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Unbroken circles and unfinished legacies: a Gambian story

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Abstract

This is a story. An unfinished one, as every story that takes shape from a real experience. It is both the story of a life and a memoir of a journey. They are interdependent but maintain their own singularity insofar as every voice resounds the peculiarity of the individual. However, these are not single voices. They don't carry within them the danger of a single story. Because as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." Born and raised from a daily exchange, by practicing an active and shared listening and throughout the experiencing of everyday life in urban Gambia, the oral account of activist Alieu Bah, also known as Immortal X, and the ethnographic narrative carried out using both writing and photography are mutually developed, intersect and echoing with other voices and other stories. The first part focuses on Alieu's life story - recorded as a dialogue we were both involved in and maintains in its written form a trace of this alternation of voices. His account - always grounded in the Gambian historical and socio-political context - begins with childhood memories and crosses the spiritual and political awakening and ends with a future challenge. The second part explores everyday life through ethnographic narration and documentary photography in contemporary Gambia. It is the product of a singular experience in which portraits of the neighborhood, reflections on politics and society, fleeting encounters and intimate connections all come together.

Keywords: The Gambia, Life Story, Youth, Activism, Photography

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What is Montevideo but the sum of the people I loved and hated in her and of so much given and received? My furies and my sorrows come from these men and these women. They are my national history.

— Eduardo Galeano

What we are writing here is history. Or at least the personal account of an eyewitness to history. Our brother, Jimmy Baldwin (peace be unto him), used to constantly tell us in SNCC that "you all have to bear witness. "That is all we are doing here, bearing witness to what we have done and seen in the hope, God willing, that it will prove instructive to those who follow us. And it was President Ahmad Sekou Toure (peace be unto his fighting spirit) who unfailingly reminded us that "only the people make history. It is not individual heroes, not individual geniuses but only the people who make history.

— Kwame Ture

Preface



We all are witnesses - voluntarily or not - through the written form or simply just by living, we all carry the responsibility of being witnesses to our own lives, to the many livings of our loved ones and to those we barely know, and thanks to that we become more generally, witnesses of our time, bearers of contradictions and traditions and sometimes also, of innovations. As specific points drawn upon an imaginary continuous line, the three place us in a particular position vis-à-vis history and its corollaries: memory, loss, remembrance, continuity and revolution. Not one of us is born in a vacuum, neither of us could we ever claim to be an isolated point in a quiet landscape of abstraction and although at first glance, it may seem paradoxical, what divides us is precisely what we share. What binds us is the legacy each of us carries within herself and himself. A legacy that lives through, because of and despite of us in the ordinariness of the account. We might have preferences, specific attitudes or penchants but we can't deny and we can't escape from this simple truth: we are all storytellers precisely because we are both equally listeners. No matter how little our audience is or how short, incoherent, boring or incomplete our stories are

or whether our name is Ogotemeli, Malcom X, Kwame Ture, Angela Davis, Acephie Josef or Chouchou Louis, we all have the right and the duty to tell and listen to our stories and to the many stories that give meaning to our inhabiting the earth as human beings.

They can be whispered into someone's ear in bed, shouted out loud in the midst of a square, stammered, rapped or censored but all stories matter because all stories have dignity. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." (2009)

Then, if what we have in common is the power to be enchanted, moved, angered and triggered by telling, listening and retelling, what separates us? It is the plurality of visions, the multitude of genealogies, the different ancestors and the various places with their own particular cosmologies, legends, colors, trees, smells, ways of singing, playing, dancing, mourning and celebrating.

In a nutshell, the different ways through which we witness our time, never ceasing to be at the same time bearers of a specific legacy. Recognizing, accepting and embracing the multitude of legacies and the beautiful, inevitable multi-vocality of their bearers, witnesses, janitors and storytellers means avoiding the danger of the single story.

The risk of the single story is precisely the lack of balance of stories among the world's people (Achebe 2000), which results in the dispossession, the mystification and the alienation of a huge part of humanity.

For Chinua Achebe these people belong to what he proudly calls the Third World and according to him, it is their duty to wield the pen and by their stories fight against centuries of Eurocentric fictions and nonfictions which have caused and supported cultural alienation, self-contempt and above all colonialism and the establishment of the realm of lies. Today Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gathers the legacy of his predecessor affirming that "a

single story shows people as one thing, as only one thing over and over again" and "that it's impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power" (2009). The story about to be told here is an attempt to engage properly with a place and a person and with all the stories of that place and of that person. It praises human equality, emphasizing how we are similar notwithstanding our differences and the many subjectivities collected within it try to annihilate not the people but the stereotype.

But before Adichie and Achebe, Frantz Fanon already stated in *The Wretched of the Earth*, at the dawn of the decolonization, that the colonized intellectual, dusted over by colonial culture, represents a threat for the national culture (1968) and that the mission to be fulfilled by the new generations of decolonized cultural actors is the affirmation of their own cultures looking at their own stories, finding inspiration in their people and working alongside with them. What Fanon is praising here is precisely the awakening of a new consciousness, a revolutionary consciousness grounded with the masses of the people in their specific historical and cultural context.

Not by chance the section dedicated to the building of a national culture, post-independence struggle opens with a quote of Sekou Touré, the revolutionary president of Guinea, friend of Kwame Nkrumah and mentor of Kwame Ture, who engaged the complete withdrawal from French neocolonialism, affirming that Guinea prefers poverty in freedom to richness in slavery.

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves. In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thoughts; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not

himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity. (Fanon 1968, p.206)

And this is where we start, from this luminous legacy of struggle for change.

Thanks to a two-year period of volunteering in a reception center for migrants in my hometown in the South of Italy, I became acquainted with Gambia, this small country surrounded by Senegal. Some of the Gambian migrants who later became my friends, introduced me to the culture and people of their country, sharing with me incredible stories of the former dictator Yahya Jammeh. My interest in the country grew rapidly when I met several young activists and musicians engaged in political activities from below, online. Among them, I ran into Alieu during the broadcast of an Italian radio program about young activists in Africa. After listening to the interview in which he talked about his passion for books and his enduring faith in socialism and pan-Africanism, I decided to contact him via Facebook. Since then we have never stopped exchanging ideas and discussing burning issues regarding Gambia.

During the course of our conversations – both recorded and unrecorded - Alieu would constantly remind himself and me, that his account it is not the exceptional coming of age of an exceptional individual. On the contrary, as a child of the ‘much-discussed’ African continent, it is a celebration of the history of a continent, Africa, of a nation, Gambia, of a people, the Gambians, and of course of a generation - all those born like him in a conjectural time, being the early 1990s. I’d say otherwise, quoting his words “the recording of my story is the recording of the story of my people because I’m no different from my people. I am one with them.”

Among the commitments we both share there’s our commitment to witnessing, and it is funny how things sometimes begin, in our case, with Alieu remembering in our first recording James Baldwin’s omen that each and every one of us be witnesses of our time.

Overlooking Harlem, his poems, prose and letters, all together witness the struggle of the blacks in the United States, the birth of the Nation of Islam, the mobilization of the Black Panthers and even the imprisonment of his friend Angela Davis.

As for us, we are both close and far from James Baldwin and his Harlem. Our story begins in a small room stuck under the stairs of a two-story building in the heart of a small town called Kololi, on the shore of the Gambian coast. It’s the story of a twofold witnessing settled in the context of a country recently freed from 22 long years of Yahya Jammeh’s dictatorship. As we speak and we witness and we make actual history, sometimes we take a break recalling through the spoken and written word, the unbroken circles of unfinished legacies to which we belong. But we also allow ourselves some time for drawing and dreaming up new ways of being and living in the future.

And it is in this constant and humble remembering and retelling of more or less known people, ranging from our neighbors and friends, Famara and Anchu, to writers such as Eduardo Galeano, Frantz Fanon or Walter Rodney, and revolutionaries like Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral and Thomas Sankara, that our stories flow and take shape.

As I witnessed Alieu’s voice sharing with me the memories of his childhood in Sanyang, of his first day at school, of his first experience with what I will call ‘pivotal death’, of the days of the many Khuruj with the Tablighi Jamaat, of his initiation to Sufism, the strict daily training of the Tarbiya, and later on of his political awakening through the works of Kwame Nkrumah and Marcus Garvey, I became aware that alongside the active listening of his journey, I had to embark on my own journey, firsthand. And that’s how I undertook my own journey in Gambia, a three-months stay made of walking, crossing, bouncing and talking to people, collecting their stories through the filter of our relationship, often photographing and writing

about their everyday life, which in some cases progressively became part of my daily life.

So here I am now, trying to explain by writing this preface, how and why these two experiences, whose outcome is the story of a life and a memoir of a journey, are both bound together, inseparable from one another because they occur in the same time, interconnected by the many echoes and rebounds scattered in the oral account as much as in my ethnographic narrative. And yet, as every encounter between two subjectivities, what makes the dialogue, the connection and the intertwinement possible is precisely the ability to maintain their unique and unrepressed singularity. Being the direct product of two singularities, Alieu's life story and my ethnographic memoir are both partial, incomplete and eminently subjective, especially for the place that we reserve to the many voices that inhabit our storytelling. They range from our loved ones to the ones that destroyed our life, from those who live in our neighborhoods to our intellectual foremothers and forefathers. As we seek to overcome the danger of the single story encompassing other stories within ours, striving to chase any stereotyping from places and faces we depict, we acknowledge that the source of the narration is in our voices, but we do not claim any authority or authoriality: we are, we have been and we will be nurtured by the same dreams, the same expectations, the same sufferings and the same struggles of the people we feel we belong to. Not only for genealogical heritage. We are what we make of ourselves and, in these harsh times, it should be an imperative for all of us to open up our consciousness to the world and dare to adopt and be adopted by many different radical legacies.

I have always been fascinated by oral accounts because of their ambiguous nature: a product of an encounter between two individuals who sat for a determined length of time, sharing a space that becomes a sort of a stage where the magic of the dialogical narrative happens. Between scribbled notes

on a pile of sheets, back in the day recorded on wax disks and then finally printed in books, these accounts always keep a transient nature made of blurred or reconstructed memories, omissions, oblivions, embarrassments and silences.

I remember the description made by Marcel Griaule in *Dieu d'eau*, the first book of anthropology I read, of his first encounter with Ogotemeli. The silence, the shadow in the hut of the wise man who was about to unveil the complicated cosmogony of his people, the Dogon of the cliff of Bandiagara. I remember Alex Haley evoking his first encounter with Malcolm X, the defiance of the latter, his conviction that Haley was a spy sent by the FBI, which over time, turned into a deep friendship. I remember also the first encounter between Alan Lomax and Jelly Roll Morton. By then Morton was a fallen, penniless jazz star playing the piano in an empty room. However, upon his arrival, Lomax remained to listen to him, bewitched. *Mister Jelly struck a jazzy thing / In the temple by the queen and the king / All at once he struck a harmonic chord. / King said, "Make Mister Jelly a lord!"* (Lomax 1950, p.XI)

Now let me conclude this quick medley with the fresh memories of Basil Davidson recounting the first appearance of Amilcar Cabral in *No fist is big enough to hide the sky*, his memoir of the liberation of Guinea-Bissau under the guidance of the PAIGC. In the tent where they shared a bottle of whiskey after a night of walking in the bush with a group of militants.

As for us, it began right after my plane landed in Banjul. It was dark and showery, a typical rainy season night. The streets were flooded and barely illuminated if it was not for the headlights of the taxis. Alieu was standing with Famara under the roof of Ef's restaurant, and I immediately recognized him because of the Occupy Westfield t-shirt he was wearing and his dreadlocks. We picked him up in the taxi and we headed towards the pension where I had booked my room.

Once there, we sat on the balcony outside my

room drinking red wine and smoking Piccadilly and as the night grew longer, we came to the agreement that this could be done.

I remember him saying while opening the door of his house “You should start with saying that friendship is very important for me...”

The first section of this work covers the life story of Alieu. Born on May 3 1992, Alieu Bah, also known as Immortal X, is a writer, a passionate reader, an activist, a third world revolutionary and a pan-Africanist. One of the most salient traits that I have remarked about him is a never-ending oscillation between political credo and spirituality. In his journey, he has encountered both at the same time and since then the two have never stopped overlapping, clashing, interrupting, rediscovering and accommodating one another.

As a dropped out boy at the age of fourteen, Alieu promptly started to craft his own education, a route dotted with mentors who opened up the world of literature to him and unlocked the lyrics of Sizzla and Luciano; comrades from the AAPRP, the All African People Revolutionary Party founded by Kwame Ture, who refined his sense of the struggle; members of the Tablighi Jamaat thanks to whom he discovered the beauty of the stories of the companions of the prophet Muhammad and the fulfillment of the missionary work and Sufi Sheikhs who led him to the strict discipline of the Tarbiya and to the realization of the oneness with God.

All these pivotal encounters register in his oral account and co-exist with more intimate presences with references to his hard-working mom, his dad, a Fula breadwinner who died far too young, his brothers and closest friend, called Famara and Barry, the old man with whom he used to listen to the radio to, while theorizing that presumably the voices came from the battery, where the people were hiding.

A genuine curiosity and capacity to be enchanted along with a unique stubbornness

has turned him into the 27-year-old man he is today, whom at any time, is ready to raise funds to pay his younger brother’s school fees or one of his friends; sits as a dedicated judge for the National Slam Poetry contest for young Gambians; goes out in the middle of the night to pay bail to get his friends out of jail and holds firm in his position, all the while denouncing the injustices and the mismanagement of the powerful on TV, on the radio as well as social media.

The first chapters retrace the childhood in Sanyang, the discovering of Anna Karenina, of the philosophy of Marx and then of Marcus Garvey, his early teens as an active member of the Tablighi Jamaat and as a young writer for the Young Observer. Thereafter, his move from the village to urban Gambia where he encountered the world of Sufism, listening to Gambian rap, and later on, after a brief stint in Anarchism, the consolidation of his Marxist-Leninist credo through the writings of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and Chairman Mao.

All the while on the background, the dictatorship of Yahya Jammeh challenged by his editorials for the Standard Newspaper even before the first signs of his dismissal until the 1st of December 2016, that marked the end of a dark era; the proclamation of a new government run by Adam Barrow; the birth of the movement #Gambiashasdecided which contested the decision of the former dictator to reject the results of the elections, the exile in Senegal and then finally, thanks to the intervention of ECOWAS, the settlement of Barrow after the departure of Jammeh in Equatorial Guinea.

But as Amilcar Cabral constantly reminds us in his writings and in his speeches – to always be on alert, to never be adventurous and rushed in claiming easy victories, Alieu has always kept a posture of defiance towards the new government even when his friends criticized him for his hard fist.

And this is how in a short period of time, the hopefulness for the new democracy gave way to the post-Jammeh blues.

From then on, it has been a constant struggle for denouncing the blatant poverty, the lack of infrastructure, the persistent light and water cuts that caused the birth of Occupy Westfield and its protest, the crumbling healthcare system, the criminalization of the youth with the everyday abuse of their bodies by the police, the tacit accords by the EU to facilitate deportations, the sale of both land and water to the Chinese and Europeans and last but certainly not least, the connivance of the statesmen to make the country a sex tourism hotspot.

You do not have to be an anthropologist to evaluate the consequences of this structural violence when your father died from high blood pressure; when many of your mates the same age as you, are dying prematurely because of bad roads; of a shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea or the lack of proper hospitals. You feel it, you taste it and you see it every day. It is bitter, it hurts and it makes you angry.

As the biographical recounting comes to an end, a more extensive part focused on the exploration of different topics begins aptly named an exposition of theories, beliefs and ideologies that is always personal, full of anecdotes and firsthand experiences.

We begin to talk about pan-Africanism while listening to Luciano and Sizzla singing *Be humble and wise, be humble and wise, speaketh the truth and not the lies just be strong as the I, even I will help the I, Rastafari paradise*. Then we swim deep into Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah, Thomas Sankara and Amílcar Cabral. Thereafter we discuss the project of African internationalism today; of his interpretation of Scientific Socialism; of the challenge of a revolutionary language able to unveil the lies of cultural hegemony, of the historical importance of the Third World and the Tricontinental Conference in Havana in 1966 and of the many tentacles with which Neocolonialism is choking the life out of a continent and its people.

Conversely the last four topics are declined with a more specific attention to the

socio-cultural environment of Gambia. Race and tribalism constitute one of the most controversial issues in the country, a pacific cohabitation between Wolof, Mandinka, Fula, Jola and other smaller ethnic groups if compared to other African countries, nonetheless at times plagued by prejudices, clichés and by the machinations of the so-called men in power. With human rights and democracy Alieu puts to question the neoliberal posture and vocabulary of the majority of NGOs (Choudry & Kapoor, 2013), state actors and civil society organizations, while in Freedom of movement at stake is the Nation-State with his tradition of erecting walls and borders on the premise of the exclusion of the other, the migrant, the clandestine, the potential rapist, the petty criminal, the jihadi terrorist who threatens to plunder an already crumbling Europe.

Being anchored in an analysis of the reality, based on scientific materialism certainly entails a dismantling of all the superstitious beliefs in supernatural entities and witchcraft but at the same time allows you to reevaluate the effectiveness of some curative herbs and indigenous treatments. And this is precisely what Alieu does while proving the efficiency of the Moringa tree to cure malaria all the while paying tribute to the long transmission of knowledge from the healers of his community still in danger of exploitation or denigration — depending on the interests of the major pharmaceutical groups and the WHO — presumably the only holders of ‘scientific knowledge’.

We end with some reflections on mortality, an intense mourning, an evocation of all the losses from the most remote to the very latest, a recognition that death is always political, an admission of the ephemeral permanence of our bodies and lives onto this earth and the strong tenacity we hold in finding continuity in the mundane and spiritual realms from where we pull the strength to move forward, crying, smiling and trying to do better so that we may have our chance to be joyful in our own way.

It was mainly thanks to the reading of Eduardo Galeano's *Days and Nights of Love and War* that I realized and then decided that however incomplete, fragmented or personal my writing might appear to some, it should accompany the life story of Alieu.

On a sleepless night in the heart and the heat of Kololi, I found myself reflecting upon some of the concerns about the function of writing raised by Galeano in *In defense of the word*, the closing essay of the book. And he wonders, presumably leaving Buenos Aires in June 1976, "One writes, in reality, for the people whose luck or misfortune one identifies with - the hungry, the sleepless, the rebels, and the wretched of this earth — and the majority of them are illiterate. Among the literate minority, how many can afford to buy books? Is this contradiction resolved by proclaiming that one writes for that facile abstraction known as 'the masses'?" (1983, p.169)

The dilemma is solved neither by Galeano nor by me, yet I agree with him when right after, he says that in an incarcerated society, free literature can exist only as denunciation and hope. And I am convinced that if this is one of its functions, then not only can, but must it, exist. Firmly believing in his vocation and in his instrument Galeano can't understand "why those writers write who declare airily that writing makes no sense in a world where people are dying of hunger. Nor can I understand those who convert the word into the target of their rage or a fetish. Words are weapons, and they can be used for good or for evil; the crime can never be blamed on the knife." (1983, p.178)

And if words are weapons because of their ability to show reality and raise consciousness, then writing can and must be a force of resistance and of counter-power. One that defies mainstream history, one that offers, "in spite of persecution and censorship, the testimony of our time and our people—for now and later". One may write as if to say: "We are here, we were here; we are thus, we were thus." (Galeano 1983, p.178)

Therefore, my testimony is not an appendix but rather a parallel story that at times echoes,

overlaps and reflects on the matters of our recordings while in other cases it autonomously draws its own trajectory in Gambia, exploring places, encountering people, grounding with them and discussing different issues.

The courage with which Galeano filled its pages with a history inspired by the ordinary people he met is the same courage with which he exposed his fragilities and intimacies. The same courage by which he denounced the daily injustice perpetrated by the system and the exact same courage that ended up somehow enchanting me. Before me all in one, I had just discovered a poet, a writer, a conscious anti-imperialist writer, a storyteller, a witness to history, but before everything else, a concerned human being who loved grounding with the people he writes about.

And this is the only thing I assume to be, apart from the conscious and anti-imperialist posture. I too, I am concerned and I love to ground with my people. I love being with them. I love listening to their stories full of joy, their wittiness, their hardship, their complaints, their cleverness and their teachings. I love sitting with them, laughing with them and then out of the blue responding or taking the initiative and shoot them with my camera to immortalize these, our very special shared moments. I don't claim any portentous action, I'm not saving lives in the Mediterranean. I don't have the power to cure malaria and I cannot advocate for them in court however, I feel them as they feel me, and if I have written words it is simply because of them. The energy they have fueled me with and the love, the concern they have shown me. Praise to the words that give justice to the ordinary people and their daily struggles. Praise to all who are committed in documenting their beautiful souls. I am merely a small cog in the machine that dares to speak the truth to the power and here I will stay, no matter what happens. I will never forget the white privilege I enjoy, simply because I was born in the cradle of imperialism and in order to ensure that the machine continues to work, I will continue to challenge the powerful, the corrupt and the

oppressors and eventually win - someday.

Evoking her deceased companion for life, Patricia Rodney understands that: "'Grounding' is a practice, a way of living. It is not just a word. It is how Walter lived his life." (2019, p.131)

At the end of the '60s Rodney was pointing out in *The groundings with my brothers*, that there are many things you can learn when you are in contact with the people, and one of those things is humility. As a young professor with a PhD in History during the years he spent in Jamaica, Rodney dared to sit on a little oil drum in one of the gullies of Kingston with some black brothers, most of them Rastafarians, and ground together with them. Remembering the time spent with them, he recognized that their conversations were important, not only because he had the opportunity to share with them his knowledge of African history; his analysis of the black condition in America and the relevance of the Black Power movement in the West Indies, but also because he was gaining much more. He learnt from them. They taught him to be humble, and he repeats it again and again as to digging at his academic colleagues, whom puzzled, thought he was mad because he was hanging out with a 'bunch of junkies', "with the black brothers you learn humility because they are teaching you. And you get confidence too, you get a confidence that comes from an awareness that our people are beautiful." (Rodney 1969, p.68)

Knowing what a huge part of humanity had to endure during the slave trade and colonialism, and still has to endure today under neocolonialism, what these people perform every day is a miracle. Rodney pays particular tribute to the Jamaicans, but I feel that his reflections can be extended to all the people who in the oppressor-oppressed dialectics play the part of the oppressed; and speaking of my experience, to the people I met in Gambia.

"It is a miracle how those fellows live. They live and they are physically fit, they have a vitality of mind, they have a tremendous

sense of humor, they have depth. How do they do that in the midst of the existing conditions? And they create, they are always sayings things. [...] Black people who have suffered all these years create. That is amazing." (Rodney 1969, p.68)

This is for Jamal and Elijah; for the enduring determination of Anchu and Maria; for the little Muhammad who is about to learn how to walk; for Famara and the help he gave me when navigating into Gambian society; for Maimuna - her curiosity and the liveliness with which her mother Ef must come to terms with; for all the hardworking women like Fanta, Aissatou and Annemarie as well for the many casual encounters which I have not recorded and of course, for Alieu. For the books, the thoughts, the music and everything we shared. I have done my best to live the grounding with you and I have so much love for all of you.

We can pretend that we are neutral scientists collecting unambiguous data and that the people we are studying are living amid various unconscious systems of determining forces of which they have no clue and to which only we have the key. But it is only pretense.

— Paul Rabinov

Introduction



As an encounter between two individuals, the inter\view is an exchange of words, it takes place in a context and it is possible because the two persons involved share a common ground. But this is not sufficient, what makes the inter\view meaningful is the exploration of a difference. (Portelli 2018)

As the one whose role was mainly to listen, I had to attune to Alieu's own speech, letting him take his own trajectory, avoiding establishing a rigorous program that would only follow my assumptions and needs. In this sense, active listening and openness are fundamental to transform the interview into a dialogue between human beings.

There is neither mechanics nor prompt recipes, you can only learn the art of the attunement living in the field, adjusting your body, your mind and your senses to the practice of a contextual acoustemology, borrowing a concept crafted by Steven Feld (2017). I did not immerse in the narrative environment woven by Alieu making a tabula rasa of my previous assumptions, I tried to inhabit it learning how to navigate it day by day how, learning when to ask a question, when to keep quiet, when to laugh and sometimes interfere. I was not his mirror, I was

there as a foreigner, yes but still an equal, and this is why the story he shared with me would not be the same if he told it to someone else. I wanted to understand how he ended up being the 27 years old Gambian he is today and the ways in which the surrounding socio-economic landscape impacted on him becoming who he is today. I was not there to judge him and I was not looking for some historical truth or something that could be turned into an anthropological pattern of the Gambian youth in the 2010s. I had only one desire: to collect his story, celebrate the human voice for, as Eduardo Galeano posits “when it is genuine, when it is born of the need to speak, no one can stop the human voice. When denied a mouth, it speaks with the hands or the eyes, or the pores, or anything at all. Because every single one of us has something to say to the others, something that deserves to be celebrated or forgiven by others.” (1991, p. 25) Who could deny the powerfulness of the voice as a tool able to explore and convey the many meanings of life?

When the interview entails dialoguing it becomes a bridge that we cross in order to speak to each other. If what we share makes the dialogue possible, what separates us leads the basis of the meaningful. (Portelli 2018)

To get closer to the voice of my main interlocutor, Alieu, and the other individuals that dot my ethnographic memoir, I decided to collocate my work at the intersection with three specific anthropological approaches: the narrative turn as fostered by postmodern anthropology, collaborative ethnography, and public anthropology which pours from both previous major theoretical contributions and insights.

It seems to me that the above-mentioned schools of thought within our discipline share multiple points of connection and significant echoes, therefore, it is primarily worth specifying their standpoints by focusing on the perspectives of their major supporters and, at the same time, to explain why they are relevant for my research. Among the most debated issues during the 1980s related with

the anthropological approach, in the light of post-colonial studies, was the need to restore coevalness to the other, too often relegated to another time and space (Fabian 1983, p.35). The responsibility of the anthropologist, therefore, does not lie so much in recognizing an anachronistic error, but in overcoming the ideology of allochronism (Fabian 1983, p.32) in order to write an otherness that has the relationship and recognition as its premises. In this sense, placing the other in the history of colonial relations constituted the starting point to grasp the point of view of the populations once subjected to European colonialism.

Around the same years, other anthropologists joined Fabian reformist critique, solicited by the necessities of dealing with a post-colonial world where the classical role of the anthropologists as the one who explains the exotic otherness lost its hermeneutical and epistemological significance. Among them, George Marcus, Michael M. J. Fischer and James Clifford played a prominent role in shaping post-modern anthropology as a bias through which questions the poetics and politics of unchallenged representation of cultures. Both published in 1986, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, represent the texts that lay the groundwork for a renewal of the discipline.

The essays forming *Writing culture*, are a revisited version of intensive discussions held at the School of American Research in Sante Fe, New Mexico in 1984, whose general purpose was to focus on “the making of ethnography texts.”

What is highlighted and deconstructed are the rhetorical processes on which scientific authority is based, the fragmentary aspect - inherent to the limits imposed by sensory perception - of descriptions that nevertheless claim to be totalizing, and the hidden partiality of data produced in socio-political contexts in which the anthropologist participates. This leads to a reflection on factors external to the text, which are nevertheless major

constituents: the colonial situation, the *de facto* inequality between the authors and those they talk about without giving them a voice, the multidimensional problems raised by "cultural translation."

Then giving these concerns, how can ethnography be still useful in globalized and interconnected worlds, where notwithstanding the inequalities in the right of representation, each and every human being has the potential to assert his voice and claim autonomy in conveying his culture?

In his introduction, Clifford (1986) uses a pivotal quote from Roland Barthes' *Jeunes Chercheurs*. The last sentence in this quote states that "Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one." (1986) If not a "new object", ethnography must then be looked at in new ways. Ethnography is changing and diverse. Clifford states it best when he says that "Ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning. It poses its questions at the boundaries of civilizations, cultures, classes, races, and genders. Ethnography decodes and recodes, telling the grounds of collective order and diversity, inclusion and exclusion. It describes processes of innovation and structuration, and is itself part of the processes." (1986, p.2-3)

If on the one hand an interdisciplinary approach demands a constant attention to other disciplines such as literature, poetics, politics and history on the other, it is mandatory for the author to recognize that ethnographic truths are always inherently partial, committed and incomplete (Clifford 1986).

This is a point that must be understood as a recognition of limitedness and finitude of all ethnographic ventures. We cannot speak for the other, nor suppose that our translations are the unequivocal product of a scientific formula because "all constructed truths are made possible by powerful lies of exclusion and rhetoric. Even the best ethnographic texts—serious, true fictions—are systems, or economies, of truth. Power and history work through them, in ways their authors cannot

fully control." (Clifford 1986, p.7)

Further on in the volume, Tyler (1986) in his contribution proposes that the key to understand how ethnography is written is by how and what it evokes. Provoking in the reader of ethnography more questions than answers is likely the very reason the author writes as he writes. Tyler sustains that "because post-modern ethnography privileges *discourse over text*, it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer" (1986, p.126)

What the author claims subsequently, is precisely what has informed my grounding way of doing ethnography: a practice that rejects the posture of a transcendental researcher, where the boundary between observer and observed is senseless, dissolved by the affirmation of a mutual and reflexive co-presence, and replaced by the emergence of an inclusive dialogue.

