle to provide even basic subsistence for his wife and children.

Debates about ritual expenses have a long history, as confirmed by some recollections dating back to the 1950s[38]. There has always been a tension between engaging in ceremonial pomp and conspicuous consumption as forms of prestige on the one hand, and showing sobriety

[38] Ba Xore Sumbundu (aged about 70), 12 December 2007, Sabi.

and humility on the other. International emigration has made this tension more acute because migrant resources have contributed to inflating ritual expenses and expectations of attendants towards redistribution, thereby causing greater dependency on extra-local resources among non-migrants who strive to keep up with rising standards. Much as the rising cost of ceremonies is due to the economic power of migrants, the new regulations were not anti-migrant rules. On the contrary, migrants were seen as potential partners in the reform because of their purported 'awareness' and openness to change. Once I was accompanying a delegation of the SYC who were going to control a wedding held by a migrant, when one of the men said that he trusted that the groom would understand the just causes of the regulation because he had travelled.

The discourse on equality and squandering struck a chord with young men coping with skyrocketing ceremonial expenses. The case of Mohamed facing pre-, inter- and post-wedding financial poverty is certainly paradigmatic of the preoccupations affecting many youths who cannot raise the sums required for their marriage . Mohamed's wedding occurred a few days short of the beginning of the new regulations; as he himself pointed out, had the wedding happened later, the regulations would have partly relieved the burden of his thoughts about it. Instead he was forced to depend on his brother's sponsorship, reinstating the problematic nature of his position as stayer.

The regulations provoked some discontent in the village. When SYC members began to patrol ceremonies, threatening to fine those who entered with the intention of begging for money, some men and women began to voice their complaints and accuse the SYC and the VDC of doing away with tradition. Because the regulations affected long standing customary relationships and disregarded the interests of women in attending ceremonies, the new rules received critiques from among the *nyaxamalo* and the *komo*, especially among the women, who usually attend ceremonies in large numbers. The issue brought to the surface all the contradictions of the SYC and the VDC in political terms. In the eyes of some *nyaxamalo* and *komo* these committees showed themselves to be a '*hoore* business' which attempted to defend the corporate interests of the free born (the typical patrons of large ceremonies now facing economic dire straits) without giving up the privileges which they enjoy in village politics. The SYC remained rather elusive about people's rumblings, which never escalated to overt protest, and they enlisted sympathisers across the status hierarchy and among women. For most youths, the regulations were not to do with status: they were meant to restore equality and thus social cohesion, on the one hand; and to ensure conditions for self-reliance and hard-work, rather than begging and dependency, on the other.

Given the socio-moral nature of life rituals, attempts to change ritual proceedings are necessarily attempts to reshape the very production of societal norms. In fact, in addition to rituals, the SYC proposed areas of intervention and amended village regulations that targeted specific uncivil practices, 'not civilised' as many put it; these were as diverse as rape and the beating of wives, stray donkeys and horses entering compounds at night, cars and motorbikes speeding through town, smoking along streets in the dry season (causing accidental fires).

The SYC proposed reforms and carried out patrols with fervour. It aspired to become the main arbiter and watchman of the village, and even tried to ensure that certain criminal offences should be 'trialled' and fined by the SYC before they were reported to the police. I see this as a claim to maturity: the SYC attempted to provide the village with an institution above the parties, implementing regulations with rigour, avoiding family and status biases[39]. The insistence on the 'rule of law' can be read as a way to partly circumscribe the power of elders in the mediation of conflicts and community affairs. By forcefully trying to be impartial, the SYC imposed fines to people of any status, including some leading members of the noble elite. It also took issue with the VDC, accusing it of being too ambivalent about implementation and thus risking a reversion to nepotism when family affiliations overlapped with VDC membership.

Just before I left Gambia, a case of sexual violence arose in the village. The SYC wanted to take over from the usual inter- and intra-family diplomacy. They wanted to make a public case out of it and administer an exemplary punishment to the culprit. However, the elders of the respective families did not wait. The father of the victim reported the case to the police, and the family of the accused subsequently settled the matter through private transactions, allegedly with the tacit approval of some village leaders. Bypassed, the SYC pulled out of the regulations as a sign of protest, polemically leaving to the village elders and the VDC the impossible task of enforcement without the indispensable personnel provided by the SYC.

In other villages similar regulations have been reportedly more long-lasting and successful. There, youth associations have been equally at the forefront of socio-moral reform and legal innovation. In the region, there have been other experiments in legal innovation (Snyder 1978), and, more generally, civic participation at the local level seems to be an important way for youths to express active citizenship (e.g. Diouf 2002; Baller 2007). It is significant that Sabi youths facing socio-economic uncertainties and marginalisation have preferred reform to open confrontation (cf. Dea 2008). The well-worn institution of 'age-groups',

[39] Insistence on law and order may be partly rooted in the wider political context. Some of the members were using the motto 'no compromise', echoing the government's 'Operation No Compromise', a campaign against corruption that has actually served to centralise authority. This does not mean that the SYC youths framed their activity within that Operation. Many of them are unimpressed by politicians' projected image as anti-corruption champions.

though governed by status and seniority, has allowed young men to claim presence in their locality, and to offer an alternative to the compelling drive to travel which possesses the danger of characterising staying behind as abeyance and disengagement. To be sure, the SYC, like the *ghettos*, cannot be reduced to an epiphenomenon of migration dynamics. Perhaps this is precisely the point: by being excluded from migrant trajectories of socio-economic success, young men staying behind can still find ways of expressing maturity, assuming collective responsibilities, influencing the direction of social change and even envisaging ways of participating in migratory processes by staying at home. Not unlike other discourses and practices related to 'sitting', the SYC's activities and reforms make sense only in relation to wider horizons, from national politics to migrant transnationalism and to Islamic reformism.

Conclusion

When I returned to Italy in May 2008, the 'immigration question' was at a climax point in the public debate. The first newspaper I happened to glance at on the plane had a report on a group of residents in a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Naples who had launched an assault on a gipsy camp armed with iron clubs and petrol bombs. Government representatives condemned the attack but exploited the event to reiterate their call for zero tolerance on criminality and illegal immigration, the two phenomena being closely linked in their rhetoric. A few days later they passed a decree which tightened security measures and rules for immigrants[1]. As the imminent arrival of the summer improved sea conditions in the Sicily Channel, this strained socio-political climate focused public attention on the seasonal flow of undocumented boat migrants crossing from northern Africa. Newspapers and TV channels began to stir up public opinion on the 'emergency' of clandestine immigration on the Island of Lampedusa, and politicians spoke volubly in alarmist tones, predicting an 'invasion' of clandestine African migrants. Right-wing politicians, and many left-wingers too, advocated tough initiatives to stop the boats and the traffickers, paying lip service to the need to tackle the root causes of immigration by 'helping them in their homeland' (in order for them to stay home)—one of the favourite slogans of the anti-immigrant Northern League party's leader Umberto Bossi, and one that resonates with the approach to migration used by many policy makers and development agencies around Europe (Bakewell 2008; de Haas 2008).

As I began to revise my field notes and plan for a thesis on young aspirants to migration who stay in their place instead, I became uncomfortably aware that I was standing on slippery discursive ground. The fact that I had carried out research in another place where migrants leave on boats suggested drawing almost a natural parallel with the Italian case. It was no surprise that when I discussed my plans with a colleague, he commented ironically that "the Northern League would love your work". By writing on the dynamics of staying behind, I felt I was moving far from the discourse of some activists and engaged academics who advocated migrants' freedom of movement and their 'right to flee' (Mezzadra 2001) from war and poverty, in pursuit of a better life.

[1] The so called 'Pacchetto Sicurezza' (Security Package), Decree no. 92, 23 May 2008, which became Law no. 125 on 24 July 2008. Rivera (2009) provides an account of the events of that period, paying attention to the merging of institutional and popular racism.

After writing the dissertation, however, it seems to me that the different parties of the debate all too often ignore what goes on in Africa, or view it from a Euro-centric perspective. There seems to be a sweeping assumption that emigrant societies do not collectively think about and organise the way in which people can and do stay behind, as if all young men in Africa were prepared to invade Europe, whether this is considered right or not. Scholarly work has gone a long way in redressing such a distorted view of African migration (e.g. de Haas 2008), though it has become almost fashionable to talk about a world in motion, often using overly ideological tones to do so. Scholars have been preoccupied with overcoming the view of static and sedentary society that has long constrained social analysis, but have done much less to understand how people continue to think themselves as sedentary people and how they socially construct immobility in migratory contexts. The impressive proliferation of studies of migration and migrant transnationalism in the last twenty years has remained heavily focused on what motivates migration and what migrants do after they leave their homes. The concerns of European policy-makers about 'hot spots' like North and West Africa have sometimes influenced research agendas and analytical categories[2], leading to young people in migratory contexts being viewed as simply potential emigrants, or worse, as candidates for illegal migration.

In this thesis, I have tried to show that it is misleading to portray Soninke young men as potential emigrants only. It is impossible to disregard young men's strong aspirations to travel abroad, aspirations which are firmly grounded in history, social practice and imaginaries; and it is impossible too not to take into account the social and legal barriers to emigration that frustrate their aspirations. But there is more to young men's lives and to Soninke migration. Although many Soninke young men want to migrate, their social lives are more complex. Young men are equally preoccupied with staying behind, they discuss their position as stayers and continuously reconfigure the conditions under which they stay in their country, both in discourse and practice.

The dynamics of staying behind among the Soninke young men appear to be a consciously and collectively organized aspect of society. I have argued that immobility is not the mere epiphenomenon of mobility, but an integral aspect of the migration process. Young men are not simply selected out of emigration by migration policies, households, social networks, and other social forces. They can and do stay behind as a way of actively participating in and constructing migration. Staying behind has a history and builds on domestic, commercial and other forms of social organization that are deployed and acquire new meanings in the current

[2] One example is the category of 'transit migration', which is largely used in policy and diplomatic circles, and has generated a wealth of studies on transit migrants and countries.

diasporic context. The Soninke have continued to farm, to raise children in large households, to teach them the Quran, to recruit kinsmen and villagers as apprentices and partners in trading firms, and to participate in 'age groups'. Although it may seem as if little has changed and people continue to live in the way they did before so many people travelled, such activities can only be understood within a wider horizon—regional, national and transnational. The fact that a considerable portion of Sabi's population has left and remains connected to home creates a space and a role for those who stay behind. Staying in Sabi means to substitute, complement and sustain those who travel. It means to 'to follow our fathers' way', 'to try our best at home', 'to join hands with the travellers'. This is most evident in the household and in transnational trading firms, where to stay behind means to take part in an overarching system of relations and activities based on both mobility and immobility. Like transnational migrants, stayers occupy a dynamic position in the transnational social field, engaging people and activities 'here', while simultaneously interacting with people and activities 'there' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Consolidating relations with the people near and far is necessary to both leaving and staying. By following young men's quest for money I have tried to show that behind apparently straightforward migratory projects there is often a dynamic, open-ended interplay between mobility and immobility, between constructing an opportunity to stay and one to leave. In this respect, cultivating sedentariness—learning to farm, to take care of the household, to trade, and so on—can be the precondition to becoming a migrant.