Taylor specifies this kind of dialogue as

a cooperative story that would result in a polyphonic text none of whose participants would have the final word in the form of a framing story or encompassing synthesis—a discourse on the discourse. It might be just the dialogue itself, or possibly a series of juxtaposed paratactic tellings of a shared circumstance, as in the Synoptic Gospels, or perhaps only a sequence of separate tellings in search of a common theme, or even a contrapuntal interweaving of tellings, or of a theme and variations. (Tyler 1986, p. 126)

My research relies primarily on this "contrapuntal interweaving of tellings" since it is built on the life story of Alieu from the one part, and on my ethnographic memoir on the other. My choice to not intervene, interfere or translate the words of Alieu comes from this precise conviction that the ethnographer-anthropologist is to be viewed less as a translator or an interpreter of world-views but rather as a middleman, someone who facilitates the spreading of a lived experience into the public

realm, someone who sometimes might take the initiative or the first move, but as in a game of chess, requires a companion for the play. This interweaving is to be seen firstly in the double repartition of the work, where as already state, the life story and the ethnographic memoir are not the sum of two-isolated monologue but a constant mirroring and confrontation, a juxtaposition of voices shaped in a given lapse of time.

Traces of the dialogic nature of both section are present in the introduction and in the conclusion of the life story as an attempt to render in the page a taste of ethnographic things (Stoller 1989) as an ebb and flow of echoes, mutual stimulations and resonances. The dialogue then became a space for the emergence of new questioning, for the working and reworking of the memory, bringing to light to a reconsideration of the past, present and future.

At the same time, Alieu's voice often permeates my ethnographic memoir, either directly or indirectly, attesting how the established relationship goes beyond the room that hosted the storytelling.

Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences also starts from a reflection on the practice of fieldwork in a context of decolonization, where interconnection is increasing and identities are constantly being reshaped.

According to Marcus, overcoming the failure of classical and functionalist ethnographies whose authors have silenced the voice of the other, flattening their point of view, requires the use of an epistemology "that takes full account of intractable contradiction, paradox, irony and uncertainty in the explanation of human activities." (1986, p.15)

Further on in the text, Marcus and Fischer propose different experimental ways of writing that can meet the discipline's new aspirations.

Among these, they mention the potential of the life story as a tool to provide the way in which the individual culturally frames the narrative of his/her life. (1986, p. 57)

Because it invokes dialogue, the life history is a mediation on the relationships of anthropologists with their informants, which reveals how this narrative is aroused and constructed together. Modernist ethnography and its experiments develop when the classical or realistic monograph of which the ethnographer is the only author is no longer able to represent the experience of its informers. The new ways of producing the texts explored by authors are strongly influenced by the notion of dialogue, which must be understood as an effort "to present more voices within a text, and to encourage readings from different perspectives." (Fischer and Marcus 1986, p.68)

Four rhetorical devices whose effectiveness lies in transmitting the dialogical textuality of ethnographic experience, are considered: dialogue, discourse, cooperative texts and surrealism.

The choice of either dialogue or discourse involves the incorporation of other voices within the texts, although they remain the production of a single author; cooperative texts, on the other hand, are composed by the ethnographer and his collaborators and aim at a polyphonic reconstitution of the actors' cultural reality. (Fischer and Marcus 1986, p.69-71)

However, the approach used by Vincent Crapanzano in *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980), defined by the authors as a surrealist provocation in postmodern anthropology, is the example that best clarifies the concerns that inform my research.

Since interpretation may impose distortions or over-interpretations, the story of Tuhami's life presents itself as a puzzling collection of edited transcripts urging the reader to actively participate in the process of interpretation. As highlighted by the authors "Tuhami derives its rhetorical power from Crapanzano's holding back on what would normally be the authority of the ethnographer over his own account, thus making room for an active reader drawn into a process of inquiry, presented as puzzling as mysterious". (Fischer and Marcus 1986, p.72).

The open-endedness of Tuhami's personal portrait may raise questions about the effectiveness and purpose of the enterprise: Who is Tuhami? Does he represent a segment of a community or is he just the expression of an individual? How was the editing done? Perhaps, the authors ask, providing more comments would have helped the reader to better understand the social landscape surrounding his narrative. (Fischer and Marcus 1986)

That said, my withdrawal from a role of pedantic remarking during the course of Alieu's narrative exposition might probably raise the criticism of a more structured and conventional discipline, the one who bears the tradition of Geertz famous statement, according to which anthropology consists in an interpretation of interpretations, a discourse built on the discourse of the social group studied.

This view of anthropological work does not therefore substantially differentiate the translator of texts from the translator of cultures. In reality, however, this vision suffers from a reductive and authoritarian approach, in which three variables that are intimately related to fieldwork are not considered: first, the negotiation of meanings with the people with whom we research - who can respond, react, reformulate, exemplify, confirm those meanings with everyday behavior, while written texts tend to reduce the undecidable nature of the same.

Secondly, the perceptive and cognitive experience of the ethnographer who is present with his body and his sensibility, who communicatively and cognitively shares the experience of life in a community is silenced or relegated to some field note in the margin of the page.

Finally, the power relations in the construction of the discourse and the final text, as well as the power relations directly involved in the production of the field statements are bypassed and resolved in the academic nature of the theories produced by the social scientist.

In the light of this triple impasse, I have tried to keep track of the meanings negotiated and contested in my memoir, leaving Alieu free to elaborate and transmit his own.

Moreover, the memoir bears witness to the experience as sensually lived in a gendered body, while the open-endedness of both life story and memoir, constructed as a confrontation between equals, on the one hand confirms the attempt to prevent the insurgence of asymmetrical power relations, on the other hand wards off the risk of reductionism that any forced theorization entails.

The second current that inspired my approach, Collaborative ethnography, is outlined by Luke Eric Lassiter, one of his major proponents, mainly in the monograph *Collaborative Ethnography* (2005).

Collaborative ethnography is presented as an invitation from "Reading over the Shoulders of Natives" to "Reading alongside Natives," (2005, p.3) to turn the I-they relationship into an I-you dialogue it is mandatory to start again from an examination of the power and politics of representation. This concern raises from the critique of anthropology enmeshment with colonialism, and its contribution into the making of the colonized subjects, through hegemonic cultural ideology and mystifications. The input that pushes the author into venturing in the delineation of a revised mode of doing ethnography can be paraphrased with two fundamental questions: Who has the right to represent whom and for what purpose? Whose discourse are privileged in the ethnographic texts? (Lassiter 2005, p.4)

Although recognizing the innovative contributions of anthropologists such as Rosaldo, Clifford and Marcus, Lassiter believes, relying on Clifford, that there are still hierarchical arrangements in the ethnographic discourse.

The issue can be resolved using ethnographic models that address both the concerns of the community within which we research, and whose textual results must be available for consultation by the very protagonists of our monographs.

This entails a double commitment for the researchers “to write texts that are both responsive and relevant to the public with whom they work.” (Lassiter 2005, p.6)

I will now illustrate some of the suggestions that serve as a theoretical basis for my work: first, true collaboration requires a sharing of authority and vision; it is a choice to invite the consultants to give form, suggestions and guidance for the text to be produced.

In defining the topics to be discussed in the life story, Alieu and I have constantly enriched, modified, added and revised our list. In addition, Alieu edited the first transcript of the life story and was the first reader of my ethnographic memoir. And he was far from being a passive reader, he commented, suggested revision, appreciated my ability to capture daily life in The Gambia, while advising me to lighten some overly detailed descriptions.

This practice, according to Lassiter, “transforms the role of the so-called informer: instead of appearing as collaborators who merely inform the production of knowledge, they assume the role of consultant, of co-intellectual.”(2005, p.13)

Moreover, collaboration, which means working together from fieldwork to text, strengthens the political commitment of the anthropologist and the writing. Writing thus becomes a way of activism, of marching alongside the causes embodied by our collaborators.

Our mutual commitment has pushed me to march alongside him against the current government, which has promised to step back after three years, but is now adamant to remain in power for another two years, or to read, comment and express my point of view on his essays.

The position I have taken corresponds to a change in the conception of the role of the ethnographer, since I have never seen myself as an inquisitor, but always as a reflexive and sensitive participant in Gambian society. (Lassiter 2005)

Besides, the author recognition of the progress

made by feminist anthropology in fostering a human encounter in all stages of the research (Lassiter 2005), brings to the fore front an uneasy challenge: my main collaborator, an African of communist and pan-Africanist background, spoke in full awareness of the fact that he was once the colonized, the native informer, the object of the ethnographic gaze, and together we reflected on who has the right to write culture for whom and how to arrive at a legitimate representation of the shared project.

And that is how, by committing ourselves to building a relationship based on trust, we have come to an end, both convinced about the need to balance the weight of our voices, for my part by removing the presumption of explaining Alieu, for his part by overcoming the distrust linked to my status as a white European researcher compromised by the legacy of colonialism.

A radical position already assumed by Zora Neale Hurston who, not only overshadowed the boundary between fiction and reality in works such as *Mules and Men* (1935), *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and *Tell My Horse* (1938), but also criticized common notions of race, culture and gender, recognizing the complex and dialectical relationships within black culture.

Doing fieldwork in the American South and the Caribbean, she adopted a literary and intersubjective perspective to ethnography where the use of narrative and dialogue often emerges.

Positioning herself as a trusted companion whose role was to record and transmit black culture, she refused to translate culture for the benefit of outsiders. In doing so, Hurston questioned her own power of interpretation, insisting on the need for researchers to recognize the limits of the representation strategies commonly employed.

By virtue of this foresight, she was criticized and ostracized by her academic colleagues who described her work as unprofessional and lacking in scientific accuracy. (Lassiter 2006)

Drawing on the contributions of feminist anthropology and the post-modernist current, Lassiter comes to delineate four principles that should underpin any project with a collaborative vocation, all of which I have tried to put into practice in this work.

These are summarized as:

- I. ethical and moral responsibility to consultants;
- II. honesty about the fieldwork process;
- III. accessible and dialogic writing;
- IV. collaborative reading, writing, and co-interpretation of ethnographic texts with consultants.

Given that I have already discussed the last three points mentioned above, I would like to focus on the importance of the first one. Taking ethical and moral responsibility towards our consultants means abandoning the myth of impartiality, neutrality and objectivity. If we want to be faithful to our commitment, we need to recognize that "social analysis must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics, and their politics." (Rosaldo in Lassiter 2006, p.104)

Precisely for this reason, it is inevitable that I take a radical stance not only in letting Alieu speak for himself, but also with regard to some provocative statements in my narrative ethnography.

The decision to include my personal experience in the field as lived through my body and feelings should not be misinterpreted as an ode to individualistic aesthetics, but rather accepted as a commitment to transparency.

A central problem for all ethnographers is to struggle to find a balance with the experience of the Self and the experience of our collaborators, while remaining aware of the co-experience undertaken.

The author keeps asking himself how to use the ethnographic experience in written

ethnography? Moreover, precisely, does talking about the Self mean silencing the voices of our collaborators and blocking their understanding?

Against all odds, Lassiter finds his personal story in the field with the Native American Kiowa relevant and effective, especially because many of his consultants found his story not only interesting, but also necessary in the overall project. (Lassiter 2005)

In addition, just like him, I think our story is important. It is a fact, a mutual economy of taking and giving: in the same way that our collaborators tell us their experience, so we have to share ours with them.

Sharing an experience also means recognizing our vulnerabilities, thereby renouncing the posture of the scientist who seeks frigid confirmation for his theories; as Ruth Behar argues, "The use of personal narrative, if creatively employed can lead the reader, not into miniature bubbles of navel-gazing, but into enormous sea of serious social issues". (Behar in Lassiter 2005, p. 110)

Or even, as Michael Jackson points out, the presence of the anthropologist's written narrative can be understood as an attempt "to recover the sense in which experience is situated within relationships and between persons", (Jackson in Lassiter 2005, p.109) which allows us to show how each representation stems from a democratic confrontation, "as a dialogue between two subjective individuals who come to a given project with particular histories that should be elaborated rather than veiled." (Lassiter 2005, p.109)

The style I have adopted to present my personal story is valid and relevant precisely because it is informed and pervaded by a constant negotiation of meanings between my interlocutors and me, by a continuous dialogue and comparison between their point of view and mine.

Before moving on to consider the ambitious objectives of public anthropology, I would like to conclude with a reminder, borrowing Lassiter's words: "we must always question, along with our consultants: Is my experience

taking away from or enhancing our collaborative ethnographic story?" (Lassiter 2005, p.116)

Public anthropology emerges in the late 1990s as the name for a new book series published by the University of California Press, edited by Robert Borofsky and Naomi Schneider. The adjective public represents a precise aim: to address engaging issues to a non-academic audience, reinvigorating the role of anthropology within the society, exploring possibilities to overcome its intellectual isolation and insularity. (Borofsky 2007)

Borofsky and De Lauri identify distinct forefathers and foremothers who adopted this double task: Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, Mary Douglas and Eduardo Mondlane. Each of them contributed to expand to wider public anthropological insights. (2019)

For example, Mondlane, after studying anthropology in South Africa and US, returned to Tanzania to fight against Portuguese rule in his country, with the help of Amilcar Cabral he founded FRELIMO, (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique) and became the leader of the revolutionary struggle in Mozambique.

Public anthropology emphasizes the role of the anthropologist as an engaged intellectual; through its research, he fosters change in society, purposing new framings on highly contested and disputed issues.

Provocatively, more often than not today, the authors affirm the anthropologists are taking liberal, non-progressive positions to secure grants from institutions and public agencies, failing thus to engage in crucial phenomena of our contemporaneity. With their own words: "Would a project proposal be funded that claims, from the very beginning, that the only way to address the so called migration and refugee crisis in Europe is to open European borders?" (Borofsky and De Lauri 2019, p.12)

That is the point, if we want to be relevant to our society and the communities where we are adopted and righteous in our principles, we should look back to the past, to figures

like Boas who openly denounced Nazism, or Gramsci who spent most of his life in fascist prison.

Moreover, public anthropology, in its commitment to help others, distances itself from the general attitude of the actors and agencies of charity, development and NGOs, since these institutions preach the hierarchical separation between giver and receiver. No. We are supposed to be against charity, and promote reciprocity, equality and respect. (Borofsky and De Lauri 2019)

As regards to the kind of written contributions available, the authors suggests that though ethnography remain the core of the anthropologists' work, as in the case of *The Land of Open Graves*, (2015) the recent monograph by Jason de Leon on the border crossing between Mexico and the United States, engaging in experimental and innovative publications should also be considered. Pushing writing beyond academic standards must be regarded as an added value in the production of anthropological knowledge. As examples of creative writings shaped by personal experience in the field, the authors include, Renato Rosaldo's *The Day of Shelly's Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief* (2014), Françoise Héritier's *Le Sel de la vie* (2012), Marc Augé's *Bonheurs du jour* (2018), Clara Gallini's *Incidenti di percorso* (2016), and Ruth Behar's *Lucky Broken Girl* (2017).

In this regard, I suggest we start also looking at other examples coming from different background, such as Anna Badhken's *Fisherman Blues: A West African Community at Sea* (2018), and *Walking with Abel: Journeys with the Nomads of the African Savannah* (2015). Though not an anthropologist by training, Badhken's memoirs, are powerful and poetic examples of ethnographic fieldwork; in *Fishermen Blues*, she recounts her experience of 8 months, living with the fishermen of Joal, Senegal's largest artisanal harbor, learning the work of the *oupa*, the wolof term for decky, addressing issues such as the impact of climate change and mechanized fishing on the local economy and ecosystem.

In *Walking with Abel*, Badkhen recounts his journey with a group of Fulani from Mali through the Sahel where the nomads practice transhumance, accompanying each other with the music they download on their mobile phones and exchanging stories of shepherds and swindlers, griots and gurus, enriched by the myths that found their past, give meaning to their identity and try to protect the future. Being committed for Borofsky means addressing the world's crucial problems, looking at Bourgeois, he agrees with him that anthropology should study the power relations that made the people we study suffering disproportionately (2019). Bourgeois himself, along with Scheper-Hughes and Paul Farmer are exemplary in their denunciation of structural violence, abuses on dignity, global inequities in the South and the North of the world. Their works on San Francisco junkies, *Rigtheous Dopefiend* (2009); urban violence, *Violence at the Urban Margins* (2015); organ trafficking, *Commodifying Bodies* (2002); and institutionalized denial of human rights, *Pathologies of Power* (2003), all testify an engagement beyond the academic arena and an effort to advocate for the subjects of their research.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes herself picks up the pen to support the development of a public anthropology, for her, academic activity does not exclude a priori public and social commitment. (Scheper-Hughes 2009, p. 2)

The anthropologist reflects on her dual role as an academic and a public figure committed to the fight against human organ trafficking, as well as the adoption market and death squads in Brazil. Recognizing the merits of a hybrid professional profile that does not bother to get the hands dirty collaborating with investigative journalists, documentary filmmakers and photographers, the author recalls, *en passant*, the social and political commitment of intellectuals such as Bourdieu, Foucault and Freyre, who throughout their careers have taken on a significant role in the criticism of a France intoxicated by consumerism, in the battle for the rights of homosexuals, in the

definition of a Brazilian identity anchored in ethnic and cultural syncretism. (Scheper-Hughes 2009, p.2)

Further on, Borofsky stresses the importance of collaboration, though sometimes complicated, collaborative projects enhance the role of the anthropologists who should not be technicians or lackeys of the powerful, but rather independent voices that challenge common-sense assumptions in their engagement to speak truth to power. (2019) Therefore, it is critical to collaborate with active participants aware of the benefit that the projects would lead to their lives.

Reflecting on the diminishing exposure of the discipline in the public realm, Borofsky finds that it is due also to the hesitancy to change the status quo and the hegemonic structures. Few anthropologists are ready to risk their chairs and position in departments for their beliefs. One of them is David Graeber, a self-proclaimed anarchist involved in Occupy Wall Street movement, whose contract at Yale was not renewed in 2005 with 'officially' no reason. However to him, the reason was obvious: his politics. "So many academics lead such frightened lives; the whole system sometimes seems designed to encourage paranoia and timidity. I wasn't willing to live like that." (Graeber in Borofsky 2019, p. 210)

Finally, in the last chapter of *An Anthropology of Anthropology*, Borofsky too, recognizes the value of storytelling in anthropology. In fact, reading anthropology often confuses and overwhelms the uninitiated, who ends up relegating our reference oeuvres to the shelf. I have witnessed that too among many of my friends who stumbled disconcertingly before anthropology during their master programs in psychology, art or literature.

In this sense, affirms Borofsky:

There is every reason to believe that stories about impact—without the obscuring language and references—will be well received by those beyond the academy. Humans frequently understand the world through stories. In our fieldwork, we frequently rely on the informants' stories

to make sense of the group we are studying. Emotional, powerful anecdotes may count more with public audiences than a mass of statistics. As Michael Jones and Deseraï Crow suggest, scientists “would do well to recognize themselves as storytellers—not to distort the truth, but to help people to connect with problems and issues on a more human level in terms of what matters to them.” (Borofsky 2019, p.221-222)

I do strongly believe that storytelling should be included as a mode of dealing with our discipline; and this is precisely the direction I have undertaken in my work. Again, stories matter, powerful stories bring out our points of view in a way that captures readers both intellectually and emotionally, whether they spring from oral accounts or memoirs, stories vacate the needy obedience to formulate and shatter our experience in technical and anemic terms.

Along with the proponents of a public and engaged anthropology, I feel the urgency of a discipline that opens its ivory gate to the most ordinary curious people, and together with documentaries and documentary photography, the memoir is well suited to this task.

Agreeing with Hannah Arendt’s idea that storytelling is a strategy for transforming private into public meanings, Michael Jackson sees storytelling as a vital human strategy for maintaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. (Jackson 2003) From the beginning and ever before the day I pushed the bottom “rec” to start the recording, I was aware of Alieu’s agency and his agency predicted the agency of the many people I have encountered in Gambia, indeed I can say that my aim was to counter the different narratives and depictions of a devastated, suffering, tricky, aimless youth that circulate not only in the mainstream media but also in many anthropological accounts.

Storytelling is crucial especially in a process of redemption, in Alieu's case the coming to terms with the failure of the 'failed revolution' that ousted a dictator, Jammeh, to replace him

with a liberal entrepreneur holed up in his cabinet.

Moreover, the story, by enabling dialogue, allows us to embrace different points of view, sharing stories helps us to create a world that is more than the sum of its individual parts. While it is true that some stories can bring about inequality and division, as in the case of official narratives used to legitimize one's political gain, in many cases similar to Alieu's, telling one's own story does not involve affirming power over others, but “the ability of people to work together to create, share, affirm and celebrate something that is held in common.” (Jackson 2012, p. 170)

Sometimes narration can have the power to heal, but this differs from assuming that stories repress memory or deny the story, in Alieu's case it is a healing that consists in bridging the gap between the private and the public, because narration allows the regeneration and celebration of social existence, as well as the sharing of a story in which others can recognize themselves and where the voice of the same narrator reflects that of others. And it is precisely this that makes certain narratives, departing from being selfish or solipsistic acts, become places teeming with otherness.

An otherness that is not synonymous with extraneousness but represents the duty to celebrate the epic of one's own people of which the narrator is a part and whose role recalls the humble handing down of memories of griots.

In this regard Michael Jackson takes the example of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to show how the individual narrative of Apartheid can testify to the experience of a community as a whole. (Jackson 2012)

“Though stories emanate from personal experience, it is not the imprimatur of individual identity that gives a story value but the imprimatur of a community.” (Jackson 2012, p.187) The stories of the Apartheid era have value not because they absolve the individual, but because they heal a damaged

nation. In this sense, the individual narrative becomes a collective epic, precisely because personal meanings take on an emblematic value for all those who have suffered.

The Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission in The Gambia was set up to investigate the atrocities related to the 22-year rule of Jammeh. Inspired by the model of the South African Truth Commission, the TRRC, although it can be criticized for its rather institutionalized approach, has helped Gambians to deal with their past. Several actors were heard, victims, executioners and accomplices of Jammeh's torture apparatus. By becoming part of the routine of *literally* every Gambian citizen, who tuned into the radio or TV every day to listen to the auditions, the TRRC is an example of the compatibility of stories with collective goals.

Another key point for anthropologists listening to someone else's story is to assume the right disposition so that through listening we can reach understanding. Thereby it becomes fundamental on the one hand to focus on details, "particulars and things close at hand" (Jackson 2012, p.259) rather than reckless generalizations, while on the other hand, to put aside our preconceptions, move away from our usual habitus and immerse ourselves in a practical and social commitment in the lifeworlds of others. (Jackson 2012)

This is why following the example of Lila Abu Lughod (1993) and Paul Stoller (2007), together with the life story I chose to present my experience in the field using a humanistic approach conveyed by the form of the memoir. Refusing the well known social scientific generalization to produce cultures, storytelling enables the possibility to perceive similarities by insistently focusing on individuals and the particularities of their lives (Abu Lughod 1993), making our positionality a tool that facilitates the attunement.

In the same vein, Stoller argues that a good ethnography combined with a sense of locality and a concrete depiction of its characters must speak of love and loss, fear

and courage, fate and compassion, the most universal human things. That is why when it is able to deepen our insights of the human condition, the anthropological path leads inevitably towards the story. (Stoller 2007)

I engaged the memoir as a challenge, similar to the one Stoller was confronted with when his mentor of Songhai things, Adamu Jenitongo, disappointed by the ethnography his apprentice would present to the academy, incited him to write his story. "But to tell my story, you've had to tell yours as well. It takes two hands to secure a friendship..."(2007, p.182) As a genre the memoir is valuable for anthropologists because it contributes to extend the readership of ethnographic issues thanks to a story that is presented in accessible prose. (Stoller 2007)

In a recent interview, Stoller (2019) reflects on the challenge of storytelling in the troubled times we are all living in. Faced with problems such as immigration, growing discrimination and populism in Europe and the United States, we must be persistent and contribute to these issues, taking on the role of cultural critics, as Margaret Mead exemplarily committed herself at the time.

Writing in an accessible way is the key to contributing to the public good, because after all, theories come and go and what remains are stories. How many works of anthropology have had and continue to have resonance in the public? Few. We parroted science, filling our mouths with functionalism, structuralism, ethnoscience, terms that we praised when they were in vogue and then discarded as expired goods.

Precisely for this reason, for Stoller the greatest challenge for anthropologists today is to use any means necessary, "articles, newspaper articles, talking to audiences, writing blogs, producing plays, writing accessible ethnographies that people will read."(Stoller 2019, p.203)

An example is his *Jaguar: A History of Africans in America* (1999). Confronted with the dire reality of African migrants in Harlem, Stoller felt the need to use a different genre to

adequately describe that world instead of the classic anthropological monograph.

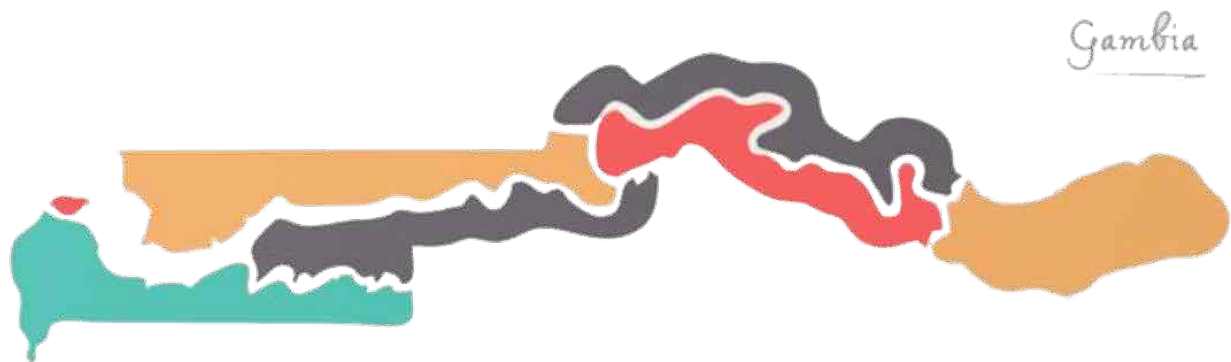
The decision to use fiction is explained by its suitability to explore how globalization emotionally affects the lives of the people it eradicates. (Stoller 2008) Through his novel, Stoller describes the emotional impact of globalization on the marriage of a West African couple, forced to face the challenges of separation. Economic circumstances force Issa, newly married, to leave his bride, Kadija, in West Africa, and travel to New York City in search of a better life.

Commenting on his works, Stoller affirms that "good ethnographers can successfully employ techniques from fiction—dialogue, descriptions of place, elements of a plot. And good fiction writers can successfully employ ethnographic description to give depth and breadth to their novels. (2008)" Of course there are difference between the two, as he puts it clearly, differences that makes them two distinct genres (Stoller 2008).

In fiction one is not bound by the canons of social science. The characters do not have to be real people. Events must not follow a linear sequence. Authors can explore the rush of feelings of their characters' inner lives. On the contrary, in ethnography one must seek narrative accuracy and one cannot enter into the minds of his informers.

In spite of this, I believe that today there is a high potential to blur the gap between creative non-fiction and ethnography, as both makes use of storytelling.

Perhaps because telling and reading simple stories that speak creatively of the human struggle, stories that open our eyes, that make us reflect on what it means to be human in the era of Instagram, Facebook, and algorithms, allows us to give light to the complexity that surrounds us, in an accessible way. Moreover, this is exactly what I have attempted to show in this introduction and that I have tried to experiment with in the following pages.



Chronology of contemporary Gambian history



1945-1965: The desire of the people of Gambia to rule themselves gradually developed after World War II. Political parties were created in the colony and some of them later extended to the Protectorate. On February 18th 1965, The Gambia gained its independence from Britain with Prime Minister Jawara representing The Gambia, although the country remained a constitutional monarchy within the Commonwealth under the crown of Queen Elizabeth II, with a titular head of state and a Governor-General who exercised executive powers on her behalf.

Shortly after, the government held a referendum proposing that an elected president replace the Queen of Gambia as head of state, but the referendum failed to obtain the majority required to amend the constitution.

1970-1994: On April 24th 1970, The Gambia became a republic following a majority-approved referendum, with Prime Minister Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara as head of state. The country was led by Jawara who was reelected five times thereafter.

The relative stability of the Jawara era was interrupted for the first time in a coup d'état in 1981. The coup was directed by Kukoi Samba who was inspired by revolutionary and anti-imperialist

ideas and aimed at destabilizing the ambiguous relations that Jawara had with the former colonizer.

In a 30-minute broadcast on Radio Gambia, Kukoi condemned the government and accused them of imperialism and neocolonialism, of creating corruption, tribalism and economic mismanagement, and of being the cause of unemployment and injustice. After a week of violence and many deaths, Jawara, who was in London to attend the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer, when the attack began, appealed to Senegal for help. Senegalese troops, after a firm resistance, eventually defeated the rebel force.