In many ways, young men in Sabi have had little choice but to take refuge in such organized ways of staying behind. The outcome of neoliberal globalisation and post-colonial state policies in the Upper River Region has been to leave behind its communities, economically and socially. Going to look for money away from home is no longer a livelihood option among others, but one of the very few ways left to ensure subsistence. For those who do not travel abroad or to the city, ensuring subsistence and dignity means primarily becoming established as stayers; it means mobilising social and moral resources in order to be recognised as legitimate stakeholders of migration and migrant resources.

However, staying behind does not always lead to a secure position. The fact that so many young men cannot obtain a visa and cannot find alternative sources of income locally has burdened households and transnational aid networks, causing an excess of potential stayers. Young men are thus subject to competing and contradictory predicaments that push and pull them at the same time. Their readiness to fulfil household obligations at home is closely monitored, while they are also invited to find money and prove they can be self-reliant instead of counting on others, particularly on migrants. Moreover, if the migration process creates a

functional need for people to stay behind, it also undermines the conditions of immobility. The changing patterns of migration over the last forty years have sometimes stretched family solidarity and fuelled internal feuds, inflated marriage expenses, exacerbated the social significance of money and constructed models of material success that capture young men's ambitions and overshadow what they can attain as stayers. The Soninke have strenuously tried to maintain a balance between staying and moving; in practice, however, the cherished complementariness between migrants and stayers can significantly lean in favour of the former.

Staying behind is thus a multi-faceted process, characterised by contrasting experiences. In his seminal essay, Abdelmalek Sayad (1999) has argued that immigrants to France face a double absence of a physical, social and existential nature. Immigrants are absent from the place they came from, and absent from the receiving context, in which they are never entirely recognised as full personas. Can we speak, in a symmetrical manner, of the double absence of the stayer, absent from the place he wishes to be (abroad), absent from the place (home) in which he strives for recognition? Some authors writing about North-West Africa have indeed chosen similar terms to describe aspirant migrants. Vigh (2009:98), for instance, speaks of the 'absent presence' of young men in Bissau, who perceive that the only way to become visible is through the social presence and physical absence of the migrants[3]. The malaise of Soninke youths facing pressures to leave, a lack of perspectives and abjection at home, suggest we can also speak of absence. But Soninke youths' absence should not be over-emphasised; it does not rhyme with utter invisibility or even with 'social death'—as Vigh argues for Biassauian young men and other authors do for Senegambian candidates to migration (e.g. Mbodji 2008:308). Immobility is not a pathological state, but a dynamic one, an interplay between presence and absence. Migrants' presence can increase the absence of non-migrant young men, but it also creates and acknowledges the (co)presence of the stayers. Even among those young men who cannot secure a stable position at home, staying behind appears to be an active stance, and a constant quest for presence, or presences. Somehow paradoxically, where the pressure to emigrate is stronger, as among the rural Soninke, youths have alternative ways of being included in migration and society at large.

It is necessary to stress the remarkable effort by the Soninke to maintain social cohesion in spite of diasporization and the socio-economic differences created by migration. In other African contexts, the fact that many young people have found themselves without a well-defined place in society and deprived of the means to progress in life has proved explosive, leading to

[3] The presence of the migrant (i.e. migrant transnationality) was disregarded by Sayad (Riccio 2008:ix).

conflict and disruption, often along generational lines (Abbink and Kessel 2005; Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Vigh 2006). The case of the Soninke young men does not wholly support the view of generational rupture and crisis characterizing much literature on African youth; it is more in line with Jean-Pierre Chauveau's (2005) argument that history as well as communitarian forms of belonging still matter to rural African youth. Domestic, age and community structures inform the young men's attempt to claim presence in their communities—such as the Sabi Youth Committee—and also constitute an adaptive resource for Soninke networks and strategies of staying behind—such as the investments and enterprises created by migrants for their junior kinsmen who are unable to emigrate. This does not mean that maladaptation has not occurred. Over-reliance on international migration has allowed the Soninke to cope with economic stagnation and with the absence of the state in the Upper River Region, but it has increased dependence on remittances and it has led to little diversification of livelihoods, locally and within the nation as a whole. Maintaining strong ties across the diaspora has enabled young men to rely on greater social and economic capital than many of their Gambian peers, but it has also increased societal control and led to a policy of immobilism in village society. Young men have thus resorted to both old and new cultural models to revise their position in society, and to challenge or reform the social, political and moral canons that define it.

Since restrictive conditions of immigration in Europe and America will probably last for long, it is likely that adaptation, diversification and innovation will continue to characterise the dynamics of staying behind among the Soninke. In Chapters 4 and 5, I have sketched some of the emergent phenomena, which at this stage call for further research. In a way, the changing nature of migration governance is creating a discursive space that makes multi-level analysis and comparison necessary, thus inviting the researcher to go beyond the ethnic and local specificity. The discourse and initiatives focusing on the issue of illegal boat migration and the consequent repatriation of people are beginning to influence the way young people think, act and organise mobility and immobility, especially in countries like Senegal and Mali, and to a lesser extent in Gambia (cf. Bouilly 2008; Pian 2009). At the same time, there remain local and longer term processes to analyse. In particular, in this thesis I could only begin to pay attention to the role of religion in the dynamics of staying behind. Islam represents both tradition and innovation in migration processes; besides shaping the discourse on staying behind, religion appears to provide concrete models of success 'at home', such as scholarly and maraboutic careers, which the spread of Islamic reformism contributes to both diversifying and making available to young men.

Young men are only one social category of stayers among others. Although I have not dealt with youths in isolation from other actors, a more comprehensive analysis of the dynamics

of staying behind would benefit from other points of view. Elders, women and children are more typical stayers, yet the process of becoming established as stayers is certainly no less complex and problematic in their case. Migrants' view and experiences would also complement this study. Adding a transnational lens would produce a deeper understanding of the migration process, and provide information as to why and how migrants relate to stayers.