In the aftermath of the attempted coup, diplomats from Libya were expelled from the country because of suspicions of a Qaddafi involvement in the coup, while the Gambian Socialist Revolutionary Party (G.S.R.P.) and the Movement of Justice in Africa - Gambian Section (MOJA-G) - two groups with Marxist leanings - were banned. The arrested, all of them in their early 20s, were accused of belonging to an illegal organization and of being in possession of arms and ammunition for purposes of terrorist activities. Only the members of MOJA-G, were finally released.

In 1982 Senegal and Gambia signed the Treaty of Confederation that resulted in the Senegambia Confederation, aimed at combining the armed forces of the two nations and unifying economies and currencies. Gambia withdrew from the confederation in 1989.

1994-2016: A protest led by soldiers over late salary payments in July 1994 turned into a coup d'etat, whose leader was a young lieutenant, Yahya Jammeh. A new military government was formed, and between 1994 and 1996, Jammeh ruled as head of the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) and banned opposition political activity.

The AFPRC announced a transition plan for a return to democratic civilian rule and in 1996, the Gambian national elections were planned. After a constitutional referendum in August, presidential and parliamentary elections were held. Jammeh was put into office as president on November 6th 1996. Jammeh won both the 2001 and 2006 elections and he was re-elected as president in 2011.

On October 2nd, 2013 the Government's interior minister announced on state TV that Gambia would leave the Commonwealth with immediate effect.

During the course of his rule, through the help of the NIA, the National Intelligence Agency and the Jungulers, his personal police, Jammeh ordered and committed several atrocities, suppressed freedom of the press, tortured and killed journalists, political enemies, activists, students and many young people. As Jola, Jammeh resorted to tribalism to accuse members of the country's largest ethnic group, the Mandinka, and in constant attacks, has threatened them with extinction.

Also, to lead a life of luxury and excess he squandered the coffers of the State and to make matters worse, he never ceased to criminalize and threaten gay and lesbian people. Regarding his position on LGBT rights he stated that "As far as I am concerned, LGBT can only stand for Leprosy, Gonorrhoea, Bacteria and Tuberculosis - all of which are detrimental to human existence.*"

Jammeh's policy on HIV was quite outstanding when in 2007, he claimed he could cure HIV with natural herbs, advising people to stop taking their anti-retroviral drugs. Yet up to now there's no proof that the treatment worked - to the contrary - it has been documented that in many cases it had detrimental effects.

2016-2019: In the run-up to the 2016 presidential elections, members of the opposition, including

*<https://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21623667-many-places-attacking-rights-gay-people-can-still-be-politically-useful-and>

the leader of the United Democratic Party Ousainou Darboe, were sentenced to three years in prison for staging pro-democracy protests. On April 14th 2016, Solo Sandeng, another UDP member, led a protest for electoral reform in Serrekunda. Gambian police arrested Sandeng and more than 20 other protesters and bystanders. Many of them were beaten and tortured in NIA custody. Sandeng's injuries led to his death.

On December 1st 2016, the presidential elections were held in which Jammeh lost to Adama Barrow, the candidate elected by a coalition of opposition parties. Jammeh admitted and said he would relinquish power and leave office in January 2017. Just one week later, on December 9th 2017, Jammeh rejected the election result on national television and called for a new election. He claimed that there were irregularities in the electoral process that led to his decision and declare a national state of emergency.

Barrow left the country and fled to Senegal, while ECOWAS launched a military intervention in Gambia to remove Jammeh from power, by force. Finally, on January 21st 2017 Jammeh announced his resignation as president and left the country to go into exile in Equatorial Guinea.

On January 21st 2017, Barrow returned to Gambia and officially took office. The country officially returned to the Commonwealth on February 8th 2018.

In the process of restoring democracy, an important role was played by the people and the diaspora who mobilized under the movement #GAMBIAHASDECIDED demonstrated their willingness to get rid of Jammeh in the streets and on social media.

Today, after three years of Barrow's rule, the Gambians who voted for him said there has been little progress and many abuses of power in the country since he took power. Human rights activist Madi Jobarteh reported

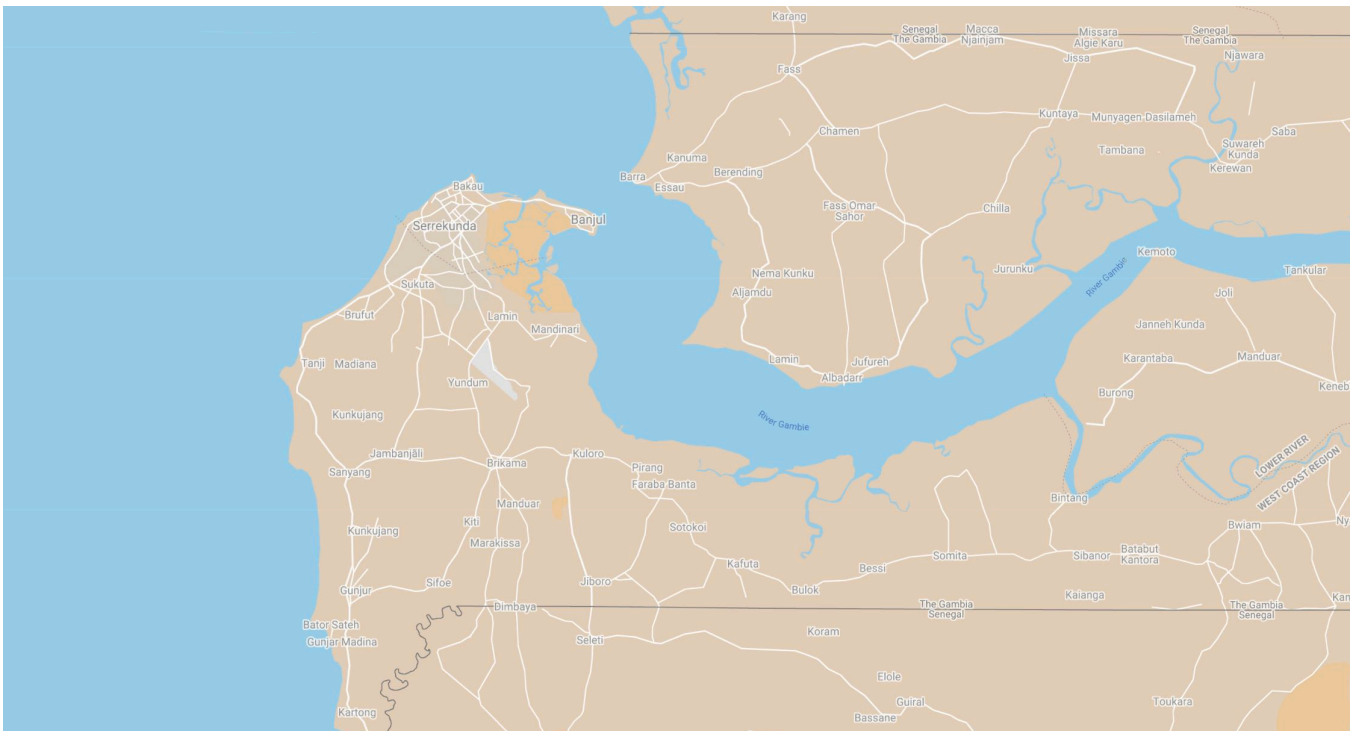
to the Guardian "There is a lot of abuse of resources, abuse of power. That's huge frustration and, practically, people have not seen tangible socio-economic change in their lives.*"

A truth, reconciliation and reparation commission (TRRC), examining the abuses of the previous regime has largely been praised. However, little has been done to reduce the size of the Gambian army, or to eliminate those with questionable human rights records in the army, police and intelligence services.

The security services have continued to suppress any protests. In July 2019, dozens of protesters calling for better services in Brikama and were subsequently subjected to tear gas and hospitalized afterwards. The rapper Killa Ace was arrested, along with 36 others in August 2019, after protests against alleged police brutality and was released on bail only a month later.

After much controversy with the police and the government, the Three Years Jotna (Three Years is Enough) movement, which asked Barrow to resign as promised, expressed its dissent on December 16, 2019 with a protest in the streets of Serrekunda in which 20,000 people allegedly participated.

*<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/sep/23/gambia-joy-gives-way-to-sinking-distrust-adama-barrow-clings-to-power>





WORDSWORTH CLASSICS
OF WORLD LITERATURE

General Editor: Tom Griffith

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO

*The Condition of the Working Class
in England in 1844*

Socialism: Utopian and Scientific

To Giulia,

To the eternal struggle of the
oppressed. To the Comradely bond
we share in trying to change our
conditions permanently and of the
good times we spent together
in the Gambia. Here is a token,
a reminder, a catalyst for
REVOLI.

All my love,
A leu Bah
Kolohi.

Overture. Sitting in the dark: how everything begins...



ALIEU: Do you know what *Qarrtsiluni* means?

GIULIA: No what does it mean?

ALIEU: *Qarrtsiluni* means sitting in the dark waiting for something to happen.

GIULIA: *Qarrtsiluni*? But...what of language is it?

ALIEU: (*whispering*) Inupiaq...

GIULIA: Inupiaq? How do you know this?

ALIEU: It's a concept that I heard from a writer...

GIULIA: Sitting in the dark...

ALIEU: Sitting in the dark waiting for something to happen. And in these times we must be a people who are witnesses...You know, Baldwin, James Baldwin spoke about it - the need to be a witness in these times. But being a witness can be difficult, like Edward Said said in the introduction to the *Representations of the Intellectual* that is a lonely vocation to speak truth to power...and that...sometimes you have to be a powerless witness, as you see all the damage around you. Yeah, sometimes all you can do is be a witness and you feel powerless in the face of giant corporations and giant military organizations, for example. But we must be spirits in opposition and not in accommodation. This is where we find ourselves today. We find ourselves as a people who are attacked from every side of the world, y'know, Africa being the one continent that has been continuously ravaged, damaged, romanticized, exoticized, robbed, destroyed and filled with a population that is mourning, groaning, crawling, wasting, trying to make sense of its living and of their governments not serving the interests of the people but are only a coalition of private interest and investment - and this is what we find today.

So at this point in the journey of our people, we must learn the art of resistance. However,

resistance is not enough in times like these. We must learn to move beyond resistance and learn to create. To be rooted and to be grounded, within one another.

GIULIA: You are talking about feeling impotent in front of corporations, politics, capitalism, imperialism as well as patriarchy and modern slavery, then, what helped you overcome this sense of powerlessness? Because to feel and to be, to act as an activist means to be able to talk to the people and keep telling them that they have power and that they can react against the objective, historical conditions in which they are trapped. What motivated you? What made you realize that you actually have the opportunity of completely turning the system around by starting and analyzing it and understanding how it works?

ALIEU: This is the point: the sense of powerlessness is also a sense of power, when we realize our sense of powerlessness then we realize that we can't do it alone, but we must share all the power that we have to free ourselves. That's why we organize. That's why we bring the people together, because you alone — and that's exactly the opposite of what capitalist sensibility wants to promote, the value of individualism - you can't liberate yourself. Like the conversation on climate change, y'know, "change your lifestyle, use less water", this individualism will not change anything.

GIULIA: An example that may illustrate your standpoint: you can't be really committed in fighting climate change if you say to yourself: "Ok, I am going to buy organic food" but you're not doing something in common with the people. So the first step to free ourselves is to unite.

ALIEU: We must unite. We must recognize our highest point of strength and we must be aware of our lowest point of weakness. And we must know who our friends are. Who our allies are. Who our comrades are. Who the one is, holding the whip in the modern day plantation. Who the slave master is. Only once we know this, can we start creating a movement.

Movement only happens when our people are bound together in order to fight a common problem. And not just to fight problems, but also to create alternative new worlds. How do we move the narrative away from trying to destroy something, to create an alternative to something that we don't want to see? How do we create autonomy? How do we promote the agency of each and every human being, a very specific kind of agency, one that doesn't nurture individualism but still honors the individuality of every human being?

GIULIA: It seems to me that in a way you are talking about being autonomous. So could it be an idea of autonomy? I am reminded of something that David Graeber said in a video I watched a few days ago concerning autonomous community and also of the engaged withdrawal - a concept crafted by Paolo Virno - an Italian anarchist. What he said was that if you start building an autonomous society following the example of the Zapatistas and you then spread this network throughout the world, little by little, these autonomous communities, all the while blossoming like flowers, will recreate worlds. This looks like a conscious way of fighting the system but using other means. Not the ones who have been historically used such as weapons, violence and warfare - even for the building of Socialist States like the USSR. Today I think we have to look for alternatives, because it is true that we have to learn from the Russian model, but in a way common people are scared when they hear someone praising the Russian Revolution. Most people, when it comes to the topic of communism, say "But it never worked", and as proof, they mention Russia, China and Cuba after Fidel. But they never question the functionality or the health of capitalism. Why? Because those people are the healthier ones and the healthier ones are the only ones whose voices matter because nobody goes to the poor ones, the working class and

and ask them the question: "Do you think that capitalism works well?"

So I think we have to start listening to another kind of narrative and voices. Why, in your opinion, is the voice of the rich always more listened to, and carries more weight? Why do the opinions held by these voices easily become common sense to the point that they conquer even the mind of the working class? Do you remember the discussion we had about being irrelevant and being relevant? This desire of owning and showing symbols of materiality and well-being typical of the western consumerism? Because they make you feel closer to the actual world. They give you the sensation of being someone who can assert their individuality. Someone who can finally be a person through the things that own us. Is there any way through which we can overturn this assumption and how we could be individuals without owning anything?

ALIEU: When you look back at history and the struggle of the oppressed, what you find today is that people want to find very convenient narratives but there has never been a struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed, without violence. It will never happen, because the oppressors will never give up their privileges. And even if the oppressed create autonomous communities, what anarchists call 'free zones', liberated ones or TAZ, temporary autonomous zones, they will eventually be attacked. We see the example of the Zapatistas whose revolution was a revolution of withdrawal, a revolution of exclaiming "we are not going to do a coup d'état, instead we are going to create our own model".

But eventually what happened? They were attacked by the government, the corporations and their neoliberal projects, because the oppressor will never leave you in peace, so this is why there are two forms of our struggle today, that is, we must create autonomy and we must create 'power with' together.

GIULIA: You mean a kind of a system of self-defense? Have they ever been any other autonomous communities apart from the Zapatistas ready to protect themselves from the attack of states and corporations? Maybe something different could be achieved if all these communities were connected and ready to secure each other's support. It's also a matter of solidarity and communality of interest, for example the Zapatistas started as a group of people whose aim was to recover their land.

ALIEU: Yes, land is the basis of all revolutions. Ninety percent of human revolutions have been about land, now what I was talking about, 'power with' is to come together and withdraw and say "we are gonna power with together, we're gonna pull our power together to create something new." But also, we need a 'power against', we need also to fight the system because if we don't fight the system the system will engulf us.

Now - what is the best defense that an autonomous society can have? We know that the most powerful defense a State could have and autonomous society can have is the revolutionary consciousness of the constituency of that place. Because when the people have a revolutionary progressive consciousness then they will defend themselves and that's what Cuba did for example. Cuba is twenty miles away from the greatest anti-socialist power of our times, i.e., the US. But how did they defend their revolution? By raising the revolutionary consciousness of the masses and the masses themselves said "Homeland or death, we will win!"

GIULIA: "La patrie ou la mort nous vaincrons", the same motto that Thomas Sankara adopted for the revolutionary government of Burkina Faso.

ALIEU: And then as an another example in Venezuela we have the Chavistas, people who knew that if the revolution failed, the Bolivarian revolution with all of its contradictions, would go back

to the same poverty and wretchedness and landlessness where they came from, so they defended it with their lives. That defense of the people is the people themselves but not regrouped in militias. It's a people's army and we need a people's army because we can't romanticize the struggle for if we build something beautiful, the investors will come, the corporations will come, the bad governments will come, all of these people will come and first they will try to persuade us to come to their side.

If you refuse there will be violence, because that is all they know, capitalism is naked violence against black and brown bodies and poor bodies, and female bodies. So what we are looking at today is: how do we nurture the change we achieved? How do we have longevity?

As Amilcar Cabral said during his time "every African government must be a liberation movement in continuous struggle". Many progressive African movements failed at that time because when they took over, they became a government and put aside the liberation struggle, forgetting that the struggle continued, *A luta continua*, and that was the contradiction we find in Sankara's Burkina Faso. They forgot that it should be a continuous liberation struggle, that we should act like we're still in guerrilla warfare.

GIULIA: But it wasn't his mistake, it wasn't Sankara's mistake because he was murdered by one of his closest friends Compaoré, who was acting on the background with the help of the French government that at the time had Mitterand who, moreover, claimed to be a left-wing president.

ALIEU: You should read CLR James' tribute to Walter Rodney. He explores precisely these issues: how do we protect our revolutionary leaders from the conniving of the reactionaries and the counter-revolutionaries? And there's contradiction here, the contradiction is that there was an amount of insecurity, but you don't create security having people around you with guns. Security is about assessing the revolutionary consciousness of people close to you, and by seeing whether they are ready. As Chairman Mao said at every point in our struggle, we must stop and ask ourselves: what is it that we want? And Cabral also emphasizes this - we must always remind each other of what we are fighting for. And of this, you must always, constantly remind the masses: this is what we want and this is not what we want.

Look at Fidel, he had how many death threats? More than four hundred or more than six hundred death threats, but he survived them all not because he was a prophet or a messiah or he had spiritual power but because the people around him had the revolutionary consciousness to know that it was not about Fidel. It was about the destiny of their nation. And that's the failure of the African progressive governments, of course, there is always the inevitability of betrayal and sometimes we cannot foresee these things, nonetheless to save the soul of this planet, to save the African continent we must organize, we must organize for revolution's sake and we must fight for liberation.

We are in the era of neocolonialism and we must destroy the neocolonial State within Africa. Because Africa is the soul of this planet, if Africa is not free, no-one is free. If Africa is oppressed, everywhere oppressed people will still be oppressed. And so long as Africa is oppressed the Western world will perpetrate the planetary crisis because Africa is the breadbasket, the raw material basket of the world for corporations to continue what they're doing.

So today, we, as Africans must think: what is there that can be done? Is it possible in these late hours of our history to really be liberated from capital and empire?

GIULIA: Maybe you know human beings have to be in a really dangerous situation in order to understand that it is really time to change things and now this danger could be the climate change crisis, seen as though it is happening everywhere.

ALIEU: This is why Africans must know now how to fight neocolonialism because the trappings of neocolonialism are more insidious, more subtle than classic colonialism. In classic colonialism you saw the colonialist, he lived in his court. You saw him so it was easy to fight him. When you tell to the people: "this is our enemy", they can see the enemy, they know the enemy.

But today neocolonialism operates in a way that it uses the people that look like you and act like you. These people are the anchors of Neo-colonialism. That's why today is harder than ever before.

GIULIA: Do you think that there is a poor consciousness of what capitalism and neocolonialism are among the Africans or among the oppressed?

ALIEU: Yes, yes. There is a very, not poor consciousness, I would say lack of consciousness or a very low consciousness of what capitalism and neocolonialism entail because of the constant indoctrination of our people. Today our people are here clamoring only about democracy and human rights but they are not dealing with the real problem and you find this reflected in everything. Like for example you have the EU supporting "democratic projects" and the International Republican Institute, the IRI of America, established by Reagan to promote democracy - as if Reagan could teach anyone democracy.

But what does democracy mean on the African continent and what does human rights mean in the African continent? NOTHING, NADA, PLASTIC. They don't mean anything because we lack sovereignty and self-determination.

But we see in reality, that democracy and human rights are just sacred cows of modernity that must be deconstructed today and decolonized from Euro-Americanism.

GIULIA: I was reading in *Why don't the poor rise up?* a book edited by Ajamu Nangwaya, a Jamaican scholar, that the core of the problem, according to him is that when African and Caribbean countries reached democracy by way of fighting or through a concession from the colonizers, they were trapped because the former governors imposed on them what he calls "structural adjustments." In a way, it's as if the condition for achieving democracy was to become indebted. Western governments acted as if democracy was a gift, a kind concession but inside it they hid a poison, and this poison is constituted by structural adjustments, debts and loans which for newly independent African and Caribbean nations meant being dependent once again.

ALIEU: Yes, that's how neocolonialism works. You see when we talk about neocolonialism many people have the misconception that neocolonialism is a political recolonization of Africa. But neo-colonialism greatest interest is economics. It's the economics and the materials of the African continent. Now, the neocolonial trapping works very much not through even NGOs or else, it works mostly through international financial organizations, like the IMF and the World Bank. Isn't it strange that the World Bank and the IMF came to be right before the end of colonialism with the Bretton Woods treaties in 1945-1946 signed briefly after the World War imperialist War, which is the right name for the World wars because they were just imperialist wars?

So how do we organize and rally against neocolonialism on the African continent today?

First, we must know what neocolonialism is, because you cannot fight something you don't know. Then we must know what class supports neocolonialism? What is the class that anchors neo-colonialism? Then, after finding that out, we recognize who the enemy is today. And these enemies who are they answerable to? If they were not answerable to anybody, this comprador class wouldn't be what you would call the lackeys of the imperialism. They have to be answerable, nonetheless even the ones that are answerable, those too must be destroyed.

But we don't stop at just fighting for the destruction of neocolonialism. We must show our people that other Africa's are possible. How? One of the best ways we have today is to create our own food sovereignty. I don't like the term food self-security or food self-sufficiency. These are just neoliberal vague words. Nobody knows what they mean. I believe in food sovereignty. We must have sovereignty and self-determination in how we feed ourselves. Now, when you say food self-sufficiency and you have food, you are sufficient. Is this the food you want? Is this the type of food that will nourish you? You can have food in abundance, but maybe it's just junk food. They say food self-sufficiency and food sovereignty is to desire what food you want and you grow that food for yourself and you nourish yourself.

This entails creating projects and building cooperatives on the principle of a solidarity economy. We say that we don't want to use this economic model any more but since the neocolonial government wants to use this model, we will start our own little solidarity economies and we will create our cooperatives within our communities.

Once we do this, we start making a social revolution from within the beast itself and we start growing and our people will see this. And when the masses have hope and trust in something then they win eventually, because they come together and they say: "now we must keep following this system and replicate it on a bigger level." And here is where the contradiction starts between the people and the state. But for the people to win it mustn't be a spontaneous uprising but an organized insurrection of the people knowing what they want, knowing who they want and knowing where they want to go from here.

Being born in the '90s in Gambia



I was born in the beginning of the '90s and then I grew up in the beginning of 2000 and it is more like a conjecture. I am a conjectural baby. Always at the conjecture of the old and the new. I was born between the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s and I grew up at the end of the '90s, in the beginning of the so called new millennium.

Being a '90s baby in Gambia is interesting and there are many fascinating factors, for example, we were not exposed to computers or mobile phones, so there was a deep connection, there was a deep communal spirit.

When we sat together nobody was on their phone. We either read or watched TV. That was it. There were only a few people in my community who had TV's so that was not really a distraction for me. There were books and I started reading at an early age but I think that what qualifies one as a '90s baby in Gambia was the sense of solidarity amongst children. It was a childhood solidarity. We would play in the streets and we would study together. It was a glorious time and we were fortunate to see people who have now passed away, who in the community today, are made sort of mythical people. People who today are only remembered by this younger generation, these millennium kids.

I was born two years before Jammeh came to power and like me every '90s baby in Gambia grew up into the shadow of his dictatorship, never having known what it meant to be a sovereign nation or a self-determined nation, or to have political vibrancy where there can be leftist or radical movements. Everything died with the advent of the dictatorship, but to be honest, Jammeh wasn't a dictator he was a petty despot, a petty tyrant.

I remember the '90s as a time of deep childhood on the outside. We were playing outside, we were very vibrant playing outside and there were a lot of fruit. The fruit was free and we got up to a lot of mischief.

I remember the '90s also as the last time I had a connection with my dad who fathered me.

It was a very pivotal period.

I remember my mom used to have a picture of me when I was a schoolboy. A white lady took the photo. My older brother gave her our addresses and later she sent it to us. We used to do this in primary school when the tourists came, we would give them our address and they would give us their address, then we would write to each other. Just like penpals.

I don't remember her name but she was Scottish, from Edinburgh and I was in grade five in primary school. She had taken a couple of pictures but the one I remember most clearly was this one where there were a couple of us in the picture, not just me. My brother was the head boy when I was in grade five and I had no hair because my mom used to cut our hair. Shaved and clean like Tupac, I wore my school uniform that was made like a t-shirt. I know that normally school uniforms are supposed to have buttons down the front, but mine was made like a t-shirt because I would always break all the buttons.

I was very stubborn.

But my primary school years were beautiful and I really enjoyed them. It was in Sanyang, which at that time was a proper village, a small village where everybody knew everybody and if you didn't know somebody you knew their face. The tarmac roads only came later.

So in primary school too we all knew each other. Every grade would have hundreds of students and there were at least thousand pupils in the school in total. But many kids dropped out. I don't know exactly how many. A lot of them were Senegalese. They were sons and daughters of fishermen so when their parents went back home, they would take their children back with them. I remember some pupils were also pulled out to go to the Islamic school and others were pulled out because maybe their mom had died and then the girls had to help in the house. However, we were too young for marriage so there were no people who were pulled out for marriage. Or maybe this might have happened, but not to my knowledge.

I remember my first day of school very well. I was so excited. I went with my big brother Mustapha. I was put in One Red and he was put in One White because there were a lot of classes in each grade and they were divided in colors: one white, one green, one blue, and so on.

Our dad took us to school. It was in 1998 and we went straight to primary school. We didn't go to nursery school. I thought I was going to be in the same class as my brother, but they separated us and I was very angry. They took me to one blue, I remember. Yes it was one blue, not one red. I was in Mrs. Ceesay's class. Mrs. Ceesay is still in Sanyang. She's actually from Sanyang, because most of the teachers are not from the same place. But my first teacher in life was from Sanyang itself, the village. So, I know her. I was in that class and my brother went to the other class. He was in Mrs. Prockett's class. I remember after the end of the first day, I hated school.

I hated school from my first day until the day I dropped out. I never liked going to school but I remember that day, I was pretty excited. Yes in a way school was fun. There were a lot of things happening in class, and there was a lot politics too. A whole sub-culture with the kids. Actually we were not even kids. We were babies, literally.

But before Sanyang my family moved from Gunjur to Farato. Farato is another village around Brikama. We were there because my father was a cattle herdsman. The cattle belonged to Doctor Lenrie Peters. He was a surgeon and one of Gambia's foremost writers and poets and to this day he's still perhaps the most celebrated Gambian poet. He's dead now. He is very popular when you talk about Gambia and I have a book at home that talks about his life.

He was published in Macmillan back in the day. I remember one of his poems called *Homecoming*.

*The present reigned supreme
Like the shallow floods over the gutters
Over the raw paths where we had been,*

The house with the shutters.

*Too strange the sudden change
Of the times we buried when we left
The times before we had properly arranged
The memories that we kept.*

*Our sapless roots have fed
The wind-swept seedlings of another age.
Luxuriant weeds
have grown where we led
The Virgins to the water's edge.*

*There at the edge of the town
Just by the burial ground
Stands the house without a shadow
Lived in by new skeletons.*

*That is all that is left
To greet us on the homecoming
After we have paced the world
And longed for returning.*

He owned this big garden in Farato, *Farato Farms*, and I remember when I was a kid they would say "Peters is coming, Peters is coming". Years later my brother was telling me "do you know that was doctor Lenrie Peters?" And that made sense because I could remember as a child seeing this man - he had this big afro but it was all grey and he had this beard that was grey too. That is how I will remember him. He always looked very strange to me. So when my brother said this I was like "Aahhh! That makes sense", because then I looked at his picture and he was the same guy. He was a bourgeois and he dressed like a bourgeois, too. He was from the petty bourgeoisie, lived in Fajara, Cape Point or Fajara, one of those neocolonial suburbs. He had studied medicine in England and he had come back home to practice it here.

So my father used to take care of his cattle because my father is Fula and Fulas are herdsmen. Before that my dad was in Gunjur, he had a corner shop but it has fallen into bankruptcy so he had to drop that and consequently he went down on the social ladder to take care of the cattle.

I remember living in Farato, we were living at the back of the village, we literally lived in the forest, it was sad. It was poverty. My parents didn't really own the house, the people there gave us the house to take care of. Among our neighbors was, I remember, this old man, Barry. I loved that old man, growing up. He was an old Fula man, I was always around him and he had this radio, he would tune into the FMs.

This was in the '90s and I remember I used to go to his house and then he would tune the radio and before he reached a station there was a tschh, tschh, tschh...When you tuned in you can hear this noise in between stations, tschh tschh tschh...I used to say "Barry, is it raining in the radio?" I used to be so confused and I used to theorize about that, I would spend the whole day thinking... if it rains in the radio why is the radio not wet? I used to be so curious, I kept wondering where are the voices coming from? Eventually I settled with one answer and I was very adamant with that answer, nobody could change my mind that the batteries was where the people were hiding in. Because if there were no batteries in the radio, the radio wasn't working and then I said to myself: it must be the batteries, the batteries is where the people hide to talk.