This notwithstanding, I would still maintain that researching migration by beginning with the 'sending' context offers a vantage point compared to the growing volume of studies of migrant transnationalism that try to analyse both 'here' and 'there', but often begin and remain analytically anchored 'here' (in Europe and North America) (Capello 2008:19ff). Because they have been early migrants to France, the Soninke have attracted much attention as immigrants, and to some extent as emigrants and transnational migrants; some non-European stories and dynamics of migration have been more marginal and often subordinated to immigration-centric concerns. As Jeffrey Cohen (2004:150-1) has concluded in his study of southern Mexican communities: "Understanding migration in rural Oaxaca begins by understanding its households and communities. To jump to the United States is to lose that foundation and to miss the profound forces that frame and organize the very processes we hope to explain". Beginning with the village is not a nostalgic return to the local and the ethnic in anthropology; it is to begin with the concerns and histories of the people who have decided to embark on migration by either moving or staying, and what this means to them. This is perhaps the best way of provincializing (Chakrabarty 2000) those debates and positions centred on a very European view of African migration. There is much more to be done in this direction.

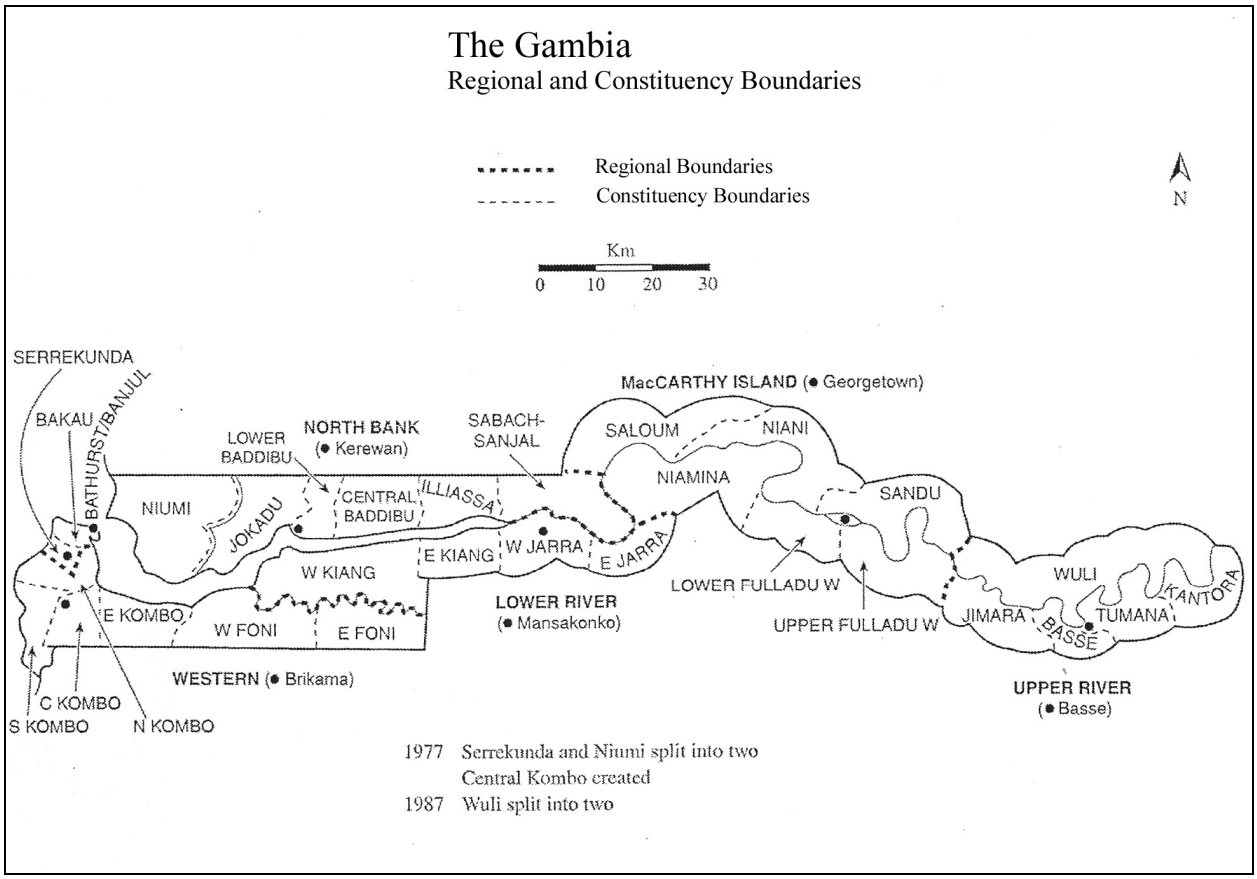
Glossary

Note: The plural version (in brackets) is provided only for those terms which are used both in the singular and the plural in the text.

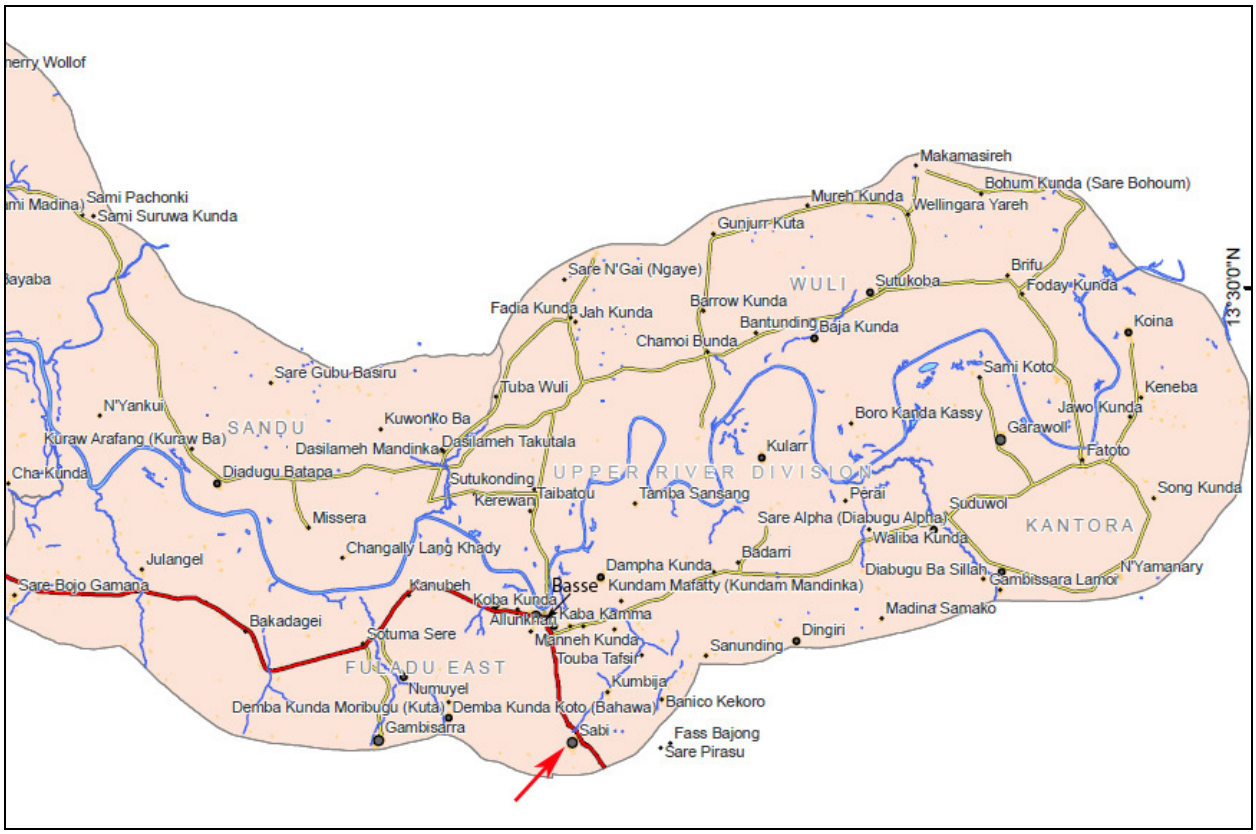
Ataya	Sugary green tea
Babylon	(In the context of migration) Europe and North America
Barake	Blessing, state of grace
Biraado	Subsistence food
Faabaremmaaxu	Of the same father, rivalry between agnatic brothers
Fangkanta	Self-guard, (economic) reserve
Follake	Sub-unit of the *ka*
Ghetto	Meeting and socialising place for youths
Hanmi	Concern, ambition
Hoore (o)	Status group: 'noble'
Jula	(Muslim) trader in Mande languages
Ka (-nu)	Household, compound
Kaara	Home place (father's *ka*, village, home country)
Kagume (u)	Head of the household (*ka*)
Kille	Path, way, (migratory) route
Kingide (*also*: kinŋu)	Hearth of the *ka* (it identifies a household)
Kome (o)	Status group: slave, slave descendant
Kora (*also: *koranlenme)	Seating platform
Korite	Muslim holiday: End of Ramadan (Arabic: *Eid al Fitr*)
Kunda	A suffix meaning either 'the household/compound of' or 'the village/city of'
Madrasa	Islamic school
Maisi	Upper Quranic 'school'
***Marabout (*Soninke: *moodi*)**	Islamic specialist and teacher typical of Sufi Islam. The marabout can make use of esoteric knowledge to divine and to make charms.
Misikinaaaxu	Poverty
Nerves syndrome	Longing for travel, distress about inability to travel/lack of opportunities (see also *hanmi*)
Nyaxamala (o)	Status group: casted artisan

Semester	Migrant to the West, especially one associated with consumerism and sophistication
Soninkaara	Homeland of the Soninke
Strange farmer	Also *stranger farmer*; seasonal migrant farmer in commercial groundnut cultivation (known as *navetan* in Senegal)
Sunna	Usu. Words and deeds of the Prophet, in Soninke: Islamic reformism
Sunnanke (o)	Follower of *Sunna*, Islamic reformist
Supporter	Helper
Taxaana	'sitter' or 'stayer', person who does not travel (internationally)
Taaxu	To sit, to take office, to become settled
Tabaski	Muslim holiday: Feast of Sacrifice (Arabic: *Eid al Adha*)
Tanpiye	Hardship, fatigue, 'suffering'
Teraana	Traveller
Tere	To travel, to walk
Terende	Travel, approx. international migration
Terendengunne	'Travelling Bush', or field of migration (approx. lands of immigration, see also *tunŋa*)
Tunŋa	Foreign place, land of exile
Warijaxe	'Luck', lot (or bounty, sustenance) granted and/or predestined by God
Xabila (-nu)	Descent group
Xalisi	Money
Xalisi mundiye	Quest for money
Xarannyinmbe	Basic Quranic 'school'