I can still remember his house, there was a little fence between our house and his house, and he loved me. Actually years later he would come to Sanyang to see my family and I'd come from school, primary school and I met him there. I couldn't believe, I was so happy, he was my friend this old man...I don't know what became of him...

As a family we were constantly uprooted and I've lost touch with a lot of people since my parents kept moving. We ended up in Sanyang because my dad had a nephew who lived there and he is still there, one day he had come to my dad and said "why don't you come to Sanyang and start a new life? Because this old cattle herd thing is not working." Meanwhile my mom was always there, working as ever, together with my dad they would go do the cattle herd, usually they would take a percentage of milk and they would give a percentage to the owner. My dad would give his percentage to my mom who used to walk around the village to sell it. So my mom used to have me on her back, she told me this but I don't remember this because I was a baby then. She would have me on her back and she would roam around town selling milk.

There's one memory of my mom that I really remember: she had this wound on her leg, it was a big wound, she still has the mark, it took time to heal, she tried everything. I can remember she used to take paracetamol, she would make it into powder and put it on the wound. I don't know where she got that idea from, I don't know whether it worked but that was the situation like...

It was in 1996 that we finally moved to Sanyang, my dad started working at the beach and my mom too. My dad would be at the beach, basically what he did was dragging the fishermen's boats to the shore when they came out of the ocean, together with other men. The boats were heavy and very colorful, they were made out of wood. So my dad would be one of those people who'd come to the shore and push the boats, you have to be very hardy. They would take a palm tree, cut the palm tree and take everything out and it will become sort of a rolling board where they laid down the boats. Then they would take two of those trunks, one in the front, one in the back of the boat and they'd pushed the boat until it was out of the sea. So once they put it in on the shore, the owner of the boat would give each of them maybe two or three fish. After pushing three or five or ten of those boats we would have some fish, my dad would sell some of it, that would be his surplus and then he would come home.

My mom on the other hand used to sell dried fish. So there's fish that is spoiled, she would take it cut it and open it, take out everything and have it dried up. Dried fish is something that people eat a lot here. That's how a generation of us were fed, clothed and taken care of.

When my dad moved he'd first lived with his nephew for a while, he's an old man now, they were almost age mates, but because my dad's brother gave birth to him, technically he is his nephew.

And then we moved to another place, this little place, there was a room and a parlor, one of the typical room and parlor in Gambia. It's a two rooms house, you have a living room and a parlor inside, the parlor is where you sleep.

We lived there, it was five of us, this was before my little brother was born, the last one, Muhammad, the one who got good grades. We were living there and then we moved to this other place, that is where my mom is living to these days and then we started going to school.

I don't ever remember waking up into a house that I called my own, my parents never had, we have always lived into somebody's house, and that's a big deal out here, it's not like in Europe or America where people can just rent and when they live in the place for a long time eventually they can mortgage it. Here almost everybody lives in their own house, it is very important to have your own compound, it is part of the culture and it is a source of dignity but my parents never had this opportunity because we were too poor.

Then when I was still a child my father died. He was a kind person, he was nice to all of the kids in the neighborhood, I remember we used to play football in the street and we would all wait for his arrival from the beach and he would give us sweets, it became sort of a routine. I remember

that one day when we were about to go to school, he was sick so we left him in bed and we went to class. When we came back in the afternoon I went to the football field to play football with my friends, you know as kids...meanwhile he had been taken to the hospital.

Later when I came back from the field I met somebody at the garage in Sanyang, which it's just beside my house and he stopped me. "Have you heard what happened?" I replied "No." "Your father died" I just said "yeah, whatever..."

I thought he was joking, so I went home and I found my mom crying and a group of people crying and really crying, wailing and weeping and I just thought "oh shit." I was already at the age where I knew what is what.

And then it struck me really "I'm never gonna see this man again" I finally realized. He was a nice person to us, he loved us and we loved him back. But I was also a kid, I mean, before the end of the year my dad passed away.

Afterwards I just packed it aside and I remember the funeral, the people who came before and after, they helped my mom, some of them assisted her with the house, they would drop money in a little basket for us to regenerate and take care of ourselves before my mom could get back to work. People cooked for us, they came in the house to clean and wash to give us time to grieve. So while people would drop that money, me and my brother we used to just go and grab some of it and go out, and it was nice.

I was young, I was kid, you know kids get over things very easily. I would just continue my life like I was, you know. I mean something had changed, the family structure changed, my mom became basically the breadwinner. She started spending more time working to take care of us and because my sisters were very little we had to do the housework, I would go to the market to get some food and my big brother would cook and we would sell peanuts at the garage.

But as time passed I started really realizing I haven't really dealt with the passing of my father, I was stuck in that time and I would loop in a grief that, somehow, was unconsciously lying there dormant waiting for something to happen.

Years later one of my best friend died and that really struck me, that's the day I realized that I have never really dealt with the grief in my life and it was devastating. I had to take years to deal with that loss, subsequently there were lot of losses in my life but all of them are connected to my father's death. It became a catalyst for me to deal deeper with that grief, with that sort of alienation from a father figure...

Because my mom is Senegalese and her family lives in Senegal, we stopped our school and we relocated to Dakar, for like six months or more, I don't really remember how long it was because I was a kid but I know it was a while. My mom and my siblings were in Keur Massar and I was in Pikine* with her elder sister, then at one point my mom insisted that we had to come back home and go back to school.

When we came back in Sanyang we entered the flow of things and shortly after that, my mom got remarried to my stepdad.

School was still going on but it was already the end of term, at the exam, my big brother Mamadou passed, he was promoted and I wasn't promoted because even if I had good grades I was too little. If you were too small they would keep you in grade one again. They would say you're too little to be promoted.

I was moved from one blue to one white. My color throughout primary school stayed with white up to six white. So I was moved to Mrs. Jammeh's class. She was a big woman and she was very

*Pikine is a city in the Pikine Department of the Dakar Region of Senegal, the department includes the villages of Yeumbeul, Thiaroye, Mbao, and Keur Massar.

intimidating.

I passed the exam this time and I was promoted to grade two. In grade two my teacher was Mr. Tunkara. Mr. Tunkara was a nice person, he was quite crazy but he was very nice. I remember us sitting in class and his girlfriend would come through the football field of the primary school, which was just outside the school. She would come through the window. I think she went to the Muslim high school - I remember her badge. So she would stand there and talk and then afterwards he would leave with her and they would go to his house.

I think that it all started during my second time in grade one. I realized I didn't like going to school, that I realized that it wasn't the place I wanted to be. I mean I didn't want to be there but it's all I got to do, I had to go to school whether I liked it or not, my parents wouldn't allowed me to stay at home. I had to go to school. I had to go. And I was smart and everybody knew that I was smart so I had no excuse, I was getting good grades from the beginning, so they were like "Nope! You're staying in school". So I stayed in school. I don't remember my results in grade one but from primary two up to primary six I had first position in class.

I wasn't even studying too much I was just playing, I was very playful and very stubborn and as a kid I did some wild things.

I remember one time we went to this guy's house, he had mangoes, mango trees. There's some mango called Ket which is very profitable to sell. So I went to his mango tree and shook it, all the mangoes were dropping and we were taking them but eventually he caught me and he was so mad. He made cooking pots for *attaya* using empty barrels. After cutting the barrel, he had this tiny little thing that comes out from it, some discarded sharp metal. He took that and he beat me. I still have these marks at my back. But because I did something wrong and I didn't want to tell my mom about it, the wounds started getting serious, then one day she saw blood on my shirt "what is this?" she asked me, she looked and it was horrible. She took me to the pharmacy, there was this pharmacy where they used to do dressings, so someone dressed the wounds and it got better. I did a lot of crazy things like this...

I was a horrible kid, but at the same time I was very sweet and people loved me, I was not at all the bully type. We had the bullies but they weren't that deep, because we all lived in the village and the school was right in the heart of the village so if you bullied someone, when they told it to the teachers, either they would beat you or they would come to your house and tell it to your parents. So it was very communal, everybody knew everybody and parents were close.

I was actually very loved, in the school I was always very popular, people loved me. I was little but very troublesome, I used to fight a lot in school but I didn't win most of the fights. They used to beat me but I used to persist so eventually they would give up.

I was a nerd, that's how I look at myself, but nobody saw me as a nerd. I was good with football for a while then I stopped in primary school because I was very little and tiny, people easily just hit me in the football field, so afterwards I was not too keen on football but I played good. In the village we had our team, it was called Black Star. I used to be the striker, I was the number nine and I was a very good footballer actually and I used to score a lot of goals.

I was considered a smart person but people didn't have the language for saying "this person is a nerd", people say *Janghis* which means some who loves education in wolof.

My big brother was considered more a nerd, he was very nerdy and he's still very nerdy, now he's a teacher in high school. He always dressed like a good student, he ironed his uniform, he combed his hair and tucked in his shirt. I didn't do none of those things, my uniform was always rumpled and when I came from school I would take it out, wear my shorts and go out playing with them until they would be dirty.

But because my brother was at the same school with me, just one grade above, I was never considered the nerd, he was considered the nerd, so I was excused from all that. I was just a nice kid. Everybody loved me in the school and I have always been popular.

Now when I think about myself as a very popular activist in Gambia, I can say that perhaps it didn't start today, it started a long time ago, I'm not gonna say shit like "I knew I was always an activist", but there are certain things that stand out now.

I remember the first time I really protested against social conventions, I was in primary school and there was this kid who died.

If you are a child who grow up in unjust circumstances you notice things that people who are not sufferings those things don't see. So I was in primary school and this kid died, I don't know what happened, he was sick. They said the mom sacrificed her son because she's a witch, people believes in witchcraft thoroughly, especially in the village. And I just couldn't fathom, because I knew this woman, she was my friend and she was very sweet and now people said she was a witch and sacrificed her son. I was young, and I just couldn't help but think that there was something very wrong with it. We all knew she loved her son and I was certain that she was grieving, you don't go to a grieving person and say "you're a witch".

I was young but that story always comes back to me again and again. I think it was just instinct because I didn't have the language to deconstruct social constructs, it was just common sense, I just felt very deeply that it was something wrong about that.

And there's also the fact that my big brother is deaf and dumb, not dumb as stupid, he can't speak and he can't hear, so he has always been very sensitive to our people and how they approached him.

He is like one of my best friend and I love him a lot, being close to him too had awaken my sense of the unjust and my sensitivity to marginalization. We grow up together and he was very good with his hands, he would make little cars when we were kids. Just before orange season, when the orange trees start flowering, they have this little fruits before they grow bigger, he'd pick some of those small oranges, then he would take a broomstick and he would make like a toy car out of those things. We were all very close but from time to time people would try to disrespect him because he can't speak or he can't hear and I used to stand up to them and this is something that extended also to other domains.

It's lack of a better word that I call myself an activist but I don't consider myself an activist, I just consider myself to be a concerned human being and I feel it because a lot of things happened that led me down this path. Because in every society there are two groups, those who are concerned and those who are not concerned, I happened by default to fall within the concerned because of my situation and the society that I come from.

But the sense of rebellion, which is different from activism because you can be a rebel and just be an asshole, the sense of rebellion has been there through the times, I know this, I have always rebelled against shit, unconsciously, instinctively not based on the fact that I knew what I was doing but I've always stood up against what I considered unjust.

I remember the first football club I was part in my neighborhood, it was called Arsenal like the Arsenal team in England, the guy who ran it was called Dibba, it's his last name but we all called him Dibba, now they called him Bounty. I remember he was such a bully, he was a big ass bully and he had this scary face and one day I told him because he was an asshole "you know, I am not even part of this team no more, I am going to another team". So I left and I became part of Black Star. Black Star was just being formed and Famara was part of it with other people. So from when I was very little I had left my neighborhood and to this day I never hangout in my neighborhood, I hang out in another neighborhood which is Famara's neighborhood. I've known him before that because we all went to school together but we weren't that close. Alex was part of Arsenal, he stayed there for a long time until his family moved to another part of the village, I think he is one of the people I knew first in Sanyang because I wasn't born in Sanyang, I was born in Gunjur, which is a village next to Sanyang.

So because of the hardships we lived in after the death of my father and the house that was too small for all of us I eventually moved in with my closest friend, Famara and I lived in his house for a decade or so.

At that time I was already advanced in my reading, I started reading in second grade, I was a baby. I had this book called *Stig of the dump*. There was this teacher, Mr. Manneh, a good man, he is still my friend, he's from Lamin, a village near Yundum. He gave me this novel, he was a teacher at the school. This novel, *Stig of the dump*, it was about a kid who lived in the dump, then after he gave me *Animal of farthing wood*, I was in my grade three then. So I started reading this little children books and by grade six I was already reading the Nancy Drew Mystery series.

During my junior school, I found this book in the school library, *The fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist philosophy*, I wish I still have this book. I was like fifteen. I started reading this and even if I had no idea what they're talking about, I could still remember this phrase "the meaning of meaning". And I used to struggle with that...what the fuck does this mean? And I read it and read it again and again, I didn't understand everything but I got some little points here and there as to what it was.

Later then I read *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. It was one of the Reader's digest books, they were cheap and somebody used just to dump them in the school libraries. The school libraries where I've grown up were sponsored by people like...tourists who would come to the school and say "Oh I'll bring you books." So they were just random books, not what the school chose. They would just take one room and put all the books inside, that was the library. I don't know who brought *Anna Karenina* there but then I got *Anna Karenina*. And I read it.

I still remember the first sentence: *all happy families are alike, all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way*. I still remember this, after all these years. *Anna Karenina* was a beautiful awakening. And I remember the day I have finished *Anna Karenina* it was the first day I wrote my first poem at the back of the book with a pencil. It was called *An ode to love*, I used to have it until I lost the book and I don't remember it off head.

At that time it was a kind of solitary activity, I had no one to share my love for reading with, until I met Mr. Jobe, he used to work for CCF. CCF stands for Christian Children Fund, it was an international NGO who used to sponsor students, now it's called Child Fund.

Mr. Jobe lives in Germany now but he's from Banjul. I would often go to his house, he's the one who made me discover a lot of music. When I was listening to Luciano, he was like, "this music is from my childhood". He introduced me to Tracy Chapman, Luciano, Sizzla...I already knew these artists, I've grown up in a community where everybody listened to reggae but he was the first person who'd break me down the lyrics, and above all he loved to read.

There were tons of books in his house and I remember there was this magazine called *Talking Drum*, I would pick it up and read it and read it. I've read that magazine for more than five or six years every time I'd go there.

I was stunned when peeking through the shelves of the bookcase I found huge books, he would have these big novels and he would be reading them and I used to ask "how do you read this, you finished all of this?" And he said "yeah" and I kept telling myself "I want to do this one day."

So I grew up in that environment and that guy, Mr. Jobe, we called him Jobis, he was a good friend of mine.

Since I was a kid I have always enjoyed being surrounded by people much older than myself but I had perfect balance, I would hang out with older people and also hang out with my age mates, cause I would play, I would want to play. I had the perfect balance, it wasn't a problem, they called me *dindinkeba*. *Dindinkeba* in Mandinka means an old soul. I was always called that, an old soul. It was Mr. Jobe who introduced me to this man called Saihou. He is from Kuntaur, a town on the north bank of the river Gambia.

He also had dropped out of school but he was older than me. He had a white wife, her name was Christine, I still remember her. Christine would bring a lot of books. So in their house, in the living room, there was a bookshelf with plenty of books and he would give me books to read. He was the first person who gave me *Harry Potter* and *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, I read it before it became hip, before it became the thing that everybody was jumping on.

And I remember going back in Sanyang (because he lives in the outskirts of the village) with the book in my hand and his words still echoing "you need to read this book" and after reading it I read some John Grisham, also from him. So at that time I was reading a lot of novels but later at some point I dropped the novels completely and I started reading serious stuff. It was shortly after that, because I knew Jobe and Saihou when I was in primary school, it was the summer when I supposed to go to Junior school and I was thirteen that he started giving me novels to read. I was in grade seven, he was giving me books, I would read them and return them.

So in a way I can say that the first serious book I stumbled upon was that one on Marxism I found in the library of my junior school, it was always with me until there had been that flood where I lost all my books. I wish I have that book now, because it was a good book. Years later when I became a Marxist, I recalled that book, downloaded it and I've realized this is one of the best book on Marxism-Leninism. But that book didn't led me to Marxism-Leninism. Of course at that time if people would mention Marx I was "Oh, I have a book on that." So I was familiar with the terms but I didn't know what the fuck they meant with Marxism or what they're talking about because the book was very dense, it was philosophical. And I didn't have no tools to decipher it so it wasn't the book that led me down to Marxism at all but it was a book that led me down to philosophy. Because I kept telling to myself "I bet if I understand this, because it must mean something, otherwise nobody would publish it", I was thinking like a kid "nobody would publish a book that doesn't mean something."

So I started reading philosophy a lot as a young adolescent and I remember I was also deeply interested in religion. I was deeply interested in religion since I was a kid...I would met the Tablighi Jamaat people when they came to the mosque, I would stay with them, listening to their stories, I loved the stories in the Quran, they're like the stories of the prophets in the Old Testament. And I would listen and ask them: "so...what did Suleyman do?" Suleyman is Solomon and they would tell me, I found all that so fascinating. I remember I used to come with my shorts but you cannot enter with shorts in the mosque so I'd go home and I'd tell my mom "Give me this long trousers" and I'd go back to the mosque. And there was this preacher who used to come to Sanyang once in a while, I think he was called Ustadh Darboe, he'd do these amazing preachings, because he had this thing, kind of an amulet, that he was selling but before he'd do this amazing preaching then he'd take out this paper with a lot of Arabic writing and he'd say "If you have this even in a plane crash you will survive." It was like a talisman I remember what he used to say "If you're in a plane crash people will find you sitting in your bathroom." Because airplanes were so fascinating for all of us.

Subsequently I remembered him the first time I entered a plane, I was like I made it. I was scared because I am scared of heights and this shit was going too high and I was looking down and there was this guy sitting beside me, he was a white guy, I was going to Ghana and I asked him "What is gonna happen?" And he tried to reassure me "It's fine nothing is gonna happen." I was so scared but then I slept because it was six in the morning.

So coming back to my appeal for religion, I remember this one instant in primary school that has never left my mind to these days. I was sitting apart, somebody had a book on religion, it was on Christianity and he was talking about it, he was a student just like us but he was older, Alhaji Bojang, I still remember who the guy is. He was talking about what was in the book and I remember my heart was so full I couldn't eat at lunch break. I could still remember that I couldn't eat. For years, when people talked about religion around me I wouldn't be able to eat, it was like

my heart was so full...

I loved the stories and I think that's how I became a storyteller basically, because even in my writing, whenever I write stories the people use to tell me "you are very good, you have a good sense of storytelling."

At fourteen, I dropped out of school and I wanted to study but there were no amenities in the village for me to study, so later on I moved to the urban area in order to find books, have access to studies, and going to conferences where I could learn more and meet other people. It was a very tough decision I made.

My teens were spent searching for knowledge and seeking a proper education that made sense to me because the schooling system didn't make sense to me, that's why I left. And I remember at some point I was deeply committed to religion, I joined the Tablighi Jamaat and I stayed there for three years. There was a time in the beginning I would just come to the city, spend my time there and then go back to Sanyang, it was during that time that I came into contact with the Tablighi Jamaat and then joined it, but my permanent move was when I reached the Tablighi Jamaat, there was a lot of knowledge exchange and I was very active in the movement.

From Tablighi Jamaat to Sufism with a brief interlude into Salafism



When I went to Junior school I started getting politicized, I was thirteen maybe, very young. Certain things had happened that I wanted to make sense of. We were poor and we grew up poor, but there were different levels of poverty also and we were at the lowest drag of that social ladder. But I was very satisfied at some point with the explanation of religion that it is God's will that one person is poor and another person is rich...but afterwards it stopped making sense. Very early on I was exposed to Panafricanism and I remember I used to go to the internet café. So I started using the internet when I was maybe around twelve. We had no mobile internet so we'd go to the internet café. I used to go to this internet café at Brikama. One thing that I recall is that I had this deep, deep interest in journalism.

So when I'd leave Sanyang I'd go in town to the newspapers and it would fascinate me seeing people I saw on the newspaper in real life. And I think it was my first real exposure to the world as I know it today. At the internet café I used to print loads of free materials on journalism like the ABCs of journalism and then one thing led to another. I would read this and this thing would lead me to another thing and so on. One day I chanced upon Panafricanism and the rhetoric of Panafricanism, which became soon an ever abiding interest. I became aware that through it I could decipher some of the things and the ideologies that were present in the books I started being familiar with and in the music. Because reggae music talks a lot about Haile Selassie and Marcus Garvey who inspired generations with the Black Star Line* or the Universal Negro Improvement Association.*

* The Black Star Line (1919–1922) was a shipping line incorporated by Marcus Garvey, the organizer of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and other members of the UNIA. The shipping line was created to facilitate the transportation of goods and eventually African Americans

The most fascinating thing was discovering while I was doing research that Marcus Garvey wasn't some sort of prophet or a mystical religious figure, I was so excited that I went to my friends and told them "You know, Marcus Garvey was a revolutionary." I didn't use the term revolutionary but he wasn't what we thought he was, for us Garvey lived maybe in the eleventh century, it was this ancient figure, almost mythic. So to find out that Marcus Garvey was actually a person who lived almost in our time, that he was a contemporary, it fascinated me and I started reading him.

I remember reading this essay called *African Fundamentalism** and it was perhaps my first heritage, my first recognition of Africanness. We were great people, I mean of course this kind of rhetoric is always around: "you great people, you black people you had a beautiful history" but this paper was a tough essay and I read it and I was so proud. I started looking for audios and I would listen to Marcus Garvey speak, he used to speak so fast, he used to fascinate me and then Nkrumah came, and all this people. But then I haven't been really exposed but I was getting there in a peculiar way. I can't really remember exactly how that happened but I know it had to do with the internet exposure. So I would go to the internet when everybody was using MSN and Face Party and I was busy trying to do these things. I remember that printing one page cost two dalasis. And I remember my earliest first ever wish that if I ever had money I would have internet at my house, because the internet was so fascinating to me. You googled, you typed anything and you'd see all this knowledge, I was like "Wow!" And now I sit and there's wifi in my house, I've become so exposed to the internet that it has become a primary part of my life.

So when I was in school, I was considered like the smartest kid in the school and I used to be at the library most of the time, but the library didn't have much, there were books I stumbled upon written by Sterling Stuckey. He was an African American historian and he talked a lot about black liberation history. When I read his books I was excited because I heard the names he mentioned in reggae: Malcolm X, Malcolm Luther, you heard Sizzla saying "they killed Malcolm X and Martin Luther King." So it was like I knew these people, I knew their names and now they started making concrete sense. The reading took them from the mystical to the most concrete reality. And I read these books for years and years, I abused them. On the other side there was Mr. Jobe who exposed me to music and books, and together with *Talking Drum* he used to have another magazine called *The African Reporter*. And I would read them, sometimes I wouldn't even understand what was going on and then also he used to have this magazine called *New African*. *New African* is still existing and I used to read it, he would buy it every month and I would grab it and read it.

So, in essence this is to show that whatever we achieved, we achieved it in a communal sense. That for anything we have today it's because the masses did something. And you could be a genius all you want but you cannot get anywhere without exposure to concrete material stuff that can further your enlightenment. So for me it was people like Mr. Jobe, it was people like Saul Bojang, like Saihou these people exposed me to all their materials together. Also, the internet played a major role, I must pay special tribute to the internet café at Brikama Gamtel,

throughout the African global economy.

* The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) is a black nationalist organization founded by Marcus Garvey, The Pan-African organization, that enjoyed its greatest strength in the 1920s, was founded to work for the advancement of people of African ancestry around the world.

* *African Fundamentalism* is an anthology of poetry, texts and short stories published in 1991 by the Garvey movement. Among the authors Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke and Claude McKay, all representatives of the Harlem Renaissance.

Gambia telecommunication company. They used to have internet cafés in major towns back in the days.

But then at some point in my junior school I joined the Tablighi Jamaat, which is sort of an evangelical Muslim group. I was fascinated by religion, I was fascinated by religion per se and by philosophical questions. And they were good at it, the Tablighi Jamaat, they had stories to tell, they moved from place to place and I was a kid who always wanted to go places but I didn't have relatives in the urban area, so I used to go in the city where I would meet some of my elder friends. For example, in Brikama I had Mr. Sey. I was part of a delegation of the region where I come from, the Western Region, then it was called Western Division. There was a national children conference against HIV, this was the time in Gambia where HIV was the main topic, everybody was talking about and there was a lot of funding, there was a secretariat called the National Aids Secretariat, NAS, like the rapper Nas, so people would create their little organization just to get the funding and do workshops.

I was the head boy of the school at that time in 2003-2004, so I was selected to be part of the group, our chaperones were Mr. Sey and Mr. Tamedou. Mr. Tamedou was the chairperson of the youth regional committee then. So with them we went to Jenoi, where the national regional conference was held. Mr. Sey was very nice, it was a teacher too, I promised that I would come to Brikama and see him.

So later I went to see him in Brikama but I had met someone in Sanyang at Child Fund Office, Solo, he had come to see someone who worked there and we became friends. He would always ask for me, so he told me "come and see me in Brikama." Mr. Sey didn't live far from Solo, so when I went to see Solo I passed from Mr. Sey house too. Solo was the first person who introduced me to the internet. Solo Sanneh, he is a good brother, I haven't see him in ages but he's fine. I spoke to him some time ago. But I used to do this type of things, I would meet people and then I'd go and visit them.

So with the Tablighi Jamaat, I remember one time I was actually going to visit my big brother Mamadou, he was already in high school and I was passing because we have founded an organization. I was already very exposed to the urban area at this point. We found our organization called Young Observer because I was going to the Newspapers and we had this column at the Daily Observer which was the most popular paper then, so our column was called Young Observer. I was the information secretary and we were going at Ocean Bay Hotel for the launching, because my brother lived not far from the Tablighi headquarters at that time I walked from Sukuta and I came to the Tablighi headquarters. Once there I said "I want the translation of the Quran". Somebody gave it to me then I spoke to this guy, Abdul Malik, we had a long conversation and I told him "I'm interested in joining this".

In the village beside my village, Jambanjelly, where I went to junior school, these guys were organizing a three days, what the Tablighi Jamaat call Khuruj*, so I went for the Khuruj, and that was my first real exposure in the system. I had heard about them but I didn't know the inner stuff. So I went for Khuruj for three days and I came back and I turned to that path. I quit smoking weed, I quit smoking cigarettes and then I told people to stop calling me my nickname, Alex, and call me Alieu. I got super deep into that stuff and I was on that path for years, I spent three years from 2005 to 2007.

* Khuruj or pilgrimage is the main pattern of the Tablighi Jamaat. During khuruj, the members of the Tablighi Jamaat go out to the mosque situated far away from their hometown. The khuruj normally lasts three days, 40 days or 4 months. The goal of khuruj is to propagate their version of Islam, increase one's personal belief in Allah and to practice Sunnah as shown by the prophet.

I took part to a lot of Khuruj, I've done ten days two times and I've done forty days once or twice, I don't remember. Last time I took part was in 2007, shortly after then I stopped going. It was one of the most beautiful and most enlightened moments of my life, I got deeper into Islam and I was like an ascetic, I was like a monk, I needed just a few things and I felt I could dedicate my entire life to that. I used to spend a lot of time at the Markaz headquarters itself.

So when I came back to Sanyang I opened a section of the Tablighi Jamaat, and this was my first attempt at building an organization and it worked.

It's fascinating how the Tablighi Jamaat works, it's the most coordinated group I've ever seen, the headquarters are located in Bundung where sits the Shura, the council. Actually Shura means consultation, the Shura is composed of the elders. We call them elders because they are the elders of the Markaz which means center. The Jamaat as a part of its coordination divided the country in regions (halqa) in Gambia, so for example Bundung is part of Halqa Five, Halqa means circle in Arabic. Halqa Five is most of the Greater Banjul Area, then you have Halqa two, Halqa three. I was part of the Western division Halqa, the Halqa also have the Ameers, the leaders of the various mosques, where they come together and plan their activities. At the basic level, each mosque has the five Amal, Amal in arabic means action, righteous action, and each member has to practice these daily. The five Amal are: Mashura which is after Fajir, the morning prayer, the times can be flexible depending on the work and the students activities but the ideal moment is after Fajir prayers. Mashura basically is a common assembly of all the members.

In the central mosque of Sanyang, once I started the group, we did Mashura every morning, we consulted each other about the daily affairs, what we were going to do and what each one of us had to do, we were very organized. So in a nutshell the Mashura consists in the meeting and planning for the day; after the Mashura there is the Ziyarat. Ziyarat happens between five o'clock and seven o'clock, between the Asr prayer and the Maghrib prayer, it consists in going around preaching people, trying to invite them to join the movement. And then after that there is the Ta'leem. Ta'leem is after Maghrib prayers, somebody who has been selected at Mashura reads the Hadith and translate it into Mandinka or whatever language, I used to do most of the Ta'leem because I was more experienced than everyone with languages.