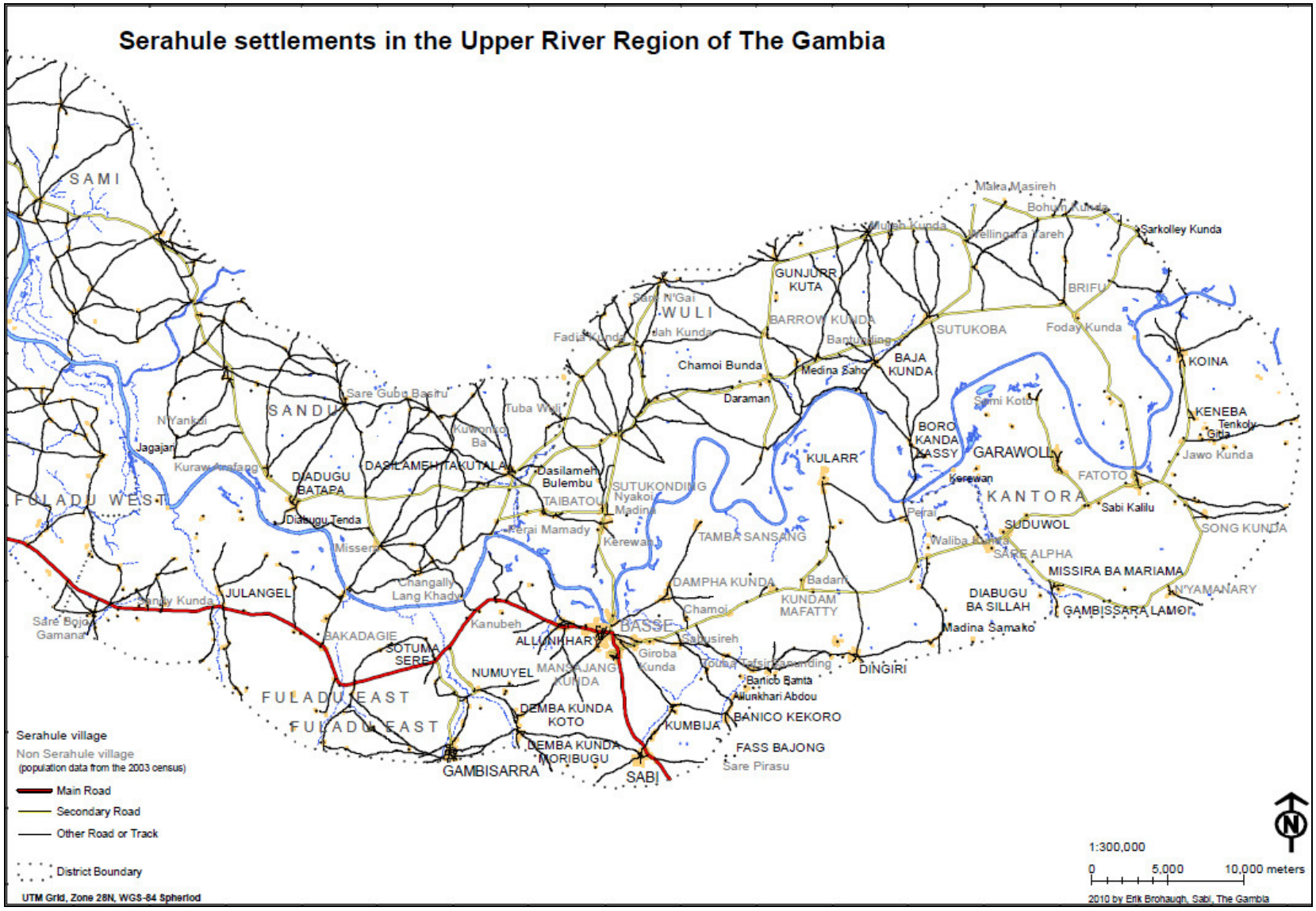
Maps



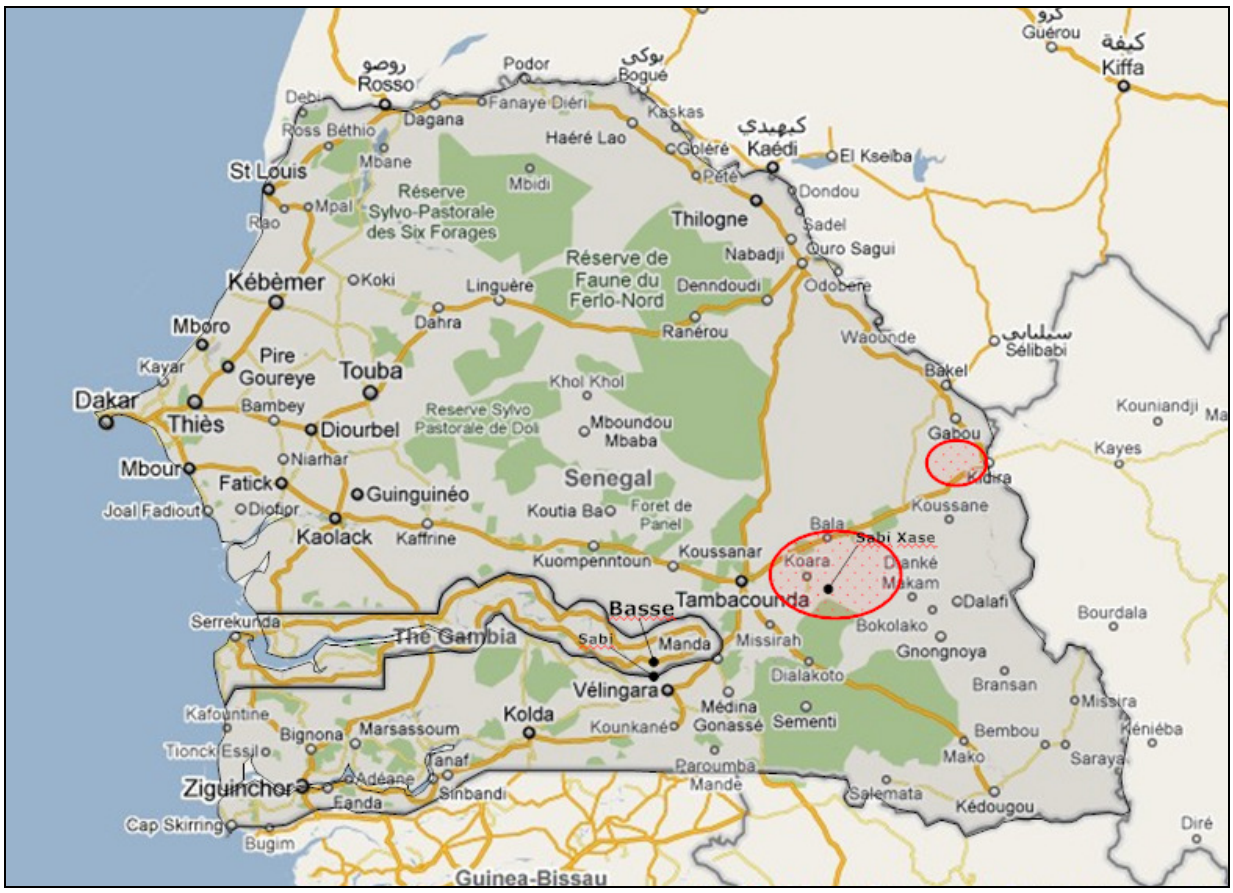
Map 1 – The Gambia. Source: adapted from Hughes and Perfect (2006).



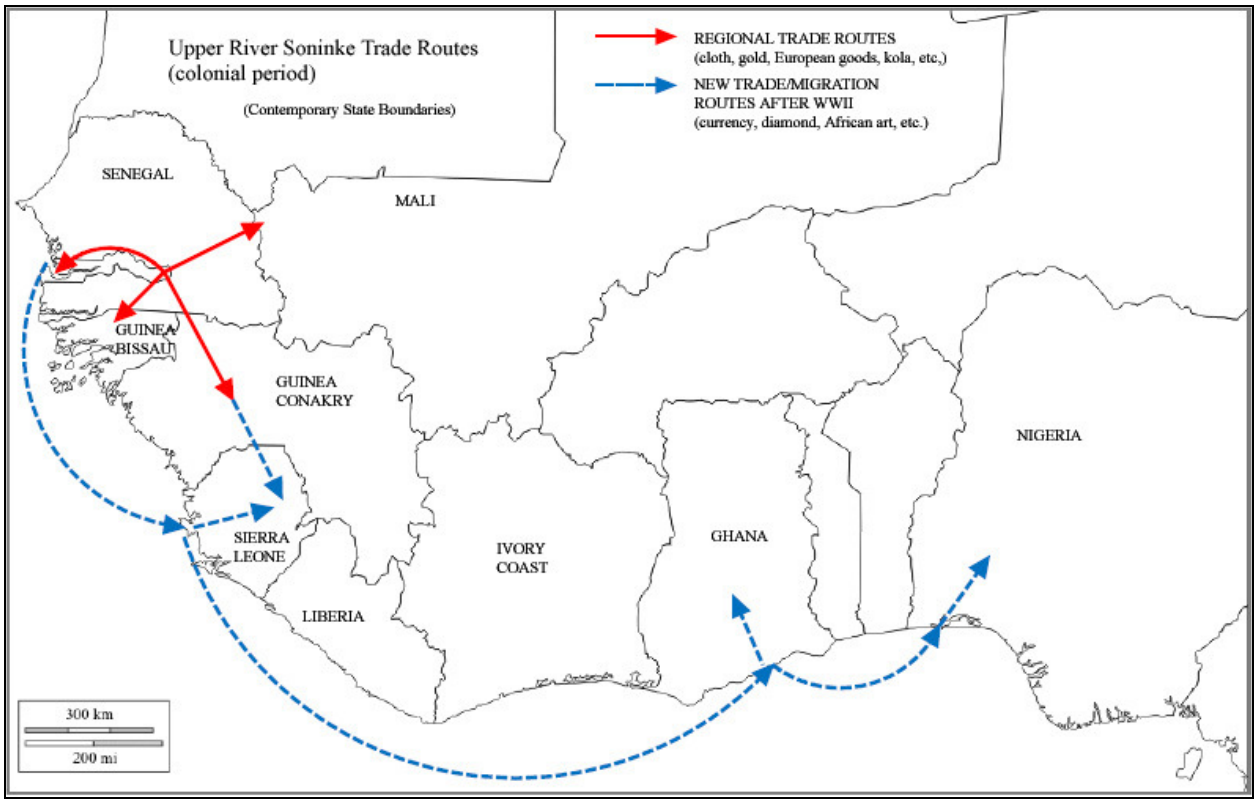
Map 2 – The Upper River Region (formerly Upper River Division). Courtesy of Erik Brohaugh.