Also in Sanyang I recruited people and took them for Khuruj. I have lost two members, no three, one died in the back-way, Lamin Manneh and another died recently of sickness and Sankung also has died. So three of these brothers are all died now. Two died of sickness, one in the back-way. But Famara and Alex, my closest friends never came for Khuruj and never joined the movement.

So the five Amal are the Mashura, the Ziyarat, the Ta'leem, then there is the Jawla. The concept of Jawla is this: your mosque already have the Amal going, so every week or two weeks, they must visit another mosque and start another activity there, it's a sort of extending the network. And the last one of the five Amal is the Khuruj, monthly you must go for Khuruj, the three days pilgrimage. We used to do this consistently and I remember it was the most amazing achievement for me. I was a little boy, at the Markaz they used to call me 'Fifteen' and then 'Sixteen' because I was young, I was the youngest at the Markaz at the time, nationally. And I used to contribute a lot, because my English was very strong. I used to do translation for the brothers from Sierra Leone, Nigeria or others visitors who couldn't speak local languages.

Sometimes we didn't have all the Amals there but usually we would go for three days and we started recruiting, we started getting bigger in Sanyang but after things broke down.

I used to do translations at the Markaz and I got really popular, many people would join the Markaz, some of them wouldn't really read the literature but I was keen, I printed a whole book from the internet and I paid a lot of money, it was a book of the sayings of Muhammad Ilyas*, the

* Muhammad Ilyas Kandhlawi (1885-1944) was an Indian Islamic scholar who founded the Tablighi Jamaat Islamic movement, in 1925, in India.

founder of the movement, from India. It's called the *Malfūzāt**, *Malfūzāt* in Urdu language means the anecdotes, the stories and sayings put together.

Every mosque must at least have the *Faza'il-e-A'maal**, which is a book that was compiled by one of the relatives of Muhammad Ilyas, he was called Muhammad Zakariya. The first section of the *Faza'il-e-A'maal* is The Stories of Sahabah, the companions of the Prophet, because when you go for Khuruj, at the end of the day you must read the stories of the companions of the Prophet for some few reasons: first is that you may think that you have done a lot of sacrifices for Islam that day but when you read The Stories of Sahabah, it humbles you because you realize the amount of sacrifices they have done and also it helps you to keep hope. The second section of the *Faza'il-e-A'maal* is constituted by the Hadith, the sayings of the Prophet, which cover various topics like the importance of prayer, the importance of remembering God and other related issues. Also there's a whole section that talks about the importance of Tabligh, Tabligh means preaching and evangelizing, and there's another book called *Muntakhab Ahadith*, a collection of prophetic sayings of Muhammad centered around the six pillars of Tabligh.

Tabligh philosophy is built on the six pillars which are: *La ilaha illa Allah wa-Muhammad rasul Allah*, the testimony of faith; *Salat**, prayers; *Ilm and Zikr*, knowledge and remembrance of God; *Ikraam-e-Muslim*, to be kind, honorable and generous to the believers; *Ikhlas* which is sincerity, to not be vainglorious or proud and the sixth one is *Dawat-o-Tableegh*, calling people to the path of God.

The *Muntakhab Ahadith* was written by Muhammad Yusuf Kandhlawi*, the son of Muhammad Ilyas, he is still alive, he is the global Ameer, I don't know if he is passed but is the global leader of the Markaz of the Tablighi Jamaat, based in Nizamuddin, in India.

There are also other books, but the *Faza'il-e-A'maal* should be in every mosque because you have to use it for Ta'leem to read the Hadith.

I used to read all these books and I got very popular in the Markaz, people would come around and ask me for advice and I would listen to them and give them my point of view, I was very eloquent so people were gravitating towards me. That's why to these days if I go to the Markaz all the people that were there at the time know me and I still go there sometimes and hang out with the people.

I went there as a kid and I carry it with me as a precious experience but at some point I think I still had some teenage-hood to finish and I was eager to go...Eventually I started smoking weed again and little by little I withdrew from it. By 2007 I had left, nonetheless it wasn't a withdrawal from religion as a whole, I wasn't done with Islam yet, I was still diving and I met some friends who were Salafi, we started talking and I joined them. The Salafi are divided into two, I joined

* The *Malfūzāt* is a compilation of some *Malfūzāt* (Statements, anecdotes, advices, prescriptions and spiritual remedies) of Muhammad Ilyas.

* The *Faza'il-e-A'maal*, originally titled *Tablighi Nisab*, is a Sufi religious text composed mainly of treatises by the Indian hadith scholar Muhammad Zakariya Kandhlawi on the merits of good deeds.

* The five daily prayers (called *salat*) are among the most important obligations of the Islamic faith. *Fajr* prayer starts off the day with the remembrance of God; it is performed before sunrise. *Dhuhr*: after the day's work has begun, one breaks shortly after noon to again remember God and seek His guidance. *Asr*: in the late afternoon, people take a few minutes to remember God and the greater meaning of their lives. *Maghrib*, just after the sun goes down, Muslims remember God again as the day begins to come to a close. *'Isha*: before retiring for the night, Muslims again take the time to remember God's presence, guidance, mercy, and forgiveness.

* Muhammad Yusuf Kandhlawi was the second Ameer of Tablighi Jamaat from 1944 to 1965. He died in 1965.

not the Salafi who are violent, like the ISIS, but the ones who are more like pacifists and condemn terrorism, they support authority and monarchy, the Saudi Salafis.

So I met these people and I got deep into that and the Salafi used to tell me "Thank God you left Tabligh because Tabligh is an evil innovation". I stayed with them for a couple of years but that wasn't intense like Markaz, I wasn't as dedicated as with the Tabligh. I wasn't dressing in a Kaftan or whatever, I was cool, then I got disillusioned and left.

At some point I became a Sufi but during all that time I started getting very political, with the Tabligh I travelled all around the country because they move a lot and I've read a lot, a lot of religious literature. What fascinated me about the Tablighis was their ability to give me this sense of purpose and responsibility, they made me believe that I was doing the work that the Prophet used to do which is to call people to righteousness. Imagine walking around feeling like I was doing the work of one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets, I was continuing that legacy. I woke up in the morning and I knew exactly what I had to do, I wasn't confused about my life, it was very...it was very clear-cut what I was supposed to do. That was the thing, and the passion, that was a burning passion to save humanity from falling into hellfire.

To these days Tabligh informs my organizing as an activist, because that is the most organized group I know and there's no abuse of power. Markaz is the most democratic organization I've ever seen. Nobody can be abusive because nobody is afforded that opportunity, it is a very loose network but at the same time very centralized. And they can organize! If we can adopt the Tabligh model we will win the revolution because the Tablighis are not scared of the people, they go to the people. While I was with them I have entered places I never thought I would enter, I have gone to bars and pubs, I have gone to Senegambia*, inside Senegambia, preaching people. I have visited sex workers, I have sat with junkies calling them into the path. That's why I keep telling to the people that we must evangelize the gospel of the revolution like the Tabligh use to do, they are popular because they come to the people and honor them, they don't belittle them, they're not like the Salafis who are always bashing people. These people go to the people, sometimes the Tablighis would approach some young people and they would say "play your music, it's okay we can talk, we're not imposing ourselves, you can smoke while we are talking to you." They make you feel comfortable, they make you think "Oh, these people are cool!" And when you join them then you also, you become part of the machine that calls people.

Tabligh showed me how to be not scared of the masses of our people, it taught me how to ground, because their work is grounding with the people. You must be with the masses, you must be on the ground with the people and it's the most grounding work...I mean they do it for religious reasons and although today I am no more part of the Tabligh, I am still convinced that there are lessons we can learn from them.

The purpose of each of the Tabligh who is sincere about it is to save one, even just one person from the depth of Jahannam, the depth of hellfire and to lead him or her on the path of Muhammad. That is their goal, no other goal. They give all their life to this, to the recognition that humanity must be saved from sin and be taken on the path of righteousness. That sense of purpose knows no doubt, no wavering because you are constantly reminding yourself of what your purpose is. That's why you go to Khuruj every month, for three days, to be in that environment and to recognize and to remember and to reflect upon the work that must be done. And they narrate a lot of anecdotes on the lives of the elders in India, in Pakistan. So one wish when I was in Tabligh was to visit where the elders be in Pakistan and India. It's beautiful, they regale you with these stories and you look at these people and think "Look at these people, they've spent their whole life doing this..."

* Senegambia is a short road in Kololi, Serrekunda, with several large hotels, restaurants, bars and clubs. It has become a focus for tourist nightlife as well as for locals looking to meet and mix with the tourists.

Moving in Kololi



I didn't move to Kololi* straight, the first place where I lived once I left Sanyang, I was 16 at that time, was Bakau New Town. I shared a room, it was a single room in my friend's family house. I stayed with him because I knew him from The Young Observer, he was the president, I was the information secretary. When I was there I used to go to Bakau at The Daily Observer which is where The Standard Newspaper is now, at the time it was the most popular Gambian newspaper. I was among the people who wrote on The Young Observer column which was a very popular column for kids.

I lived in Bakau New Town for maybe 2-3 years, then I met this brother at the Tablighi Jamaat center, the Markaz in Bundung, Lamin Touray, we became close friends and I moved to his house in Latrikunda German*, around Pipeline, behind Kairaba Avenue. His family was also in the house, I stayed in this small room for a long time, at that time I have already left the Tablighi Jamaat meanwhile I was becoming more active in writing, and my interest for political movements was also growing up.

* The original settlement, Kololi Village, is now home to an increasing number of professionals, expats, retirees and workers in the hospitality industry, since the early 1980s Kololi has been radically transformed by tourism, growing significantly and spreading right down to the beach, at what are now called the Palma Rima and Senegambia resort areas.

* Bundung and Latrikunda German are former villages now incorporated into Serrekunda. Formerly known as Pipeline Road the Kairaba Avenue was named after the Gambia's former President Dawda Kairaba Jawara. It runs eastwards from the Total petrol station on the Atlantic coast and terminates at the monument at Westfield in Serrekunda. The reason it used to be called Pipeline Rd. was because it is so long (3 Km). The road itself is lined with banks, restaurants, mobile telephone companies, fashion shops and other retail outlets.

I joined the AAPRP* and the Panafricanist Congress and I started accumulating books. Shortly after I moved there they opened The American corner which was a sort of library sponsored by the American embassy. There were lot of good books and there was free internet access. I used to go there and read, it was like five minutes away from my house, so I ended up being there every day and I started meeting other people too.

Also during that time there was a forum on Gambian Facebook called Balafong. Balafong was a discussion ground during Jammeh's time, it was not political per se, but it concerned social issues. And through that I linked up with a lot of likeminded people, we met in real life and we became friends.

I became very popular because I was very young and had very wild opinions and that's how I got to know a lot of people who later on would become very instrumental in my intellectual journey.

When I was in Latrikunda German I also started working for the Standard Newspaper. Later on I moved to my brother's house in Sukuta* because I had encountered some problems in Latrikunda German with the family there. I stayed with my brother for like a year, but it was too far. It was during that time that I met Tom, a white guy from Austria, through a documentary he was making.

One day I was sitting at Senegambia, I saw him passing and I called him and said "you look so pale!" And he told me "Yeah, I just came from holidays in Austria." And I was like "ok". So we had a conversation and during that chat he said "I have a free room where I live, I live with other people but there's a free room if you want you can take it." I was like "that's so prompt!" I didn't even ask, you know young people we always have rent issues, so I said "Ok."

That very night I went, I saw the place and told him "Ok, I can move in." Those days I moved in. And it was three of us sharing the space. It was around 2013-2014 when I moved there in Kotu*, we stayed there for a year, then the landlord said he didn't want to renovate the rent so we moved to another place in Kololi. I have already lived in Kololi years ago, for maybe 2-3 months before, around my actual neighborhood but apart from this I used to come to Kololi a lot because it was the chill place, there were bars everywhere.

Kololi is sort of dead now but back in the days it used to be very lively, there were bars at every street corner, there was so much weed, it was a sort of a countercultural city in Gambia which still is in a way but it has lost a lot of its glamour.

Where I was living in Kotu, it was just a street far from Kololi, so it was like we were living in Kololi basically but after we moved into the very heart of Kololi.

We had three bedrooms and a living room that we also converted into a bedroom. We lived there for like 2 years and from there we were all separated, Tom went back to Europe for a while, a long while this time. I rented my own place then Tom came back and there was this place I live in right now, we were like "let's rent it together." So that's how we moved in there, I've been in Kololi for a been while now, but it wasn't like intentional that I wanted to move to Kololi, it was more the circumstances that led me here.

* The All-African People's Revolutionary Party (AAPRP) is a socialist political party founded by Kwame Nkrumah and Kwame Ture and organized in Conakry, Guinea in 1968. The goal of the party was to create and manage the political economic conditions necessary for the emergence of an All-African People's Revolutionary Army that would lead the military struggle against settler colonialism, Zionism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and all other forms of capitalist oppression and exploitation.

* Sukuta is a town located in the Western Division of the Gambia, nearby Serrekunda.

* Kotu is a village close to Kololi, now part of the Serrekunda urban area.

Chances are that if I had my own funds I would not have moved to Kololi at that time, I would have lived maybe in Kotu which has a more decent reputation, but then I ended up here and here I am now and I love it to death, I wouldn't see myself living anywhere else other than Kololi.

One thing I remember vividly when I moved to Kololi is if people asked me where I lived I used to say Bakoteh because I didn't want people knew that I live in Kololi. It was about the image of Kololi, I had already faced some of the stereotypes as someone who smokes weed and drinks, so when you tell people you're from Kololi, the stereotype is that as a young person either you're a bumster* or you're just some drug head.

But later on I changed that perception, I was like "It is what it is" and I started introduced myself as someone from Kololi.

My evolution has a lot to do with this place, it was in Kololi that I've encountered anarchist politics and I became very deep in anarchism and also in my political activism against the State.

What makes Kololi different than other places like Bijilo, Brufut or Kotu is that Kololi has still a working class vibe, a lumpen vibe, people hanging out and chilling. Also I got used to the place, there's something special when you got used to an environment and you know everybody and everybody knows you, for me it's like my second home apart from my village.

Last time I went to the beach in Brufut Heights and I was in the car with Babou, one of my friends. I was telling him that in the streets there there's nobody, there's nobody outside while in Kololi you can find people in the streets chatting, selling stuff, smoking and drinking *attaya* any time of the day and the night.

Brufut Heights, not the heart of Brufut itself which is more or less like Kololi, is one of the rich neighborhoods, it's a place catered for rich people, there's more community in Kololi on so many levels and even if it's getting gentrified it still has that authentic, so called Gambian community, because you can find the rich houses and next to them our people still living in their compounds washing clothes by hand in the courtyard, cooking meals on charcoal or sitting under the shade of a baobab tree and an old portable radio broadcasting Mbalax or Afro Manding.

It's a confluence where the rich and the poor dance into each other, in constant motion, but it's getting more expensive to live in Kololi and there'd come a time when maybe I will have to move out if I cannot afford it anymore but I hope and pray that I will be able to fight against the gentrification. Even the people are complaining about it but there's no political action to stop it, because of the capitalist indoctrination we don't talk about gentrification and because from childhood they tell us that it is normal that rich people should have better places whiles we have poorer places.

* Ugandan anthropologist Nyanzi describes bumsters as: "Young men involved in diverse activities that include the process of misrepresentation of facts, usually a concoction of plight stories and ineffective struggles to meet the needs of large extended families, which are convincingly fed to sympathetic wealthy-looking foreigners with the motive of moving them to pity and compassion." (2005, p.561)

In-depth into Tarbiya



Tarbiya is an Arabic word that means discipline, basically. I follow the Faydah Tijāniyyah which was a path started by Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse who was a Senegalese Sufi leader. He was born in 1900 and died in 1975.

The Faydah is a branch of the Tijāniyyah order, which is one of the biggest Sufi orders in the world, the founder of the Tijani order, Shaykh Ahmed Tijani was an Algerian but he is buried in Morocco in Fez. Shaykh Ahmed Tijani had predicted a Faydah, Faydah in Arabic means a flood plane, it's when the river overflows and then floods the plane outside, that's what Faydah means. Shaykh Tijani had prophesied that "a man will appear among my followers who will come with the Faydah". The Faydah is a metaphor that many people would enter the Tariqa Tijāniyyah through him. A lot of Tijani Shakyhs have claimed this title but in the end they realized it wasn't them.

I narrate this according to the account followed by the community of Shaykh Ibrahim: in 1930-31 when Shaykh Ibrahim was celebrating the Mawlid in the village of Kóosi —the Mawlid is the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad which is a very popular tradition in the Senegambian region— he stood up and said "*Ana sahib al-fayda*", "I am the bearer of the faydah, the prophecy" and they said that after his declaration a lot of people realized the knowledge of God. Now the knowledge of God in Sufi Islam is a very specific thing: according to Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse God is to be known by his names, by his attributes and by his very holy and eternal essence.

* The Tijāniyyah is a Sufi Tariqa (order, path) within sufism, originating in North Africa but now more widespread in West Africa, particularly in Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Niger, Chad, Ghana, Northern and South-western Nigeria and some part of Sudan.

Sufism differs from mainstream Islam in this regard, because mainstream Islam claims that one can know God through his creation while the Sufi contends that the initiate can know God experientially.

So that's how the community of the Faydah Tijāniyyah started and from that time onwards when Shaykh Ibrahim made the declaration he started having a lot followers and he would initiate them into what he called Tarbiya which is a spiritual training aimed at disciplining the soul so that the soul will wake up to the knowledge of God.

The community of Shaykh Ibrahim believes that the soul already knows God: what happens with the Tarbiya is that the soul wakes up; they say that when we are born we already know God as a baby but as we grow up society and social conditioning and social constructs start programming us putting in our head all kind of misconceptions like "God sits in the sky, God is this, God is that..." So because of this ignorance the soul becomes blurred and forgets that primordial knowledge. What happens in the process of the Tarbiya is that the soul wakes up and remembers that truth, that knowledge of God. Once the soul remembers that, the Sufi initiate enters into the state of Fana which is an annihilation of the ego, because it is the ego that overshadows the spirit.

It's very singular the way I came into Tarbiya. I have a lot of friends who have done the Tarbiya and in Gambian hip hop, even though I wasn't a rapper, most of my big brothers who are rappers, they follow this path. People like Smoke Doctah, Killa Ace, Kanasu Barz, they were always talking about this and it was deep but at the same time it sounded so blasphemous...I was a Salafi then and I would wonder "How can you say all these things, that you see God, that you are God?" But it peaked my interest, it was an interesting conversation. But when that was happening I was already gravitating autonomously towards Sufism as I have always been interested in trying to know what was going on with religion. Religion was always fascinating to me as a kid and then growing up, I kept this interest.

I used to talk to them and I used to listen to them and also to their music, they were hip hop and I used to listen a lot to hip hop, it was kind of cool, they would wear their long big beads like the bead I have. It became a subculture the whole thing, it was an authentic urban youth subculture.

On my Facebook account I had this guy who was my friend, Mustafa Briggs, his father is Nigerian and his mom is Gambian and he followed the Faydah Tijāniyyah and with him I would talk about these things but in an intellectual way, while my friends were more like, it was all street talk and there were a lot of fables and legends involved in. Whereas my friend was very intellectual with it, and because I was very interested in intellectual stuff, I was just a dropped out kid reading a lot of books, I was like "Ah! This is interesting!"

Also another thing is that I've always known about Shaykh Ibrahim because I grew up in Gambia and he was from Senegal; you can see his picture here everywhere, inside the cars, on the side of the collective bus, in the shops, at the back of the taxis, literally everywhere.

But I always had a distrust toward him because of how people treat these Shaykhs and how they glorified them and I was sure that this wasn't my thing. A lot of young Gambians would say things like "Naah! I don't know what this is about, people just worship people..." Then I started talking to this Mustafa Briggs, we would talk about all these things, Shaykh Ibrahim, Faydah Tijāniyyah and the Tarbiya. So in front of me there were two ways: Smoke Doctah and Mustafa. On his Facebook I saw his friends and added a lot of people and a lot of people added me and that's how I started seeing different sides of the Faydah: the intellectual one on Facebook and then this other one which was more spiritually based, not intellectual, it was more folklore type of thing.

The first time I went to the Shaykh of Smoke Doctah, Killa Ace and Kanasu and all these people who were rappers, their Shaykh Baba Diallo is still my good friend. I went there and I said "I want to do the Tarbiya." He initiated me into the Tarbiya but then I stopped, I was like "I can't do this, I don't know, I'm still not really convinced."

So I stopped until Mustafa came around from England for holidays. Shaykh Mahy was here, Shaykh Mahy Cisse is a grandson of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass himself and together we went to see him and that's how I entered again into the path.

The general practice for all Tijanis, whether one belongs to the Faydah or different branches of the Tijani Tariqa is the Awrad, the litany of the Tijāniyyah itself. Every morning you do "*La ilaha ill-Allahu*" hundred times on the beads, it's like the rosary of the Catholics, then "*Astaghfirullah*" hundred times, and finally "*Salatul Fatihi*" hundred times too. *Salatul Fatihi* is a prayer and a sending blessing upon Prophet Mohammad.

I did that for a while, I kept doing it but I wasn't really satisfied, I wanted something deeper and I did go to Medina Baye, the city of Baye Niass. Baye Niass is Shaykh Ibrahim but his endearing name for everybody is Baye Niass. Once I came back from Medina Baye I was more determined. Mustafa was then a student of Shaykh Mahy Cisse but after he switched to Shaykh Wuld Khayri, a Mauritanian Shaykh who follows Shaykh Ibrahim. He is a spiritual guide, a Muqqadam, the way they called spiritual guides.

Mustapha was following Shaykh Wuld Khayri, so I went to Medina Baye, I met him once and I was impressed, he was a beautiful human, a very beautiful person and I just fell in love with him. So when he came to Gambia to visit because he has a lot of disciples here, I went to meet him with Mustafa and I started asking him questions, like, "Shaykh how can you be sincere, having with no pretensions when you pray?" All these things, all these metaphysical questions. And the Shaykh looked at me and he asked me "Have you done Tarbiya?" I said "No", he said "can you recite *Salatul Fatihi*?", I said "Yes", he said "Ok" and then he started, he did the prayer of Tarbiya for me and exhorts "Start the Tarbiya" and I was like "I've never said I wanted to do the Tarbiya!", so I started unprepared. I wasn't ready, because in a way he decided for me, yes, he said "Do it!" and then I started, Mustafa was reassuring me "Just do it, you will be fine."

So the Tarbiya, the way I did is every morning after Isha prayer, Isha is the last prayer, the last evening prayer, I did five hundred *Salatul Fatihi*: *Allahumma salli 'ala sayyidina MuHammadin al-faatiHi lima ughliqa / Wal khaatimi lima sabaqa / Naasiril Haqqa bil Haqq / Wal haadi 'ila siratiqal mustaqeem / Wa 'ala aalihi Haqqa qadrihi wa miqdaarihil 'adheem*.

And it means: *Allahumma salli 'ala sayyidina MuHammadin al-faatiHi lima ughliqa Wal khaatimi lima sabaqa*, Oh God, send blessings upon Muhammad, the prophet, who is the opener of what was closed, and the one who sealed what has gone before him. As it is said in the station of prophecy, because in Islam, the Prophet is the last prophet, he sealed the door of prophecy, no prophet will appear after him or messenger from God. *Naasiril Haqqa bil Haqq*, And he is the one who leads to the Truth by the Truth, he uses the Truth to lead to the Truth. *Wal haadi 'ila siratiqal mustaqeem Wa 'ala aalihi Haqqa qadrihi wa miqdaarihil 'adheem*, And the guide to the straight path, and send blessings upon his family with the amount of the station that he has before you, O God. Like Muhammad's own station before God, his greatness.

So, I used to do this five hundred times after the Isha prayers: *Allahumma salli 'ala sayyidina MuHammadin al-faatiHi lima ughliqa / Wal khaatimi lima sabaqa / Naasiril Haqqa bil Haqq / Wal haadi 'ila siratiqal mustaqeem / Wa 'ala aalihi Haqqa qadrihi wa miqdaarihil 'adheem*.

That is one on the bead and I would do this five hundred times, I used to be home because it was more comfortable, I needed my silence to meditate upon it. And then I would do five hundred before Fajr prayers and five hundred again after Fajr prayers and some other prayers.

I started the Tarbiya in Gambia, I was doing it here for a while and then I completed it in Medina Baye, the city of Shaykh Ibrahim, which is in Kaolack, Senegal. It's not far from Gambia, from the border is like one hour and thirty minutes, two hours and you get there by bus.

I went there, Shaykh Wuld Khayri is a big Shaykh, he's a big, big spiritual guide so he has various Shaykhs under him who can supervise people's Tarbiya. And the man who supervised my Tarbiya was called Shaykh Habīb, he was a very nice man to me, I have a post about him on

on my Instagram. I stayed in Medina Baye until I finished my Tarbiya, it took maybe a week or two I can't remember exactly. Apart from continuously doing the things I have already explained, I had to do the general practice of the Tijāniyyah which consists in three obligatory adhkar or litanies, the Lazim, the Wazīfa and the Haylala on Friday. In the morning I would do my Lazim, the *La ilaha illallah Astaghfirullah** and then the *Salatul Fatihi*, hundred hundred each. And then in the evening I would do the same thing. Now after the Maghrib prayers, the Maghrib prayers is the 7 o'clock prayer, between that and the last prayer, that gap, the Tijanis do what they call *Wazīfa*. People sit around a cloth, a white cloth; they spread a big white cloth, the size depending on how big the crowd is. The cloth is spread so there can be order, everybody sits around it and does *Astaghfirullah Al 'Adhim aladhi la ilaha illa Houwa-l-Hayyou-l-Qayyoun** thirty times and after the *Salatul Fatihi*, which is the longest prayer in the Tarbiya for fifty times, then *La Ilaha illAllah* hundred times and finally *Djawharatul Kamal** eleven times.

Every Friday people gather for the Haylala from 5 o'clock, the Asr prayers until the Maghrib prayers, and they do *La Ilaha illAllah* thousand of times.

So I used to do all of these practices which I didn't find difficult. But the Tarbiya is very intense, sometimes you get so bored doing the same thing over and over for weeks. But once I finished, basically what the Tarbiya did to me, when I finished it I felt like I was one with the universe, like I was one with God. It made me realize that I was anew consciously, it's like sort of gift. It's a form of a consciousness you wake up to, it's like realizing that everything is one, that there is no duality. Basically once I finished my Tarbiya I could look at no matter what object, thing, tree or sound and say "this is me" and "I am this." There's no separation between beings and things, everything is united as one. It is an experiential epistemology, it is not something that people would tell you how to feel, you feel it within yourself. And then they took me through a series of interviews, the person who supervises my Tarbiya asked me different questions to see if I had really arrived at the knowledge of God. Through my answers I showed him that I have really reached that level; otherwise if my answers were wrong I would have to continue the prayers.

It is such a strange and beautiful thing that when I have finished I knew that another person had finished its Tarbiya in China, another person in India and another in Pakistan...because somehow me and these guys we all reached the same answer. It's very scientific. We are all doing the same thing because there's only one indivisible Truth and Truth will always be Truth.

For example they can ask you: "Who is God?", and your answer will show whether you are ready or you're not ready. And they would say for example, this is an example not that they may ask you this, but they would ask you "What is this?" And if you tell them "This is a pack of cigarettes" they would say "You are not ready." Because you haven't achieved oneness with the universe. If you've done, really done, when they ask you "What is this?" You say "This is me."

* I believe in no other God except Allah, I seek forgiveness from Him.

* I seek the forgiveness of Allah the Mighty, Whom there is none worthy of worship except Him, The Living, The Eternal, and I repent unto Him.

* The Jewel of Perfection prayer: "O Allah, send benediction upon and salute on the Essence of Divine Mercy, the Accomplished Ruby encompassing the center of comprehensions and meanings, the Light of all created universes, the Adamic who possesses Lordly Truth; the all-filling Lightning in the rain-clouds of gains that fill all the intervening seas and receptacles; Your Bright Light with which You have filled Your creation and which surrounds all possible places. O Allah, bless and salute the Essence of Truth from which are manifested the thrones of realities; the Essence of the Most Righteous Knowledge, Your Complete and Most Straight Path. O Allah, bless and salute the Advent of the Truth by the Truth; the Greatest Treasure, Your Outpouring from Yourself to Yourself; the Encompassment of Talismanic Light. May Allah bless the Prophet and his household, a prayer which brings us to knowledge of him."

But not in a crazy way, it's not like you're insane, it's a deep understanding knowing that there's nothing that separates us, separation is the illusion, it's something similar to Nirvana for example. Nirvana is the best explanation. There is no duality, but you don't need to read a book to reach this awareness because the knowledge you achieve is based on practice and embodiment.

It's like something you experience, it's experiential knowledge: it's like for example the law of gravity, if I was in the Gambia and Newton was in England and I saw a mango falling and Newton saw an apple falling, and we investigated, we would arrive precisely at the same conclusion because it is scientific knowledge. Tarbiya is something like that.

So, when I finished my Tarbiya, I was experiencing the most beautiful feeling I have ever had in my life, ever. I wish I could go back and do it again, but it was tough. A lot of time I was like "this is an illusion, this doesn't work, they're just fucking with us." I wanted to give up and I would go to the Shaykh and tell him "I am doing all this but I can't feel anything!" And he would reply "because your ego doesn't want you to find out, if you keep on doing it your ego will be obliterated, it will be destroyed in this process and you will lose your self awareness." And he was right eventually because all these mundane convictions "you are this, this", all these images I had of myself "I am this, I am Immortal X, I am the school kid, I am a rapper or I am this..." all of this would vanish.

As long as you have this self imaging of yourself, you will not arrive at the knowledge of God. You must essentially recognize yourself as somebody who doesn't exist to realize that only God exists. Somebody who feels but doesn't exist, it's like this. You can see the shadow of a glass, the shadow looks like it exist but when there's no light and there's no object, the shadow doesn't exist. The shadow exists only when is predicated upon the light and the glass. It's like the voice and the echo, when there's no voice there's no echo. So, we are like the shadow of the glass or the echo with God, we think we exist but we don't exist really, only God exists. So if only God exists, then who are we? Shadows? No, if God is the only being that exists and everything else is in non-existence, then who are we? Projections of God. All of us are projections of God.

I am aware I could have reached the knowledge of all of these things philosophically, but the community of Shaykh Ibrahim doesn't care about that; I could have read about this in books and said "I'm one with the universe, I've meditated..." No. I wanted to go through the process, because I wanted to realize it by myself, I couldn't get it from the speeches of a Shaykh, I couldn't get it from a book, I couldn't find it anywhere but in myself through the practice of the Tarbiya. You have to find this in your own heart and realize it in yourself that is not a lie anymore but a truth that you've realized within yourself. That's why during Tarbiya they would tell me "It's not Baye Niass, it is not your Shaykh, it's not your friend: it's your own path, you must walk it." It's the most beautiful experience. I finished my Tarbiya and I came back to Gambia, I was an illumined human being, and it's never been the same since.

And the people around me could feel this change in me, because when you finish your Tarbiya, people can tell. So once back home I returned to my daily routine, I was working at the Standard Newspaper and I went back to my job, I would go and do my rituals...

Overtime I became lazy, I wouldn't do stuff but I still hold memories of that time, memories that are very close to my heart and there was something I wrote on Facebook, something that speaks very profoundly of the time I spent in Medina Baye and it reflects a bit of that atmosphere I was living in...

"Sitting here thinking of baye niasse. that giant of a man at the peak of sainted humanity. the quintessential sufi guide to the presences of the divine in the latter days of the downward flow of time. i remember the beautiful humans who dwell in medina baye. who showed me nothing but love, light, beauty and goodness during my time there seeking the face and countenance of god.

I remember the wazīfa when the old and young, the rich and poor sit side by side for an hour to glorify, remember and honor god and the legacy of his prophet thru the oft mention of salatul fatihi.

I remember the first time i laid my hands in the hands of shaykh wuld khayri and ask his permission to guide me on the path. I remember his smile, his softness, his love for all of wandering humanity.

I remember shaykh ḥabīb the beloved and humble one, the one who supervised my tarbiyya and showed me what wayfaring unto god looks like.

I remember too the deep conversations I was blessed to hold atop the roofs of the little beauty filled city till the call to the prayer of dawn is called and we cluster giddily behind the righteous imām to give thanks and start a new day as cosmic beings in the presence of a deeper and wondrous connection.

And the times I spent before the resting place of baye, sitting there witnessing deep acts of love you only find in the ancient hagiography of the sufis. There you'll find people from all over the world reciting love poems, weeping and just being in awe of this black prophetic figure.

God bless the elders, teachers, spiritual guides and fellow wanderers on this path.

Upon the city of the shaykh barhâm be peace, abundance and much goodness.

Amīn."

Back from Medina Baye: Anarchism, The Standard Newspaper, Coalition 2016, #GambiaHasDecided & Post-Jammeh blues



I had come back to Gambia from my Tarbiya in Medina Baye and I was so dedicated to the path that I thought of spending the rest of my life spreading that Sufi wisdom, trying to get people into Sufism and to experience the Knowledge of God as espoused by the community of Shaykh Ibrahim Niass. And for a while I was really committed, I would do all of the devotions.

I was already living with Tom and Kumba who was his partner then in this house and we used to talk about politics a lot, but I was in this phase where I was deeply rooted in traditional Islam, not the Wahhabi* form, but the usual West African form of Islam and we used to talk about that a lot. During that same period some of his friends came from Austria to visit him and they used to joke that if they were not careful I would convert them to Islam because I was reading all the books and I was talking a lot about it, I was passionate about it. And I remember we used to argue about homosexuality a lot and I would firmly affirm “No! This is the unnatural order of things!” And I used to be homophobic, but I wasn’t calling for violence upon them or anything, I was just arguing it on a metaphysical level.

Also, because most of them followed anarchist politics, we would talk about politics too and somehow I got introduced into the writings of the Zapatistas and the Subcomandante Marcos. I used to find these writings so fascinating because they were so poetic. Actually

* Wahhabism is a puritanical form of Sunni Islam and is practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the word “Wahhabi” is derived from the name of a Muslim scholar, Muhammad bin Abd al Wahhab, who lived in the Arabian peninsula during the eighteenth century (1703-1791). Today, the term “Wahhabism” is broadly applied outside of the Arabian peninsula to refer to a Sunni Islamic movement that seeks to purify Islam of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teachings of the Prophet Muhammad and his this creed.

reading Eduardo Galeano reminds me of Subcomandante Marcos and his writings in the way they talk about the word, how the word must be preserved in the fight against oppression.

So I brought within myself these two attitudes: I had this revolutionary strand that has always been there but has been dormant for a while because I had other interests, spiritual and religious interests, which were the second component.

So when I came back from Medina Baye it was in that environment that I found myself and while I was trying hard to hold on my spirituality, on the other hand I was also developing a keen and sharp taste for anarchist politics. This was my first real exposure to anarchist politics and it was fascinating.

I started asking myself questions like “why would someone uphold authority? How did authority come to be? How do we end up following one person? And this person has so much power...”

These issues emanated from a country that was under dictatorship then, in the Yahya Jammeh dictatorship, and they propelled me because I was already speaking against Jammeh at that time and I was working at the Standard Newspaper as an editorial writer. It was a very fascinating experience when I was at the Standard. I had dropped out of school and I knew the guy who started the Standard Newspaper, Sheriff Bojang years ago because I used to write for The Young Observer and he was the director then at the Observer until he left for studies. So when he came back I got introduced to him again and he said to me “can you write an editorial?” And I didn’t know how to write an editorial but I said something like “Yeah, an editorial, I can write an editorial.”

He told me to come to the office and start. When I got there, the first editorial I wrote was on May Day. I have already read a lot of communist literature, so I knew exactly what I was going to talk about. So my first ever editorial was on May Day, its historical significance for our times and in what it could be still useful, because on May Day in Gambia there are no protest or strikes, it’s just workers going to the stadium and entertaining themselves with sport and doing little speeches. So I was saying, this is not the aim, the goal of May Day; and I remember I had no computer then, so I wrote it on a notepad and then transcribed it. And he said “this is good, this is a good editorial!”

But my editorials were really not objective, they were very personal, so I had to work through that also. Also at that time my editorials reflected a lot of religious content, because I was in that phase and I remember he used to tell me “No, you need to cut down with it”, even if him too, he was fascinated by religion and spirituality and for me he is one of the best writers I’ve encountered in person.

So I was at the Standard, I would write editorials for the week, it was a daily newspaper and I used that medium too to criticize the regime, I started running a weekly column called Immortal Reflections. It was a glorious time, my column came out every Friday, because my nickname was Immortal X it just became Immortal Reflections, it was densely philosophical. And people were like “you know we don’t understand what you’re talking about” and Sheriff used to tell me “just write, you’ll find your niche” and he was right because little by little I found a dedicated following, a small dedicated following for my column. And I was using Facebook too, I was one of the people who was known at that time to attack the regime of Jammeh on social media when everybody was scared to do it.

There were sporadic outbursts that I would have where I would attack the regime of Jammeh directly but for the most part I had to do self censorship, because it was very dangerous. But because of the social milieu we were all familiar with, when I said something people would know exactly what I meant because they’d understand the situation, but there was a lot of self censorship for safety reasons because I didn’t want to be just an adventurous, I wanted to say things that meant something.

But there were other times where I would say things very directly like I remember this July 22nd, July 22nd 1994 was the day Jammeh came to power through a coup d'état which was celebrated yearly as the day of the revolution. So I remember writing a letter on Facebook: "Dear President Jammeh..." and I was very clear about everything...

There were a lot of things like this one in which I was caught and when people call me an activist most of the time they are talking about that era. I remember this one time I wrote this post on Facebook "if they ever come for me, just remember all I did, I did for the love of my people." It was a night where I really got scared because I said some tough things and I felt like I was gonna be picked up, but somehow I was always lucky. I didn't get picked up. But this was also because my political activism has always been informed by my revolutionary leanings, so I was not just haphazard nor adventurous, I wasn't speaking truth to power just because I was frustrated with Jammeh's government. Of course there was an element in that but I was mostly inspired by revolutionaries who came before me.

I remember I used to read a lot of Huey Newton from the Black Panthers and that would inspire me to say something concrete and to speak truth to power. This was the environment I found myself in. Before my time in Medina Baye I was already doing this but when I came back I'd had sort of a spiritual grounding and at the same time I was discovering anarchist politics. So basically that is the environment I was involved in when I came back from Tarbiya. But that doesn't mean I have abdicated my spiritual path, I still don't know whether I still believe in anything anymore but I sustain memory of love for Shaykh Ibrahim Niass and the community and I still talk about him in great fondness and remember that community with great fondness and beauty and I still hold on into that path, in a weird kind of way I am still connected to the community.

It was a very interesting time and in the year 2016 I had intensified my political activism, I started doing live videos where I talked about political and social issues and also I would write a lot. That year the coalition was formed, months later after all that, on the 1st of December 2016, the day of the election, the coalition finally won against the dictatorship, it was a glorious and beautiful moment.

I was supporting the coalition because it was the one formidable force, it was the first time I have voted in my life, the first and only time basically I have voted in an election, a national election, and it was a very glorious moment.

I remember the election was on the 1st of December, the results were supposed to be announced in the night. But it was the following morning, on the 2nd of December when they announced the winning, I was one of the very first people to get to Westfield for celebration. I made a live Facebook video on my Facebook, it was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. People just coming out and hugging each other and smiling, people who didn't know each other, it was like there was a burden that was lifted from the backs of Gambians.

I was there from the early beginnings, because as an activist I was part of the process. So shortly after the announcements, Jammeh accepted the result saying that it was a transparent election.

So we were celebrating, it was a truly beautiful moment, I think it was something like how Africans must have felt when they won independence, we felt like that.

A week later Jammeh came on TV and said he rejected the results. People got paranoid and scared, and then shortly after that a movement was born out, #GambiaHasDecided.

The logic of that movement was that Gambians have already decided that they wanted Adama Barrow and that they were not going back and I was one of the organizers of that movement.

But it was not a centralized organization, it was more an ideal that just spread amongst the people and people just took it: there were T-shirts, there were billboards, there were little conferences that we did organize and we would speak passionately about our desire for democracy.

It became a hashtag on social media also, it trended a lot, even in the diaspora. The Gambian diaspora played a very critical role in the fall of Jammeh. They were also in the impasse, they were a very critical voice.

So I had written an article, it was called “#GambiaHasDecided: T-shirts, Billboards and the long road to the inauguration*.” Because they started tearing down the billboards, Jammeh’s people. Jammeh still had mandate until the 19th of January or something like that, and this was early December when they started arresting people. Towards late December they started arresting the people for wearing the t-shirts and they would tear the billboards, so there was a reason for the title of that essay. And I wrote it to recount what was really happening in the ground and what was the way forward. So once I published it, it went viral and I became a target of the Jammeh regime in its dying days. People started advising me to leave the country and I went to exile for a couple of weeks in Dakar. While I was in Dakar, we were also mobilizing against Jammeh, we were speaking on different mediums, and we were doing live Facebook videos: it was me, Kemo Bojang, Muhammed Sandeng, Hatib Njie and some people would join in our lives like Babou Njie, Juka, this sister, she would also join us sometimes. This live Facebook became very popular, we would do it daily and a lot of people watched it.

Shortly after that there was a crisis at the border between Senegal and Gambia. Gambians were crossing in huge numbers and they were staying at the border because there were rumors of civil war since Jammeh refused to leave office.

So while we were in Dakar Killa Ace and Agi Deffih with a couple of people were already in Karang, a border town, helping Gambian refugees. So we decided to go there and join them and help. So we went, there was a group called Help Gambia Desk, we were part of it. We started raising funds privately and publicly; we were buying pampers and Cerelac for babies and food. And then we were distributing lunch, breakfast and dinner for Gambians who were staying in unfinished buildings or in other’s people houses. And also, the cost of living was getting higher so those families couldn’t really sustain all of the people, so we remained there for a while doing our best to assist people and distribute food wherever Gambians were staying.

Then Jammeh through the Ecowas move finally accepted to leave, so once he left the people also started leaving from the border.

I saw the power of people, ordinary everyday people, coming together to do something that in the mind state of the people only governments can do. We were just ordinary people who came together and did that.

Now if I look at the whole thing about the defeat of Jammeh, I can see that it was deeply rooted in the aspirations of the people. Gambians voted against Jammeh, they didn’t vote for Barrow. This is a distinction that must be made, I didn’t even know who Barrow was. How many people can you meet who knew Barrow? Nobody cared, at that point anybody, even me, if I was the candidate I would have won because it was never about Barrow but about taking Jammeh out. That’s why Gambians can’t understand how today the current politicians has betrayed us.

What I saw during the #GambiaHasDecided moment and also during the crisis at the border was people taking agency and acting and doing things without waiting for power or the powerful to do something. It was just everyday people, there was no leadership, nobody can stand and say “I was the leader of #GambiaHasDecided” or nobody who went to Karang at that time can say “I was the leader of the Help Gambia Desk.” No. We were just working, coordinating collectively, together with others actors in the society and the people of Karang. They really looked out and helped us a lot and the Karang people must be commended because through them we were able to do a lot of work.

* Full text of the article in Appendices.

But the primary contradiction in fighting against Jammeh was that Gambians just wanted Jammeh out, anything but Jammeh. At that point for Gambians, there was no question of “We must take power” and that was the mistake that Gambians made. So, that ‘anything but’ was the great contradiction and that’s why we have this idiot in office because we didn’t plan, we didn’t say “Now, next time, we wouldn’t have an idiot or a corrupt person in office because we’re gonna groom a leader from amongst the people, who cares about the people, who understands, who is progressive, who can be answerable directly to the people.”

There was no consciousness like that, all that people wanted was Jammeh to go, that was the slogan “Jammeh must go”, the slogan of the Coalition was “*Si Suuf rek*”, “He must go down.”

So if there’s something we have meditated on post-Jammeh is that we should never ever again say “Anything but.” We must plan ahead, we had to have a post-dictatorship, we should have had a post-dictatorial democracy, we should have had institutions that we built from amongst the people, not from the government but from amongst the people. And it is important that we’ll always remember this. But the primary contradiction in this struggle to uproot Jammeh is that it was not a sustained progressive plan which only could have saved the soul of this nation. People came to the fight with no ideology, some people came because Jammeh had hurt their family members or they have been hurt themselves, other people had family members who were killed. People came for various reasons, very personal, there was no rallying ideological ground that we could all agree on. There was no disciplined environment for struggle, it was not a revolutionary struggle, it was more a liberal reformist agenda, one of the kind “Let’s take him out and we can have democracy.”

But we didn’t define that democracy. What does that democracy entail? What does it mean? When we have a government that claims to be a democratic government, then what would that look like? And their representative, who they’d be answerable to? Would the rule of law be enough as a rhetoric? Would freedom of expression be enough?

Because our society is suffering more than it has ever suffered, people are still suffering, there is still crisis in the healthcare system, crisis in the educational system, crisis in the agriculture, everything is in crisis, just like it was more or less in Jammeh’s time.

So, what is the essence of a democracy if it cannot take care of the needs, the material conditions of the people?

These are the questions we must explore today as a people. When we say we want a democratic government, what exactly do we mean? Do we mean a government that can let us criticize it but it doesn’t change its ways? Does it mean voting every five years? Or does it mean a popular democracy, a people’s democracy that is directly connected to the wellbeing of the people and strives to better the conditions of the people?

Unmasking the jamboree of the New Gambia: Occupy Westfield



In 2017, when Jammeh decided to leave, finally, Barrow was sworn into office in Dakar. It was on the 19th of January. And when he came back they planned to do an inauguration at the Independence stadium in Bakau which is a football stadium and the only big stadium in Gambia.

There were billboards all over town with Barrow's picture on it and I was attacking these billboards telling the people "we just came out of this, Jammeh's pictures were littered all over the places." And everyone was trying to calm me down "No, you are too hasty." Some friends were saying "it's important that people familiarize themselves with his face." I didn't agree with that, I think that it was wrong. Others said "it's just to advertise for the inauguration."

According to official figures the inauguration costed 19 millions dalasis, 19 millions. And I was like "Why would you spend 19 millions when Mai Fatty who was part of the coalition had said that Jammeh emptied the coffers? We have no money. But somehow you want to spend 19 millions dalasis on inauguration?"

I had trouble with that, I remember saying on Facebook "Fuck the inauguration!" And there was a huge debate around that. For me I think at that time, this was like in February when he did this inauguration, I was perhaps the only critic of Barrow's government. People were saying I was negative, for me it was simply because I felt that something was fundamentally wrong with a government that claims that their representatives came to destroy corruption, autocracy, tyranny, dictatorship and economic mismanagement. And then the first thing they do is to hold the Jammeh's style inauguration and jamboree.

I found something fundamentally flawed with that, so I was actually making an argument "Why don't you put these 19 millions into NAWEC, we are kept in power cuts, there's no

water and everybody is complaining?"

That was the time when I started going off on the regime, this was in the early months of 2017 and then I think the second major critical episode was when Germany gave Gambia 75 millions or something like that and I shared the article and I said "Dear Gambians, especially the people who have gone through the back-way, your government has just sold you." Because it sounded as an absurdity that Germany would just pick money and give it to a new government without any interest.

So the signs were clear and readable and I posted that and everybody was "You are negative, nobody's gonna send back nobody."

And I remember months and months later when they started talking about deportations, people were telling me "Oh, so you were right."

This was the first instance but shortly after that followed the silence and indifference of the president, this guy would not show in public and talk to Gambians, he would just be quiet and then things started happening.

I can't recall on the top of my head right now but as a political activist and as an anti-colonialist I began feeling that something didn't make sense. So I started attacking and speaking out against the system.

In late October 2017, I posted a status update on Facebook, given the social conditions, the material conditions of that time when NAWEC was going through shit, like we wouldn't get power for maybe 8-9 hours a day and it was extremely unbearably hot and sometimes there was no water. I posted this status update, I was like "Who is ready to go out and protest and march for NAWEC to fix shit? If you're down, Holla!" And after that I added a hashtag, #OCCUPYWESTFIELD.

I went to bed and when I woke up, that status update went viral on Gambians Facebook and social media as a whole and through that a movement was born which became called Occupy Westfield.

Now Westfield is a place, it's like the vein of Gambia's commerce because it has a road that leads to Banjul, a road that comes from Brikama and a road that comes from Kairaba Avenue. It's like a heartland, if you lock up that place then Gambia stands still. So it was a very perfect place. And also that is where Solo Sandeng* and his people did the protest. So it's a very symbolic place in Gambia's struggle for change in modern times. I don't know how the name Westfield came but we can suspect it came from colonialism.

That gave birth to a movement which became so big and I was the founder and the face of Occupy Westfield. During the weeks that the movement had started, we met the head of police in Gambia, the IGP, the head of the immigration, the head of the paramilitary which is the riot police and others. We have met to negotiate because they were saying "Gambia is still not stable that's why we have a peacekeeping force in the Gambia and a protest like this would affect the stability and security of the nation."

Very diverse people joined the movement, young people, students, workers, women, taxi drivers, there was everybody. Occupy Westfield blew up because it was talking directly about the condition that were affecting almost everybody in urban Gambia. Everybody felt the burn of the electricity and the water cuts, it became so big that it was trending more than anything. At that time on Facebook and Twitter the only thing one would see was Occupy Westfield, thousands people were talking about it.

Occupy Westfield was even the time when Barrow fired his first minister. It was a big deal, because he was a popular minister, Mai Fatty, the minister of Interior.

* See Chronology of contemporary Gambian history.

Even that couldn't trump Occupy Westfield from trending. We were the last people who officially met him before he was fired.

What happened was that in the Gambia we have a public order act, it is a colonial law which states that before you protest you must get a permit from the police and this is not just to notify the police but they must permit the protest. So the first negotiation we had was with the police and they denied us the permit. But we insisted and they said they were not gonna give us the permit, then the following day we met with Mai Fatty who was then the minister of Interior and in that meeting there was the minister of energy, there was the managing director of NAWEC, there was the permanent secretary of the Interior, there was the national security advisor and me with my team.

We insisted, we told them "you have to give us the permit." But to speak plainly in a way we didn't want to go there for the permit, because section 25 of the Constitution affirms the right to assembly, the freedom of assembly and section 5 of the Public Order Act sort of contains this freedom too. So we were saying "No we are not gonna go for the permit." But a lot of people, given the history of the protests in the country and how the State had acted towards the protestors, were insisting that we get a permit so the State would not harass us.

So eventually we started that process, we went at the police headquarters in Banjul for ask the permit and they screened us. After we spoke to the police and the following day we met with the Cabinet and other representatives.

We had only one demand "we're not here to postpone or cancel our protest, what we want is a permit for us to protest." That day we met with the IGP, the inspector general of the police, this was the day before the meeting with Mai Fatty and his team, we made an announcement that the state have categorically denied us the permit and that took Occupy Westfield into a whole another conversation. Now we were protesting against two issues: water and electricity and democracy.

So Occupy Westfield became basically the litmus test of this new Gambia and its new democracy. And people knew how hardly we fought for this new government and now this new nation, supposedly bearer of freedom, was rejecting the citizens their right to protest. So for this reason the movement gained even more force, because a lot of people weren't really interested in the water and electricity, a lot of people were like "Ah NAWEC, we're used to this, why would you protest?" But when they denied us the permit, the people joined because they felt wronged that they fought so hard for democracy and now people were being denied their right to assembly and protest peacefully.

So when we met with Mai Fatty our conditions were clear, "we want the permit, we don't have to come here to negotiate or anything", but they persisted in snubbing our rights. And this was on a Friday, that Sunday we were supposed to do the protest but because we were expecting the terms of the dialogue we moved the protest to the following Sunday since we were supposed to meet with the government for continuing the negotiations.

The following week after that Friday we were supposed to meet with Mai Fatty on a Wednesday or a Thursday, I don't remember exactly. So when we met with him, we talked with him briefly and he got a call from the vice-president of that time, Fatoumata Tambajang, that he must come to the State House and then in the evening we heard that he had been fired. The following day the police called us and we went to their headquarters and they gave us a permit to protest. So finally we had obtained the permit, we could protest.

The day after, it was less than 24 hours when we got the permit, they called us and we had a meeting with a whole bunch of them. They wanted to inform us that "there's a new development." There were people who wanted to counter the protest. "Well counter the protest, that's not our problem, that's your problem, you are the security you have to deal with that." And then they added "The beach boys, the bumsters, they want to protest on the beach" and we

were like “they’re citizens they can protest, what is wrong with them protesting?” “It will affect tourism.” And we replied “But the tourists are not citizens but they are citizens they have the right to protest.” And they kept going on with other excuses, like “there are people trying to protest in solidarity with you all over the country.” We stood firm, “these are two different things. First, if there’s anybody protesting in solidarity with us I think that we would have known about it but we haven’t heard of any and even if they haven’t told us, Gambia is so small that we would know about this. Second is that they have the right to protest, they can do whatever they want and we are protesting at Westfield, that’s what matters. We’re not telling them to protest, we’re protesting at Westfield, that’s what we agreed on with the police.” So, they talked, talked, talked and they revoked the permit. So within 24 hours they gave us the permit and revoked the permit. And then we came on social media, we told to the people, because social media was a medium of communication with the people, we informed the people that our permit had been revoked. But for me Occupy Westfield meant more than just a protest because as an activist it was the first time that I faced direct death threats, assassination threats and insults. I had already faced a lot of things before but this time it was on a new level. People sent me death threats, somebody who I knew personally called me and said he would look for me, use a machete and cut me down. And people who knew where I live called me and said “we know where you live, we’ll come there and kill you.” This was not the government, this was vigilante justice. Vigilante justice is citizen justice, not State justice, it’s just people taking it upon themselves to do something violent because they think they are protecting a good thing, a good cause. Basically they were supporters of Barrow and the government at that time.

And there was a lot of fabrication too, there were people who were questioning my nationality as a Gambian because of my ethnicity I guess, I don’t know, even though my ethnicity which is Fula is the second biggest one in Gambia after the Mandinka.

People started fabricating stories about how I was a single child, they claimed that my mother was a single mother, left Guinea Conakry and moved to Gambia from other countries or some other place, and came here. Others pretended that I was being used by some people to achieve a certain agenda that I’ve been given. Some people said I’ve been given millions of dalasis to stage this protest. It was a very frightening moment.

On the other side I had a lot of support too, I did get a lot of advice from people and also I wasn’t alone, I was there with a movement, there was a team of very solid and dedicated people.

Occupy Westfield was never about me, but because our people have been told to believe in a leadership I had to step up and take upon being the face and leader, so people were attacking me and I think that after those encounters I kinda turn cold a bit.

So fast forward they revoked the permit, we met and asked ourselves: “what are we supposed to do now that the permit has been revoked and we have already told people that on Sunday we are protesting?” People said that “every time people protest this country the State comes with violence” and “we don’t have the capacity to expose people to that form of police violence.”

So we made an announcement publicly that the protest had been canceled based on these grounds, but amongst us we decided that we were gonna go to Westfield that 4pm on Sunday and we were gonna read a press statement.*

So the protest never really happened and this need to be clarified because people saw the videos and thought that was the protest and people that were supporting Barrow were like “Look at this crowd, it’s so little! With all of this noise all over the Gambia this is the crowd they’ve pooled.”

But we had told people clearly: don’t come to Westfield, and we informed the authorities that we had canceled the protest.

* Full text of Occupy Westfield press statement in Appendices.

Then at 4pm we all appeared at Westfield, there were some of us, the team, and people who were well wishers also came. Some people held the banner and we had T-shirts and I read the statement. The statement was basically intended to register disappointment at the government of the Gambia for revoking the permit they had given us and for threatening our democracy.

After reading the statement we were just standing on the pavement chilling, it was an early evening, so it was nice, we were chilling out there and the police came with full riot gear and guns. They asked us "Who is the leader?" And then everybody said "We are the leaders", there was no one leader. But because there were some elements, some big brothers, a few petty bourgeois who owned radio stations and some lawyers, this guy who led the riot police recognized one of them and told him "it's because of you people if not we have arrested all of these people." Then the head of the police turned towards the small crowd and yelled "you should disperse in thirty minutes" and then he said "No, disperse in five minutes" and then "No, disperse now!" So there was a push and pull with regards to all of the people and he threatened us with violence this police officer. So yeah eventually we dispersed.

This was in early November 2017, during all this process the president never said anything, nothing, he was quiet like a graveyard, he never said nothing, he never pronounced anything about Occupy Westfield.

However, we already knew that he wasn't gonna say shit, so why bother? We already grown accustomed to the silence of the presidential palace, we weren't really interested in him saying anything because we knew he wouldn't say anything as we were aware that he was the one who was pulling the strings from the background, telling the ministers to meet us and the police and all these people but he didn't say nothing, the State never said nothing, only the police released a press statement during that time and declared us to be troublemakers and national security threats. That also happened.

Afterwards my friend would tell me that I had been declared a national security threat in this country by the police, so officially, according to my friend who has very close information, I am a national security threat to these days in my country.

And I was never a threat, I was only a threat to the unjustly powerful, to people who think they can usurp the power of the people and call me national security threat, that's the case, I don't consider it to be anything to be scared of, instead I look at it more as a badge of honor that the powerful actually have been threatened by our existence as a people, as people who defied and continued to contest the powerful.

That was the beginning of another era: post-Occupy Westfield became a tumultuous time and we kept fighting and we kept marching, so yes, the struggle continues...

The struggle continues...



After what happened and didn't happen with Occupy Westfield along with the disillusionment with the new regime, as an activist but foremost as a citizen of this land, I went through the five stages of grief basically. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance or some shit like this.