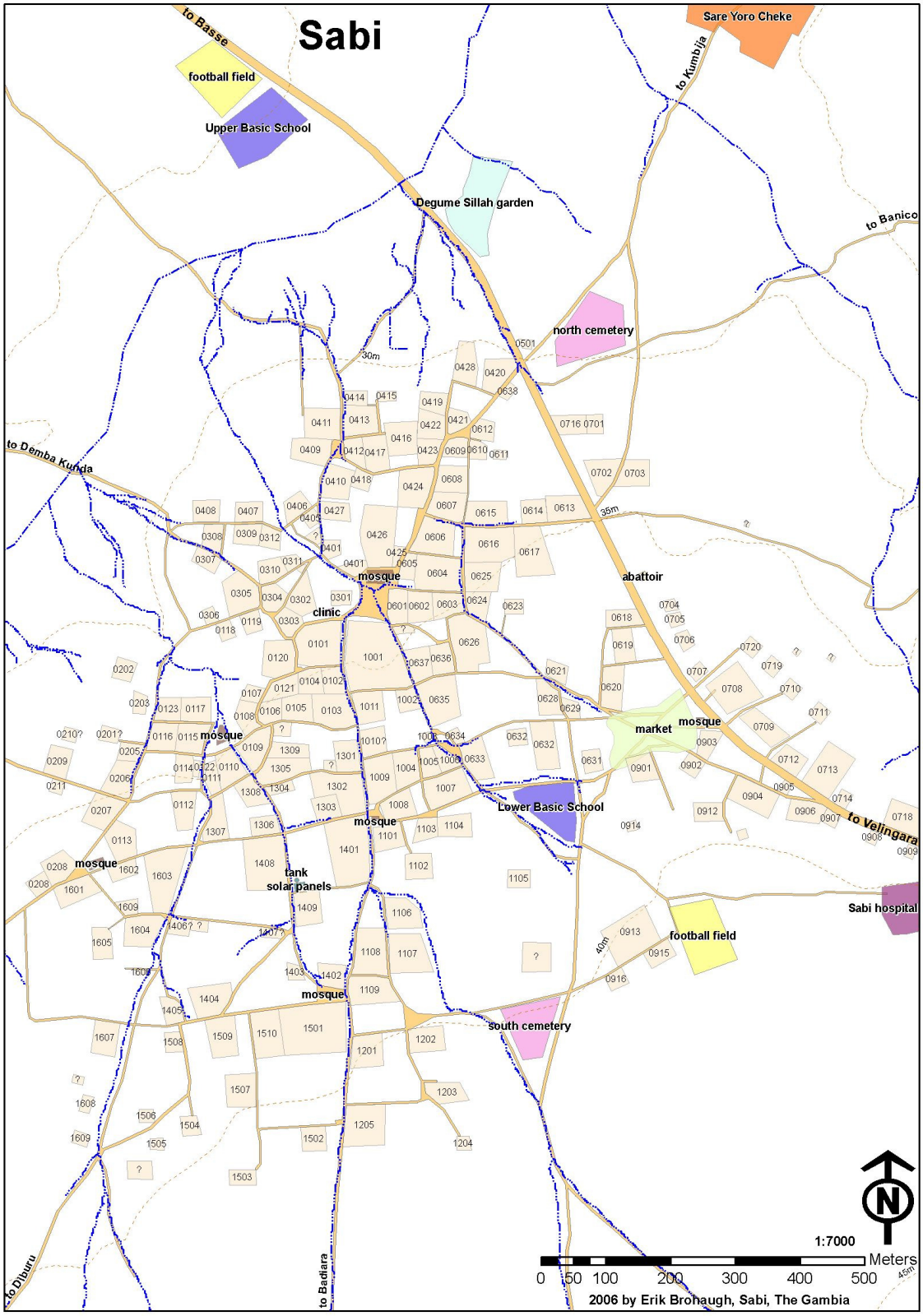
Map 3 – Settlements with 50% or above of Soninke (Serahule) inhabitants (Upper River Region). Courtesy of Erik Brohaugh.



Map 4 – Main zones of origin of Upper River Soninke in Senegambia (contemporary map)
Source: Google Earth, author's data and elaboration



Map 5 – Soninke Trade Migration Routes in the Colonial Period
Source: D-maps; author's data and elaboration



Map 6 – Sabi plan (with compound numbers). Courtesy of Erik Brohaugh

Appendix
Questionnaire for Household Survey (English version)

Name of Interviewee: _____

Patronym: _____

Status Group: NOBLE – CASTED ARTISAN – SLAVE DESCENDANT

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

N =

How many 'hearths' (households) are there in your *Ka*? _____

Number of residents in your household _____

Number of men _____

Of these how many farm? _____

Number of women _____

Of these how many farm? _____

How many men in the household are 'abroad' at present? _____

How many of them have been away for more than a year? _____

Where are they?

SEREKUNDA _____

EUROPE _____

USA _____

ANGOLA _____

Rest of WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA _____

Other Destination(s): _____

How many farmers migrate for 'dry season' work? _____

Where do they go?

SEREKUNDA _____

Other Destination(s): _____

HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY

AGRICULTURE

What do you farm on the 'communal land'?	Millet – Sorghum – Maize – Groundnut
How many male farmers have an 'individual field'?	N = _____
Is the harvest sufficient for you for the whole year round (2005/6)?	YES NO
Do you have to add rice or buy grains?	YES NO

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES

Do your householders earn cash in Sabi?	YES	NO
How?		
Rented house/shop	YES	NO
Artisan activity, specify:	YES	NO
Trade/Business, specify:	YES	NO
Other, specify:	YES	NO

LIVESTOCK

How many livestock do you have in your household?	N =
CATTLE	_____
HORSES + DONKEYS	_____
SHEEP + GOATS	_____

REMITTANCES

How many of the householders 'abroad' send money for 'survival food'? N= _____

How many of them send money on a regular basis? N = _____

Is this money sufficient for your 'survival food'? YES NO

What else do migrants buy/pay for?

FOOD YES NO

AGRICULTURE YES NO
tractor ploughing – fertiliser – workers – other:

HOUSING IMPROVEMENTS YES NO
(in the last 10 years)

MEANS of TRANSPORT YES NO
Bikes – Motorbike – Car

Do migrants send money for CEREMONIES? YES NO
Naming ceremonies – Marriage – Funerals – Religious Festivals

Bilbiography

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CSO 2	Colonial Secretary's Correspondence
CSO 18	Historical Notes on the Provinces
NGR 1	Prof. Gamble's Files, 1946-1958

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