Because for me, even though I knew this government was bullshit I still had a belief that they would not relegate to certain levels.

Occupy Westfield happened at the end of 2017, we entered 2018 and things were not looking up, things were still messed up, people were still complaining about a lot of things. Something that stood out was the people in Faraba who were protesting that the mining had to stop in their community and the government didn't say anything about that and also the people in Gunjur wanted the fishmeal factory run by the Chinese to close down. All these things were at the forefront, there were people who were talking about them. And then has been the turn of the Monkey park in Bijilo being destroyed to build a conference hall, and that's how the neo-liberalization spiraled down.

So what we did, after Occupy Westfield we wanted to move from a moment, because Occupy Westfield was a moment, to a movement. We tried for a little while but we had major ideological differences within the organization, we were trying to set up an anarchist collective but many people didn't understand the sense of a leaderless movement and of horizontal democracy. So we tried, we failed, we tried again...

To these days in Gambia Occupy Westfield is treated as an organization so we still get invitations to conferences, to give speeches and all of these things. There's one particular speech that I gave at the beginning of 2018, this was just after Occupy Westfield and it was very significant because I present the official profile of Occupy Westfield as a movement.

Let me me read it.

The #OccupyWestfield Collective is a coming together, a meeting point, a gathering of wishes, aspirations and stances of a generation who wants sustainable horizontal democratic and de-colonial change within their respective societies. A collective of anarchists, socialists, communists, de-colonial thinkers, disruptors, rebels, revolutionaries, lumpens, drop outs, pan Africanists, students —mainly ghetto, everyday day, slum kids turned revolutionary born out of the heat of struggle, it centers direct action and anarchist ethos of mutual cooperation, anti hierarchy and shared liberated spaces.

It represents shared desires and critical wishes rather than just ideologies and theories —even as those are necessary for clarity. Born out of a desire to lift diverse voices into a unified, amplified echo for change on all levels and strata of community and society. Part of a global movement the collective is busy building joyful revolutionary spaces and the radical imagination beyond the rigidity of the old left. Cuz we believe capitalism can't rob us of our imagination and brilliance as we create a culture of defiance and resistance.

It wishes to focus on ongoing struggle beyond the short lived eruption for change and build long lasting struggles; because we believe there is much work to be done in destroying structures of domination on both societal and global levels. Based on that we are coming together to build and organize for the long road ahead and focusing long after the euphoria has faded.

Our key thematic areas of struggle, amongst other things, are:

- 1)creation of dialogues around the issue of direct, horizontal democracy wherein the masses directly participate in the making of decisions on both government and non governmental levels.*
- 2)conversations around the issues of coloniality, western dominance and the economic imperialism of the corporate empire and other multinational organizations.*
- 3)challenge the structures of patriarchy and center the liberation of women from sexist oppression.*
- 4)create study groups that revolve around political education.*
- 5)fight for a unified Africa under scientific socialism that will get rid of colonial borders.*
- 6)promote critical thinking and critical undertaking of the major ideas and theories that shape the narratives of our time.*
- 7)speak out and fight against racism, homophobia, islamophobia, xenophobia and all forms of hate.*
- 8)the creation of a strong anti capitalist, anti statist, anti bureaucratic leftist vanguard party politics in our communities.*
- 9)stand in solidarity with other groups and organizations that are fighting the same causes as ours.*
- 10) empowerment through creation of centers, libraries and spaces for self care.*

This is the profile of what we wanted Occupy Westfield to become, basically what I wanted to become because I had an idea of what I wanted to see, a type of organization but we don't find this type of organization reflected down here. And it's not like because I was a genius or I knew things, this is just because we all are exposed to a certain level in how long we've stayed in struggle and how we have engaged other struggles.

I was opportune to be in the Panafricanist movement for a very long time and I came across a lot of ideas that are both practical and impractical. I believe in the spirit of self criticism that the issue with Occupy Westfield was that we were trying to create it in a time when our material conditions were not ripe and that is why we failed. And it's mainly my responsibility as the lead organizer of Occupy Westfield.

But during all of these events I got sucked deeper into the whole civil society apparatus.

In Gambia when we talk about civil society organizations we are talking about organizations that believe in the liberal project. Their members don't have literally any problem against

Neo-colonialism or imperialism, they would attack the Chinese establishments but there's no politics behind it, it's just pure disdain on a very instinctual playing field.

And when we talk about colonialism, a lot of time people say things like "We have to stop the blame game because our problems were created by ourselves, what we need is good governance."

So this is the rhetoric around civil societies spaces and we find that this rhetoric is both unhealthy, unrealistic and downright stupid. Because Africa's problem is not merely good governance, I mean Thomas Sankara, if there's a thing called good governance, Thomas Sankara had good governance going, but what destroyed that? Cabral has created liberated territories in Guinea Bissau in his time even before the advent of independence. What became of that? Nkrumah started creating developmental projects. What became of that? So what I want to say is I think that is very simplistic for us to say that good governance is the problem and when we get good leaders then we will be fine. We say no, I said no, I think we must raise the revolutionary consciousness of the people so that when there is a revolution, that is basically good leadership, it would be protected by the people themselves like we see in Cuba when Fidel and the July 26th movement won what they did was raising the revolutionary consciousness of the people. The people felt part of the revolution so they embraced and protected it even though they were just 90 miles away from the greatest anti-socialist power, the greater anti-socialist power of our time, the United States of America. They were able to protect the revolution.

One of the contradictions within civil society organizations is that they focus almost exclusively on civic education; now civic education is when you teach people their civil rights and we know that this is not enough. Now we teach the people that they have the right to health, that they have the right to education, then what? Where is the health center or the hospital where they can go to and that would give them proper care? Where is the educational system that can give them or their children proper education?

We say no. I think that this is not enough. Maybe we should go out to the people, elaborate with them a popular education where we come to people, honoring their experiences, grounding within them and sharing with them what we know and they share with us what they know. And only then we could start having a constructive dialogue, let's look at it as a progressive dialogue between the progressive activists or intellectuals and the masses of the people. And there's no dichotomy because the activists and the intellectuals come from within that community. We all are shaped and made by that same people, so we should just go back to our people to say "What do you think?" Because in every epoch, in every generation there are people who are invested in liberation. Everybody yearns for freedom, everybody yearns for liberation but not everybody has the desire to spend and put his life on the line for the creation of liberation.

It would take a group of people, let's say the vanguard party, according to the Leninist perspective, that would enter into conversation with the masses of the people on a purely material level. And with them we can start create a mass line, the mass line is discussing with the people what should be done, what can we do, and how can we improve what we are already doing. But also we shouldn't forget that grounding with the people doesn't mean that we romanticize the masses so much that we fall into tailism. Tailism is to just follow, like a tail. No, we have to say this is what we want, this is what we don't want, this is what we should do and then from the collaboration that happens between the masses and the revolutionaries or the activists we create a mass line that can become the line of struggle.

But civil society organizations in Gambia would just drop, filling my e-mail box with invitations of the type "the EU wants to draw a blueprint for Gambian activists, you should come."

And I am enraged, how can the EU draw a blueprint, basically a mass line for Gambian activists? So the civil society organizations get funding from the EU, from the IRI, the International Republican Institute. So we find the contradictions again, where imperialist powers come and

they want to tell us how to struggle for our liberation, for our freedom, for our development, for the upliftment of our people.

And the enemy, because I consider them as our enemies, will never show us the way to liberate ourselves. So these are some of the contradictions we are trapped in after a scientific analysis of the civil society organizations.

The principal impasse within the CSOs is that even though most of the people there desire liberation, they don't use term like liberation. They say "We want a democratic society, we want a government that respect human rights." The contradiction is the lack of recognition that the State, the Neo-Colonial State which is a subsidiary of capital and imperialism, is not here to protect the human rights of the people but to protect the interest of corporate and imperial investments.

When that recognition is lacking then we put too much trust in the State, like some people do when they tell me "We will go to court for doing this and this..." while I contend "but the Court is a part of the State apparatus, the Court will never betray the wishes of the State itself, it would solidify the base of the State."

I give a classic example, the UDP, the United Democratic Party, which is the biggest party in the Gambia right now, had filed a case in the Supreme Court of the Gambia for repeal the section 5 of the Public Order Act which says you must get a permit before you protest because they had gone to jail, their party leadership in 2016 went to jail because of that injunction, Yahya Jammeh used it against them. And it actually infringes upon the freedom of assembly clauses in the Human Rights documents and charters Gambia is signatory too.

So they took that to Court but when Occupy Westfield happened, the Supreme Court said "No, we will keep this section five." They didn't say Occupy Westfield but everybody knew it was because of the Occupy Westfield noise that the Supreme Court decided to say "No, we're going to keep this."

And what I was telling to the people is that the State, no matter how independent it might want to look, it's still not independent; the Courts are not independent, the Courts will never be independent in a Neo-colonial State because they are committed to protecting an investment.

These are the contradictions we are dealing with and there's no language for liberation within the civil society organizations, there is no shared new language that they can use, it's all the old clichés like democracy, human rights, non state-actors and state-actors, stake holders, and all these private investors, all these Neo-colonial languages that we are so invested in.

And we see clearly that the idiom they use doesn't provide newness and because language also is a site of struggle language too must be decolonized, must be deconstructed, must be contested, must be questioned, must be historicized.

So we can see that behind all these terms, like good governance, civil society, donors and funding, humanitarian aid, developing policy, there's like a crafted new language which is the language of Neo-colonialism and when we talk about setting good governance, we should have a discussion about the topic. What is the meaning of good governance for us? Do we agree on it or not? Do we look at Sankara, Cabral and Nkrumah as examples of good governance or do we have different models?

That said, we will never find Cabral or Sankara using the term good governance, because it is a colonial term. Good governance means being good little slaves for imperialism and for capital. It doesn't mean being liberated. Imagine if every Gambian activists is calling the State the Neo-colonial State, that would give the language a new meaning. The Neo-colonial State, that doesn't sound right! Now, we shift the blame on one person, all the blame is on Adama Barrow. But Adama Barrow is just a symptom of the disease. The disease is that we live under Neo-colonialism and we name it for what it is. Now, this is the mistake we made, we thought that Jammeh was the major problem, that he was the evil and that if he went away, everything would be okay, but we forgot to do an analysis of the African Neo-colonial State. And today our analysis

must be scientific.

What do I mean by a scientific analysis? What that means is that is based upon facts, it's based on the material conditions, it's not based on ideas in people's heads or some metaphysical explanation that maybe is God, no. It's based on facts, it's based on observations, experimentations and conclusions.

When we observe all of these corporate investments in Gambia, all of this private sector rhetoric, we observe and we say that: "Let's experiment, let's look at other examples around Africa, is it the same thing going on?" And then when we look, we say "We conclude that indeed, this is the Neo-colonial State" because it's a template that has been replicated around the African continent and we see with the replications that is a scientific analysis too. We see that Barrow have replicated Jammeh's template which is that of the one leader who controls everything. A president who has so much power but in essence doesn't have any power because he's answerable to corporations and to investments and the desires of the international conglomerates like the EU, like the Chinese, like all these IMF, the World Bank. The IMF and the World Bank are the ones who designed the economy policy of this country. And if this is not Neo-colonialism then what it is?

So we must engage in a scientific analysis and in our scientific analysis we must look at the material conditions of the people: what is the hunger level today? Are we growing our own food? No, we're importing maybe, I am guessing at the top of my head, 80% of that what we eat. Even toothpicks, that you tooth your teeth when you eat, are not made in the Gambia, which are just little fucking sticks, are not made in the Gambia.

So when we do a scientific analysis of our material conditions, we come to a certain conclusion: that indeed we are colonized. We have food colonialism, there's no food sovereignty. I don't like the term food security. We need food sovereignty, food self determination. Our water is controlled, our electricity is controlled, everything. Everything around us, everything that constitutes the basics of life is controlled and when we talk about good housing, we are confronted with a proliferation of real estate as if a poor person can buy a house in an estate.

There is no housing policy and the dalasi continues to inflate and become useless.

Then we look at agriculture, which is supposed to be the backbone of Gambia's economy. It is failed too. And they would not talk about agriculture appealingly because all the lands are going to the investors, the capitalists. And they would not want us to be fisherman because they've sold the sea to the EU*, there's a very elaborate plan, and it's not conspiracy theory, we see it every day. And people don't want to be fishermen because they don't get nothing out of it. They don't want to be farmers because they get nothing out of it.

Because nobody dignifies their work and their conditions of work. If you go to Tanji at the fish market you will see. And I remember, when you go to school they say "If you don't work hard in school you'll end up being a farmer or you'll end up being a fisherman." As if these were just shameful activities, they have made them look like useless jobs, saying that nobody will get no money out of, that's the thing. So after analysis we realize that Gambia has entered an intense state of Neo-colonization and pauperization. Gambia has reached the level of a fully fledged Neo-colonial State on all sides, the trapping of the Neo-colonial State is all around us.

Even the conversation on migration, with the EU and the IOM representatives which come and tell people to stay here, they even have a slogan "*Tekki Fii*", which means "you can make it here". As if every time a black body enters Europe or a Gambian body or an African body enters Europe they're there to make money.

* https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/press/eu-concludes-sustainable-fishing-partnership-agreement-republic-gambia_lv

As if we cannot move and be adventurous, forgetting that one of the great myth of the West that is sold today to our children is the sense of adventure.

You must travel, European kids are all over the world, running around, trying to get new experiences.

But us, we're not supposed to move, we're supposed to stay here, we're not supposed to go to colonial Europe or fascist Europe. And that rhetoric is inherently very racist. Movement is one of the inherent attributes of humanity. We move, we experience new things, we get new opportunities and all these things.

But who empowers this rhetoric? The Gambian government empowers the rhetoric of *Tekki Fii*, you can make it here. They have used popular Gambians to popularize this.

A form of colonizing the freedom of movement. Stay where you are. Stay in your place. It's like the slum and the rich area. They tell the slum dwellers "stay in your lane". Even when we see policing in Gambia, we know where they go to arrest people for weed and for drugs and where are the most big police stations. Usually in the poor neighborhoods, and the drug squad, the drug squad police is always in the poor neighborhoods.

Policing itself, which is the controlling of poor bodies is daily routine here, you see it with your own eyes, you saw the drug squad police in Kololi almost every night but when you go to the rich neighborhoods you don't see them patrolling there.

And there is more drug been taken in the rich neighborhoods than in the poor neighborhoods. This is the contradiction we are faced as a nation.

We are a Neo-colonial state, we definitely have become a Neo-liberal State, and our struggle today must focus on how to dismantle the complex of Neo-colonialism and the complex of Neo-Liberalism. And once we dismantle it, what type of society do we want to create? We say we want to create a society where the wealth of the nation goes back to the people, where the wealth of the nation is not controlled by just a few people, we want a nation where there is no use of rhetoric like democracy and human rights and constitution and rule of law to control our people. But we want to use this wealth, which is the base of every fucking society, we want to use this wealth for the enrichment, for the development, for the joyful creation of a joyful society for our people.

We want that every Gambian must have decent housing, we believe that every Gambian must have a decent workspace, must have leisure, must have proper health care and must have proper education. And these things are possible. There's enough wealth and resources in this community, in this Gambian country to create this. And also we say that Gambia will not be liberated until Senegal is liberated from French colonialism. And Senegal will not be liberated until Nigeria is liberated from corporate conglomerates.

Then, at this point we can say that a key for freedom and a key to overcome this situation is Panafricanism.

Panafricanism, but what type of Panafricanism? Today our people talk about Panafricanism, there is a Panafrican bank, Eco Bank, we have Panafrican corporations, we have Panafrican this and Panafrican that. You have conspiracy theorists who claim to be Panafricanists, there are people who are misogynists and homophobes who pretend to be Panafricanists and Jammeh too looked at himself as a Panafricanist. But when we say Panafricanism, personally I am talking about Panafricanism as it was defined by Nkrumah, basically the unification of the African continent under scientific socialism.

Panfricanism



Yeah if you know not love,
And practice not love then you know.
We gonna do to extension,
So this one is from the Black Royal Nation,
Blessed.

Do I and I sing with the vibes for the injured,
And the tongue of the tune dem,
Without love we're nothing.

The way of the system is getting uptight..
Oh gosh.. (ey listen, ey listen)
Say the youth get desparate,
And wayword to fight, hmm.. (what is that your doing)
Take a little stroll down the street,
The other night, well, well. (yeah, yeah)
Hear some gunshot echo and a youth losin' life,
Wha Jah tell them.

Spread a little love and let Jah blessings go round,
(ey listen up, listen up)
Place your feet on higher ground.
Humble as a dove and let Jah blessings touch down,
And give some love to someone who is hurt.

Be humble and wise, be humble and wise,
Speaketh the truth and not the lies, yo.
Just be strong as the I, even I will help the I,
Rastafari paradise!
You see Black people feel the vibes, that's them business,
The pharicies and scribes come within the villages,

They want to bring a dirty lifestyle, on communities.
I've got to peel the wicked man like oranges,
I've got to lick the warrior from ____,
Tell them bring the marijuana smell it from a window sill,
Well Rastafari, prevent the blood from spill,
With one love from the heart, oh my whole temple fill.

I know that society is fighting the truth.
But it's time for I and I to teach the youth the root.
Say I, the Nyabinghi will reign forever, oh Lord.
Because Jah love is the foundation on which I man stand;
And that's why I say.

Spread a little love and let Jah blessings go round,
Place your feet on higher ground.
Humble as a dove and let Jah blessings touch down,
And spread some love to someone who is hurt.

Well it's Sizzla, feeling so ire fire deh go blaze,
Love to see Black people living the, lovely ways.
Going 'bout dem doing dem own thing Rasta dem a praise,
Now who the hell can stop the ghetto youth dem from phase.
That's how I love my friends, that's how I love my foe,
Mama say that isn't why she's ____.
And to my black people they leave that open door, well,
Rastafari never ignor.

Yea so then you,
Spread a little love and let Jah blessings go round,
And place your feet on higher ground.
Humble as a dove and let Jah blessings touch down,
And spread some love to someone who is hurt.

Ah tell dem say!
Be humble and wise, be humble and wise,
Speaketh the truth and not the lies, yo.
Be strong as the I, even I will help the I,
This is Rastafari paradise!
Yo, just be humble and wise, be humble and wise,
Your brother you must never criticise.
Yo strong as the I, even I will help the I,
This ah Black people paradise.

Make yuh peace, make yuh peace,
Come mek me trample the beast.
I man make ah speech,
And den me travel go to east.
I man make ah speech,
And dem me trample the beast.
Some say me simple,
And dem think me ah the least.
But gimme gimme gimme gimme gimme peace.

Just just be humble and wise, be humble and wise,
Speaketh the truth and not the lies, yo.
Just be strong as the I, I and I will help the I,
King Rastafari paradise!
Ghetto youths dem feel the vibes,
But that is dem business

— *Jah Blessings*, Sizzla ft Luciano

My Panafricanism started with music...Reggae music talks about Marcus Garvey, about Africa for Africans, so I had that deep sense of black history. And also *I am black and I am proud**, and all of these things in the music.

It has been just a constant evolution but there have been certain things that stand out. I remember one time my big brother brought this book home, it was written by some chief, some African guy wrote this book about Africa and that book made sense because everybody knows the lies about Africa as they are told in mainstream history. And in that book he talked about Garvey, Marcus Garvey and he talked about Nkrumah. I read this book so many times and it was funny, because he used to say funny jokes, like for example I could remember where he said when he came to the airport in England and the immigration officer looked at him and said: "Go back whatever jungle you come from in Africa!" It was very navigable and also another thing was that I knew people in the country growing up who used to buy the *New African Magazine*.

The *New African Magazine* is a continental wide magazine published in London. It was founded in 1966 and there used to be columns like Baffour Ankomah's column which was called Baffour's Beef and there was another guy, he used to have this column called Under The Neem Tree and I remember another one, this Portuguese old man whose column was amazing, when I read about his death, I was so sad, somebody picked up his column, I think now it's called The Reflections Of An Ordinary Woman or something like that.

And I used to read this, there were a lot of historical data and also current affairs happening on the continent. This was where I first got exposed to Panafricanism, I used to go to the CCF office, the Christian Children Found, which is now called Child Found and the people who worked there, like Mr Jobe, used to buy The New African and I used to read it from him.

So this sort of gave me the names and the people to look out for. Every time I stumbled upon Nkrumah, I knew that him, he was a motherfucker I needed to read.

And then a second thing that happened, while I was young I left Sanyang and I came to the urban but I didn't stay. At the time there were more like day trips to the city. I used to go and come, usually during the summer holidays, one day at the Daily Observer I met this guy called Madi Njie, he was a journalist there and we became friends.

I started to go to his house, he had these stacks of papers, lot of stuff from his journalism, when he went to the newspaper they gave him documents and he used to keep all of these and he had this little bookshelf. I read literally everything there and there were these papers from the AAPRP, the All African Peoples Revolutionary Party, which was founded by Kwame Ture and a couple of others comrades under the guidance of Kwame Nkrumah in his exile years in Guinea Conakry.

And I used to read this stuff and I found it very interesting, so one day he took me to Pipeline which is an area here in Gambia, in urban Gambia and I met this guy called Osman Kargbo, he was a Sierra Leonian refugee who's still here, he is a journalist, he's an editor in one of our newspapers now.

He was part of the AAPRP and he had all these books in his apartment, he had like a big bookshelf, a bigger one than mine at home and he had books like *Garvey and Garveyism* by Amy Jacques Garvey who is the ex-wife of Garvey. Most of these books were photocopied and laminated. And there was a lot of them and I used to go there and I don't know whether he would read this but I stole a lot of his books.

So when he went inside his room, I would just take one and put it in my bag. I remember I used to go camp out with him and smoke weed at his place, I was very young, I was like fifteen or fourteen.

* A reference to James Brown's song *Say It Loud – I'm Black and I'm Proud*.

But I was grown, people would assume that I was maybe nineteen. So I used to be there smoking and discussing with him and through him I became part of the AAPRP. I started to attend the work study sessions, the study circles at this place in Bundung, which was a nursery school, sort of kindergarten and the guy who ran it, I believe his name was Abbas, he was also part of the AAPRP, so he used to use this space to study.

Most of the members were Sierra Leonians living here because they got exposed to the party in Sierra Leone before the civil war.

Then on Facebook I met this sister, Mjiba. Mjiba was a long time member of the AAPRP and I said to her "I need some books" and she would send me things to read. And there was a brother, an African American and he used to come here frequently because his wife is Gambian, his name is Zizwe. So Zizwe is an old comrade also from the AAPRP, he worked with Kwame Ture and all this people, he has been in the AAPRP a long time.

So this is to say I would send the list of the books I wanted to read to Zizwe shortly before he was coming. So Zizwe came with these books and that was the first time I had a copy of *The Wretched of the Earth* and also a book which contained some speeches of Thomas Sankara and in that box there was also *Consciencism* by Kwame Nkrumah and there was another book but I forgot what book it was, it was many years ago.

And I start reading these books, I remember that Sankara was the most accessible one, it was a very simple English, it was a Pathfinder press publication.

The Wretched of the Earth, I used to of read *The Wretched the Earth* and I was like "This makes so much sense!" While I was with them I also joined the Panafrican Congress in Gambia which was headed by Madi Jobarteh and Fabakary Ceesay who also contributed a lot in the development of my Panafrican understanding.

I used to go to his house in Ebo town, it was a little room. It was a room and a parlor, a living room and a sleeping place. This living room was small, it was like the size of my room, and all over the wall where pictures of Amilcar Cabral and Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Samora Machel, all this people. And I used to ask him "Who is this guy? I know Nkrumah but who is this?" And he said "That's Samora Machel from Mozambique."

He was a journalist for Foroyaa for a long time, he was arrested during the Jammeh regime, he was a dedicated fighter, Fabakary Ceesay. And he would also lend me books to read.

So I met these people separately and that's how I came to read about Panafricanism and to know Panafricanism and it was a very interesting for me because it made sense to me as a young African that this should be the way to follow.

I remember when I started reading this stuff I was losing interest in school, I was like more and more convinced that the cool stuff was not inside the school, the cool stuff was outside the school and I had already encountered it.

Then I would also go to the internet, I have printed whole books. I had a friend, Bakary Badje and I would go to his office. Bakary Badje used to work for the Child Protection Alliance which is dedicated to child rights issues so I used to hang out there and Bakary, which has contested for Mayor in the Kaninjing municipality recently but has lost, was a good friend of mine, he was like one of the nicest person I've ever met and I would go to his desk and I would print whole documents, whole books and then go home with them, I still have some of them at home. And I would read these things, I wouldn't let anything slide, I didn't have a smartphone to distract me or to read anything, no. So I would read these books and then I would study them and I remember how excited I used to be, I would go to my friends and I was like "You need to read this stuff, this stuff makes so much sense!" And that is how I came to know what capitalism is, what is scientific socialism, what is communism and all of this -isms and how they shape our life. Since then it has been a spiral, I can't remember what happened next and next and next...but I was part of the AAPRP, that was the first revolutionary organization I've belonged to as a young

African but eventually I left. I left that and became part of the Tablighi Jamaat and then I left the Tablighi Jamaat and came back to this stuff again, because there has always been that yearning. Perhaps it was a yearning for freedom or perhaps I've just found it interesting. I was flirting with revolution, maybe I wasn't too serious but I knew that there was this intrinsic identification that I had with these works and with these great figures.

When I discovered these readings, I started feeling part of something bigger, because I always had a very ambivalent relation to this country, my mom was Senegalese and my dad was Gambian but my dad died when I was young. So it was my mom who raised up us and she wasn't Gambian.

Since a lot of people don't know who my dad is, they started asking "Are you like, a Senegalese?" So there was always that tension of being a non-Gambian, even though I knew I was Gambian but visibly people questioned my nationality, so for a long time I was confused. I loved Gambia and as a child of course I didn't have a conceptual understanding of patriotism or nationalism, but I remember how much I used to love the national team, the football team.

I used to have my notebook and write all their names and what countries they played in professionally and all of this childish stuff. And then we would celebrate when Gambia won, there was this deep attachment, I remember every game that Gambia played, whether it was the under twenty, the under seventeen or our national team, usually the under seventeen they don't put it on the TV so West coast radio or City Limits would do a live commentary and I used to be listening to that stuff.

But still I had this ambivalent relation with nationality so when I discovered Panafricanism it liberated me, it sort of gave me a context and a language to work with. So I started saying to the people "I am an African nationalist, I am an African patriot but I am not a Gambian nationalist" and then I started developing a conceptualization of the colonial border and the bordering of colonialism, this sort of balkanization of the African continent that Nkrumah calls balkanization of the African continent into non-viable States.

And this balkanization in Gambia, is more evident than in other countries, Gambia is a classic example of a country that was created just to be a route for enslaved Africans and raw materials. Gambia was literally created to just use the river Gambia for transportation because it was a great opening to the Atlantic.

I started developing these conceptions of being an African nationalist and not necessarily a Gambian nationalist and for a long time I fought with people over nationalism and patriotism and I was against micro-nationalism on a Gambian level. And I remember one time Foroyaa, the newspaper founded by the PDOIS*, ran this editorial saying "Can an African be a foreigner in an African country?" And that editorial just answered all the questions, I was telling to myself "This is right! This is what I am looking for!" And the answer was no, obviously.

Panafricanism gave me a sort of rootedness because before I didn't have a concept like "We are all black people, we're all Africans and we're one people." I mean the message was present in the music, in reggae music but didn't strike deep as much as when I read *Garvey and Garveyism*, that book I stole from Osman Kargbo, that book just used to fill me so much!

I would go at the internet café or use a friend's computer because the offices used to have internet, and I would just play Garvey's voice and just listen to him.

*Founded in 1986 by Halifa Sallah and Sidia Jatta, The People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (PDOIS) is a socialist political party in the Gambia. It was part of Coalition 2016 in the 2016 presidential election, whose candidate, Adama Barrow, defeated Yahya Jammeh. The PDOIS also publishes a party newspaper, Foroyaa, which was noted for its opposition to the Jammeh regime.

His voice captured me as he spoke very fast and then I would listen to Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Kwame Nkrumah at the UN delivering speech.

While I was deeply immersed with this stuff my friends were busy playing and smoking and going to club, while I didn't care because I was busy deepening my knowledge of these figures, so in the context of my time and the place that I existed in I was like a super nerd, I was a weirdo. But eventually my age mates accepted me the way I was because I had a balance, I would spend also time with my friends but there'd come a time when I withdrew from social life. I hated football in the end, I couldn't stand even watching, they looked so stupid, I stopped playing football and I quit smoking with my friends. That's because in a way I've always been looking for the big things: one day I would appear with the Tablighi Jamaat, the next day I would talk with them of my fascination for Garvey, Malcolm X, Nkrumah or the Black Panthers. I used to have this hat which is like the same model Cabral used to wear and then I had a picture of Nkrumah like a lapel that I put on it. And then I had this dashiki and I used to wear this, I did the weirdest things, now I think of all it and I am ashamed of myself but that was the time when I was kind of embodying all my passions and also I was a teen. So I would appear to my friends and they were like "What the fuck are you doing these days?" A lot of my friends would still tease me "You are still not done finding what you are looking for" but eventually I ended up and now I tell them "Nah, I think I am settled now."

So I jumped from one thing to another, just striving to find something to hold on to, something that made sense.

I remember when my friends like Famara would ask "What is the new thing today?" I would say things like "I believe, I think that there are two Gods up there", the next day I would come and say "You know, this, this, this." I always had something boiling in my head and I think it had stayed with me through the passage of time. That's why sometimes still now I would relate to people in a very weird way because I am trying to figure out something in my head. I can sit down and abruptly just be quiet, I would not talk to nobody but it's not that I am against the person or anything, it's just that I live in my mind a lot and I try to figure out stuff. It's like an ideological mathematics. I am trying to find clarity through doing the equations of ideologies and their conceptions in real time.

That's been my experience with Panafricanism and over time my Panafricanism got more refined, more informed.

Back in the day I used to think I was a Garveyite, I used to think I was following this strand of Panafricanism but today I know that the logical and highest development, the logical conclusion and the highest development of Panafricanism is found in the works of Kwame Nkrumah.

According to him Panafricanism is a program of uniting the African continent on scientific socialism, it's a program of action to develop the African nation and to bring the African nation that must be into fruition. Today we have to organize the masses of our people in taking over and destroying Neo-colonialism and imperialism and capitalism and patriarchy.

And if our Panafricanism is not anti Neo-colonial, if it is not-anti imperialist, if it is not anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal then it is not Panafricanism. Panafricanism has to be a real time practice, a concrete plan of action, not just an ideology, it is about building a mass organization that will lead Africa to its eminent and final conclusion as a united continent that gets rid of these colonial borders and this colonial bordering.

As an example of the way to be pursued I would take the fifth Panafricanist congress in Manchester in 1945. This was one of the most pivotal moment in the history of Panafricanism because that's where young African revolutionaries met and there was only one agenda which was the liberation of Africa from colonialism. And then it started, Nkrumah was the first person with Ghana, the Ghanians masses succeeded and Nkrumah did the famous declaration that the independence of Ghana is meaningless if it's not linked to the total liberation of Africa and then

that's how Ghana became a hub, a laboratory for freedom. Ghana was independent in 1957, in 1958 Accra hosted the All African People's conference and Lumumba was there, Frantz Fanon was there representing the FLN, Mugabe was there too, and with them there were a lot of young Africans who then did go back to their countries and continued to fight for their liberation. This was also a watershed moment, the All African People's conference. And then afterwards it was the creation of the OAU, the Organization for Africa Unity, a brainchild of Nkrumah, which mission was to unite Africa under scientific socialism.

Of course that failed, nonetheless these were watershed moments, and also coupled with these are the works that came out of that time, like the works of Nkrumah in synthesizing, clarifying and organizing what Panafricanism is, what Panafricanism is not. So we find Nkrumah attacking in his works the notion of African socialism, arguing that there's no such thing as African socialism, there is scientific socialism, socialism that is based on scientific analysis, rooted in the objective laws of social development which basically means Marxism. African socialism is revisionist, there's no such thing as European socialism or African socialism or all of these things but there is one form of socialism which is scientific socialism and it's materialist.

Then other figures appeared on the scene, people like Walter Rodney, people like Amilcar Cabral, Sekou Toure, Frantz Fanon who deepened the conversation around Panafricanism and the Panafrican ideal. And also these same people were talking about the third world as a whole, and how to build solidarity between Africa, Asia and Latin America. This was the time of the Tricontinental summit against imperialism in 1966 in Cuba and the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement, when Nkrumah was saying "We look neither East nor West, we look forward" because of the Cold War and the conflict between the eastern block or second world, Russia, the USSR and its satellites and the first world represented by western countries like America and West Germany.

And in front of these super powers the Non-aligned movement dared to speak, opposing to support one of the two blocks and said "we don't belong either the East or the West, we are independent."

As a young African revolutionary and Panafricanist revolutionary who believes in organizing for a socialist takeover of the means of production, I don't think any African revolutionary has inspired me like Amilcar Cabral.

There were certain things in Cabral that stood out and that didn't stand out in the others, even though they were all sincere, but eventually they were all children of their time.

But Cabral was very clear ideologically, he had ideologically clarity and he had a strong grasp of reality, he didn't take flights into the clouds, he was grounded with the people and he understood the material conditions and he deepened the analysis on imperialism, capitalism and colonialism on the African continent.

I admire notably the way he approached the struggle for the liberation of its country, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde, where 99% of the inhabitants were illiterates, he was one of the fourteen people in his land to ever get higher education in Lisbon.

After he got his degree in agronomy he came back to his people in the '50s and started organizing them to fight against colonialism. In 1956 he created the PAIGC, The African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, a party that was scientific in his approach, it was not at all a haphazard party or some emotional party. It was a party that mastered the material conditions of the people and eventually was able to takeover and win independence against the Portuguese.

I think that every young African revolutionary, every third world revolutionary must study keenly and sharply certain revolutionaries, foremost amongst them Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah. These are very pivotal names from the African continent and they must be studied and analyzed deeply because from them we learned our

lesson while never forgetting that they had their contradictions and we must try to resolve those contradictions and then move on.

Looking back to our time, today I can't look at a figure and say "This guy." There's no more the Nkrumahs and the Cabrals. Today the age of the charismatic leaders has passed. Today what we have is organizations, like the AAPRP, the All African People Revolutionary Party, that still exists and which is a classic example of that type of Panafricanism that I speak about, and also The Third Worlds People Alliance. To a certain extent the African People Socialist Party headed by chairman Omali in America is one of those. On the African Continent the PAC, the Panafricanist Congress of Azania, South Africa and the Socialist Forum of Ghana. All these are organizations embody the teachings of our forefathers. But one of the contradictions today is precisely how do we move away from the narrative of the great man and the great woman of history and look at organizing? Because it's the masses who will win freedom and liberation for themselves, it is not one single man or a single woman, it will take a nation to liberate a nation, it will take a continent to liberate a continent and it will take the working classes of the global south to lead the global socialist revolution to its logical conclusion.

Towards an African Internationalism



I have always dreamt of an All African people badass internationalism. A convergence of desires, of shared wishes and deep confluent conversations that bring out the pain, the vulnerability, the courage, the rage, the brilliance and tenacity of this late African human who lives on the periphery of big money and in the heat of the proxy neoliberal regime. One that give Panafricanism a new sharper edge beyond ideology and mere theory. This desire I have nurtured thru the passage of time—knowing its becoming is a force of nature that is circling the continental and diasporic heart like the ever persistent harmattan wind that blows westward in all its power and pathos.

As an activist on the African continent, there's always this persistent urge, I think it was from childhood that I don't really belong to this country, I have one foot in and one foot out, because my mom is Senegalese and my father was Gambian. So from a long time I have always had issues because we all look the same, we all say the same thing but somehow we're two different countries.

People say that Gambia and Senegal are the same, it's a cute thing people say but there's still rigid nationalism between the two on an official level and a lot of people bind to this. But at some point, I discovered Panafricanism as an ideology and as a program of action to liberate and unite the continent under scientific socialism and it made sense to me. And once I knew from very young age that we live in the bounds of the Neocolonial border, I've declared that I will never sustain a nationalist or patriotic posture for these borders.

Years later I would reconfirm this and reaffirm it in my writings and in my engagements and I have stood against xenophobia on the African continent precisely because of this deep feeling that we all are the same people, we all inhabit the same continent and we cannot compete against the world order using these non viable Neocolonial States.

And we know that for us to defeat Neocolonialism and imperialism and capitalism and

patriarchy today on the African continent we must build a powerful bloc and that can only happen when the African countries created by colonialism at the Berlin Conference will be dismantled and in their place we must build a federation of African republics.

That desire for me is persistent, that's why I believe in an African internationalism, a Panafricanism.

Over the years I've started traveling across the Continent as a bearer of that gospel that we are one people, that we are the same people, that we must accelerate the unfinished project of African unification. That has been the conversation that has sustained my African internationalism.

Young Africans across the continent who identify as activists and revolutionaries and progressive people are holding the same conversation that now we must throw away these borders.

And I remember when I was in Tanzania as a guest for the African Rising Solidarity Residence for Togo, there were Togolese people, there were people from DRC, there were people from Kenya, there were people from Mozambique, there were people from Algeria, there were people from Egypt, there were people from Gambia like me, there were people from Nigeria, there were people from Zimbabwe, there were a lot of countries from the African continent.

What we were talking about is that we must create solidarity among African young people because our States have failed us, our governments have failed us, and what we were talking about is to create a solidarity to defend the rights of the masses of our people.

It was a beautiful moment and for the first time confirmed to me that my dream for an African internationalism is possible, potent and alive and I've met fellows wanderers on the African continent who feel the same way and that was a beautiful thing.

Since then I have travelled across the continent and I have met other people who preach the same message, so the potency of Panafricanism beyond just an ideological project of uniting the continent it's also in the spirit of the people in their everyday life. And for me as a person who have lived this ideal for a long time it was a beautiful thing to witness and to reaffirm my faith in the fact that these colonial borders would never stop us from hugging each other, from looking at each other in the eye and seeing each other's vulnerabilities, and seeing each other's hopes and dreams and seeing the brotherhood and the sisterhood and the love for another Africa.

This has been one of the most beautiful thing I've experienced, so for me the next stage after being in touch with different activists around the continent is how we can build a continental movement, not a continental movement who supports neoliberalism, but a concrete one that does concrete analysis of concrete material conditions to take us out of this pathos that we live in, this wretchedness that we live in, this dispossession that we live in.

How can we build a counter-power to the hegemonic powers that control the continent?

This has been the conversation we've been having like with my friends Sungu or Oyoo from Kenya, like with my friend Cidia Chissungu from Mozambique and different other people in Ghana, in Tanzania and different places in the African continent, like Gauthier from DRC, Shaka from La Lucha.

How do we build a continental wide movement of young people that reflects the legacy and the greatness of the OAU charter? The OAU charter was a charter that build the OAU on the 25th of May 1963, today we're making progress in talking about African unity in the context of our time, and it's a beautiful thing that to be alive in a moment where young Africans are waking up to that dream. In this regard we're not just captives of history, we don't carry the weight of history and we're not captives of mere ideology but we are people who desire a deep recognition, a deep development, a sustainable development in every field: the economics, the political and the cultural and social prosperity for the African nations that must be.

That has been one of my major preoccupations, that's why I am trying to build an organization that shall be named The African Peoples Alliance to recognize the African in us instead of the

Gambian in us or the Nigerian in us or the Ghanaian in us because this is the only tangible reality that we have that colonialism cannot rob from us.

But today our struggle must also reflect the struggle of our time, it must reflect the struggle of the farmer under neoliberalism, it must reflect the struggle of the LGBTQ community within our society, it must reflect the dismantling of patriarchy in the global south and third world feminism in our land, it must reflect revolutionary nationalism, it must reflect the socialist ideal of our time. But beyond all of that it must reflect the organic and the beautiful nature that has risen from among us and that we must nurture for the recognition of Africa as a powerful entity amongst the constellation of continents and nations on earth.

Scientific Socialism



My experience with revolutionary activity started in my teens and it took a very confusing path; in the beginning I was into black nationalism, I was studying Marcus Garvey and Garveyite movement and I was deep into that, also I was reading a lot of black history. I was more like an afro-centrist than a Panafricanist and even my Panafricanism was kind of convoluted until I found the works of Kwame Nkrumah specifically and the AAPRP which defined Panafricanism as uniting the African continent under scientific socialism and informed my understanding of revolution and struggle. I soon realized that these ideologies were not just ideologies that were only in books, they have been tried and tested on the battlefields, in the State Houses and in the parks and highways of the African continent.

But why the term scientific socialism? And why did it appeal to me? So I was gravitating out of religion because for the most part of my life I had used religion to explain my reality, my worldview was very spiritual. Now scientific socialism on the other hand says that our material conditions have to be explained scientifically, based on factual observation of objective reality, as opposed to utopian socialism where you have all kind of fantasies about creating a beloved community and the way you're gonna get there is convoluted.

Conversely scientific socialism is very clear when it states that we must use the laws of social development to create a new society which is inevitable because capitalism's contradictions will destroy capitalism.

So it appealed to me greatly and I became a part of that long tradition of revolutionaries who had called for scientific socialism. But again, my scientific socialism is rooted in my material reality as an African and I have predecessors who had practice this, people like Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Amilcar Cabral, Walter Rodney, Kwame Ture, people who specified that applying scientific socialism in our country is not supplanting one ideology from Europe with another one.

But to be true to dialectical materialism and historical materialism and the science of socialism means to study our material condition and to apply these principles to our reality which is different from other places.

I think that it's important that we understand that the liberation struggle against colonialism was not only a struggle against the end of classic colonialism, it was also an attempt to build a state, every African revolutionary fighting for independence, whether it was Nkrumah, Sekou Toure or Julius Nyerere, all looked to the afterwards, and as they fought they asked themselves questions about the kind of society they wanted after the victory against colonialism. What type of society are we building? What type of State are we building? Are we gonna go capitalist or are we gonna go socialist? That was the debate and socialism was the most revolutionary ideology and it corresponded to the reality we wanted because colonialism was capitalism, it depleted us of everything. So it was only natural that if we were going to reconstitute a new society, the New State would be one that redistribute the wealth of the Nation back to the people.

But it wasn't so simple to choose between capitalism or socialism, a lot of things happened in the mix, some people started talking about a socialism with African features, like the Ujamaa experiment of Nyerere. Nkrumah started coming with his own ideology of consciencism, so there was a mass confusion, there was a lot confusion.

People like Fanon were already warning in their writings of the dangers the new African States might encounter and of the risk that the petty bourgeoisie would take over the power sacrificing all the efforts that the masses had made during the liberation struggles. In *The Wretched of the earth* it is him trying to say "if you don't do this, this is what it's gonna happen" because all the signs were there, it was not him predicting or prophesying that it will happen, the signs were all there for everybody to see that if you don't take these measures then the petty bourgeois will hijack the struggle. That's why Amilcar Cabral said that the petty bourgeois must commit suicide as a class and become revolutionary workers, because of that danger.

During the debates on African socialism, Ujamaa and all these revisionisms that were happening, it became necessary that a few African revolutionaries and intellectuals took it upon themselves to espouse scientific socialism.

But how does scientific socialism relate to us? Scientific socialism was the methodology developed by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao and that has a trajectory and it is scientific insofar it is rooted in material reality, insofar it involves the study of the objective conditions, knowing that we are independent of objective reality, that whether we like it or not objective reality would exist.

In that debate even Nkrumah eventually had to give up and choose scientific socialism and that's why he said the project of Panafricanism is to unite Africa under scientific socialism.

So scientific socialism is a project. Why is it called scientific socialism? You can go back to Engels talking about two type of socialism, utopian and scientific, and he was him who introduced the scientific designation at a time when there was a lot of utopian ideas about socialism especially from the French, like Saint Simon.

Now, scientific socialism it's saying that we must use scientific methodology to come to conclusion on how to change the reality and that methodology has to be objective, has to be based on facts, experimentation, observation and then conclusion.

Also, socialism has to be on a State level, the USSR, the Soviets, never said they were building Russian socialism, the Cubans never said they were building Cuban socialism. It was a matter of building socialism in its scientific fact as it must be based scientifically in reality and not on superstitions or religion or ethnolinguistic realities.

That's why once you start developing an African brand of socialism, then you start getting into a lot of problems, because dialectical materialism and historical materialism are universal scientific laws that you can apply to reality.

Lenin defined Marxism as “the study of concrete conditions, a concrete analysis of concrete conditions as in rooted in concrete reality.” But there was also a need to decolonize Marxism, to take Marxism away from its Eurocentric origins and this is a problem that we still need to resolve now. How do we apply historical materialism today on the African continent whereas there are societies that didn’t go through what we would call feudalism in the European context and where the land was shared by everybody and there was nobody who owned the land?

Indeed we can see there were two contentions with regard to African socialism. First there were people who were just using it as an aesthetic, as just a name. But there was nothing concrete, anything real, they didn’t want socialism. And then secondly there were people that genuinely wanted it and also people who were grappling with Marxism, because Marxism is so Eurocentric, they wondered how we apply it to our reality?

That’s the area where you find Cabral in, that box where there were people grappling with an ideology, that’s why Cabral didn’t say “we are Marxists” but he was Marxist, his analysis was Marxist, his party was a vanguard party, which is Leninist.

I am sort of an inheritor of that project, this scientific socialist project, it’s an unfinished project.

And I’ve read their arguments and they made sense for the African continent, that land, wealth, everything must be distributed equally for our people and more or less our people have lived like this before the advent of colonialism. Of course there were feudalisms, there were monarchies but there was a sense of communalism, those primitive communisms.

Scientific socialism matters to me on two levels: that first of all it is an ideology of struggle and second is a construction of a new society.

It has within it a revolutionary ideology that you can use to change society revolutionarily and also, after the change of society it also provides the guardians, that is the masses of our people, that we need to reconstitute a society with a just economic system and a just political and cultural system.

That’s how I’ve been on this path ever since, I mean of course there was a time when I had a short stint with anarchism and that’s not much of a difference, literally they are both materialist philosophically so there was no veering off that materialist conception of history and reality.

Scientific socialism has informed my daily struggle even when I’ve been involved in very liberal activism, it has informed the way I analyze and I look at material reality to explain that our reality is not the doing of a God. And this is reflected in my views and in my writing a lot because we must break down these concepts in a way that it is understandable to the people. One of the ways that I have been doing this is when I say to people that it is not by God’s will if we are in this material deprivation but it is because of the working of a system, and this is the capitalist system, which concentrates wealth in the hands of a few and takes it from the few, takes it from the many and gives it to the few.

For us to prosper and to better our condition permanently we must struggle for a society where the wealth of the people is controlled by the people, that is the edifice of our socialism, the wealth of the nation must belong to the nation. And when we say the nation we mean the masses of the people.

When we talk about one party democracies, people say “no this is a dictatorship” and that’s what we must break it down: when we say dictatorship what do we mean? Because every society has a dictatorship, it’s either the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie or the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Right now, I live in a society with so many parties and there’s multi-party elections but who controls the economy? Who controls the media? Who controls the dissemination of ideas? It is the few. That is a dictatorship. So when we say one party system we’re talking about the dictatorship of the proletariat and that party finds its root within the people, it’s not just one party that has a little headquarters and runs everything, it’s not a bureaucratic party, it’s going to be a party that is rooted in the people, it is ran by the people and they can change the leadership anytime they

want. What we must understand is that so long as we don't control the economic base, so long as we don't control our own ideas we are not a democracy, we don't have human rights, all we have is an aesthetic and that's what must end on the African continent. And that's my struggle today. How do we constitute a scientifically socialist society? Because scientific socialism is the one tool that we have to combat bourgeois ideology, private property and also superstition. Dialectical and historical materialism save lives and for me Marxism is an ideology that affirms life, because if I am marxist and Marxism is my worldview when I am sick I wouldn't run to a marabout, I would go to the hospital because it has been scientifically proven to work.

So for me Marxism is an ideology that can save millions of lives on the African continent because today millions of our people are dying because of superstitious beliefs and because colonialism stunted the historical trajectory of our productive base.

But also, my scientific socialism wants African unity because when we do an objective analysis of the African condition we realize that we have States that were created by colonialism. On the first level they divided our people unjustly, second they subverted and usurped our history as a people, third the African States are more or less fifty, sixty, seventy years old, they are non viable States, they cannot vie with States that have been created for centuries.

None of the African States, even the most developed like South Africa, can compete with the UK, France or Italy that have been in existence for centuries, so it becomes necessary for us to realize that the only way we can win this fight is to pool our people together and to create a federal government of African States that can stand the military might, the political might, the economic might of the rest of the world.

Today I believe that I am just a continuity of that legacy of the African socialist project, not "African socialism" but scientific socialism, in the footsteps of Rodney, of Nkrumah in his latter days, of Cabral. This is the socialism that I am working on today, a socialism that is cognizant of the material conditions of the African continent, not just a socialism you read from a book and you want to apply, no. Socialism has to fit the material conditions of every time, that's why Cabral said "national liberations are not exportable commodities, they take the characteristics of their place." So our socialist theory itself must be informed by the material objective conditions of our lands.

Scientific socialism through the laws of social development, matured by Marx and Engels and subsequently other thinkers have shown us after scientific analysis that the only way we can advance the African cause is to unite our people and today more than ever we are seeing the resurgence of the spirit of the need for African unity.

People are fighting for real stuff and that's the basis of Marxism, the basis of Marxism is that until we change the material condition we cannot change anything, we must change the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie for the dictatorship of the proletariat. If that doesn't happen then nothing changes because the bourgeoisie will give us any type of ideas to make us believe that we are winning but we're not, we are not gaining anything.

And we also know that the only viable ideology today that can fight against the neocolonial State where we exist in, is the creation of a socialist society, because the neo-colony is a direct subsidiary of global capital and the only ideology that can destroy global capital and put in place egalitarian society is scientific socialism.

It's important that we understand scientific socialism as it is foremost a materialist ideology, it is not an idealist utopian ideology, it believes in the material, what comes first is the material and what matters is to change the material. You don't change things in your head, you must do a material effort in order to change the reality. For me it's still the most viable ideology, even though the left has failed considerably and it has failed woefully over the years, it's still the only system we have that can change the world for a better world, this is my total conviction and I believe that we will win and that we must win. Avante!

Language of the revolution



Since I was a little boy, I don't know for some reason I have always had problems with mainstream terminology for everything. It always used to be strange to me. I remember the first time, the first thing I had problem with was hearing Jammeh during his speeches always saying "Fellows Gambians." And for a long time I've always struggled to look for something that doesn't sound misleading and false like him.

And another thing that I hated was the pomp of certain contexts, like for example, when you go to a conference and people say, "Ladies and Gentlemen", all that "all protocols duly observed", all of that stuff I hated that.

But when I grew into political consciousness the thing I hated the most were the mainstream terms of the government like: national development, private sector, all hands must be on deck, stakeholders all those terms that don't mean nothing literally. They have always nauseated me and I have always tried to find others. And one of the terms that I can't stand in particular is "civil society organization."

So I struggled with this language, I felt that it was something inherently non creative, something that kills you, something that kills the inspiration, the determination, the rebellion, the resistance we are supposed to be fed with, because of course we have an unfinished project for liberation.

My disdain for a language that doesn't inspire revolt, also stems from the fact that I am very interested in the written word, I am very interested in the word basically, spoken or written word.

I have always wanted something creative, something that makes sense, something that you hear and you just see joy. I wanted a language that is poetic and I remember one of the first thing I ever did was to call the government 'centralized authority' instead of calling it government.

And over the years I would change the language that has been used, instead of civil society organizations I would say social movements, instead of saying underdeveloped State I would say Neocolonial State. Because language is a site of revolution, language is a site of resistance, it is a site of colonial anxiety and colonial pacification, it is a site of power, because the powerful are the ones who set the rules, the ruling class and they tell us how to speak, how to behave, how to act, how to be good or bad and all of that is communicated through language.

Language is the medium through which we find our expression in the world. So today part of my activism is trying to decipher and trying to dismantle this language that kills the sense of revolt, this language that lies, it's not a language that is truthful, it's a language that accommodates, in the words of Edward Said it's not a language that is defying, it's not a language that leads you in opposition but only wishes to accommodate. And one of the struggle today we are faced with is how do we name oppression? How do we name revolution? And when we say revolution what do we mean? When I say revolution I personally don't mean revolution in the tradition of Europe or America, it's not like the French Revolution or the American Revolution, I don't mean the technological revolution either. A revolution for me is born out of a material condition, it is born out of a scientific analysis of our objective situation and that comes with its own language, it comes with its own worldview because eventually language is also a site of contestation of world-views.

Now, we know the Neocolonial State is not really a State but an investment of capital, a subsidiary of capital, and capitalism had done well in giving us language that we will use, a language that is not threatening to its existence. And we see that today individualism is taught as entrepreneurship, revolutionary resistance couched as a mere fancy old cliché; for example when they tell us we should fight for democracy and human rights.

What is democracy? What is human rights? How does that relate to our economic situation? Because if our economic situation is not right then nothing is right because society cannot grow. Poverty distorts human existence.

Today I am saying our fight is not for human rights, our fight is to better our conditions permanently, our fight is that each and every African must be able to live in self determined societies and must have sovereignty.

And talking of sovereignty, now instead of saying food security, I said food sovereignty because what is food security? Where is this coming from? Who is determining what is secure and what is not? When we say food sovereignty we are saying food self determination, we grow what we eat and we decide what we will eat.

Even the term climate change itself is very troubling, it sounds very nice, it sounds very apolitical. Why don't we say a climate crisis? Why don't we say a planetary crisis? Something that you hear and it just strikes fear into you, but not just fear, but it inspires you to try to find means to destroy and to bring order into the chaos and to solve the crisis.

But when we say climate change, change is usually a positive word.

Today I am trying to change that language, to a language of revolution, instead of saying we're fighting against a corrupted regime we say we're fighting against the Neocolonial State, the client State of imperialism in a country that has been sold, whose rivers are technically owned and ran, owned and operated by the EU, whose lands belong to different conglomerates.

We expose the system for what it is, we say this is a Neocolonial State, this is a capitalist State, this is a State that talks about a free market society, we know what that means, when they talk about free market to a person who is not politically inclined it sounds good, yeah, free market. Because the term 'free' itself is very positive, everybody wants to be free, who doesn't want a free market?

But we know what that term means, it's a neoliberal term and it's capitalist, it means: the market takes over and determines the lives, the deaths and the afterlives of our people.

So we say No, we don't want the free market, we want a self determined market, we want us to determine ourselves what market we want, we want to plan our economy, we want to have a cooperative economy, we don't want a competitive economy. They say competition is good, when there's competition services become cheaper; we don't agree with this.

Because for example Africell, Qcell they have competition but does that makes our life any better? No. Competition just intensify ripping us off. So we say we don't want competition, we want cooperation, we want a society where people cooperate to take care of themselves, we don't want people to compete and we don't want a cut throat society. We want a society that cooperates, that's built on the egalitarian principles that our societies were known for before the advent of colonialism and even after colonialism, even to these days we see those egalitarian values reflected in our society. So who says that cannot be possible when our people have lived like that for millennia?

So that's the language that we are trying to change these days.

Also I want to specify that revolutionary language is not intellectual language. The point is that the ideas that the society believes in are the ideas of the ruling class: who is the ruling class today? The ruling class is the capitalist class.

So the ruling class is the one that decide, because it controls the mainstream media, it control basically all facets of life and it sets the pace. But then in every generation there are people who say "No we're not going to accept this." And they change the times, but we know that the left have suffered a lot of defeats because of neoliberalism and the intensification of capitalism.

And that has disturbed the balance, but there were times when the revolutionary language was very popular. To these days you find even capitalists calling each other comrade which is a revolutionary term, which is a non gender term, it denotes the struggle, and there are expressions that have even entered in the mainstream, we hear terms like *A luta continua*, the struggle continues, which has become a norm even for neoliberalist reformists, you find organizations that are neoliberal and even neocolonial but they use terms like *A luta continua*.

So the work today is to just name the system, we must go to our people and tell them that capitalism is not totalizing but it is just a hegemonic project, and we have to start naming it: this is capitalism, this is how it operates, this is the language it uses, we need to start breaking free from it.

That's why it is important to have political education, popular political education and we see that every society given the level of its productive forces and of its modes of production and considering the ownership of the production of that society has its particular language to express dissidence.

And in every society the languages that tend to emerge that are against the ruling class of that time - like in Gambia we have a specific language that is anti systemic - they're not necessarily Marxist or leftist terms but they're terms that breed fear into the system. For example when we say *Baayi ken mormut deka bi*, we say no man's father owns this country. What is that? That is a claim against the bourgeois notion of ownership, this feudal notion of "we own this country, we're gonna run it the way we want it", it's not a patriarchal term per se, but because this is a patriarchal society we use father, so when we say "No man's father was this land" this is to say that this land belongs to the masses of the people.

But if we go to England or Brazil we wouldn't hear people say "No man's father owns this land" because that is specific of our society, so we will find different terms which express the same content using the particular form inherent to that society. In every society we can find a language that is anti systemic and anti private property, because that statement goes against private property, it says No man's father or no man owns this land, as to say this land belongs to each and every person, each and every person must be able to make it here, must be respected, must have dignity and integrity in this land.

So there is language that is appropriate for every time and place and that reflects the same scientific sentiment that scientific socialism has expressed throughout the ages, because what is objective will always be true, what is true is what is objective and objectivity is universal, even if it's particular to a specific place and condition. But when Gambians say "No man owns this land" and another person says "death to private property" and in Cuba they say "Homeland or death we will win", we all say the same thing, we all express the same sentiments. In Gambia we say *Dafa doy*, this is enough, the Zapatistas say *Ya Basta!*, it's enough, and in Egypt they say *Keffiyeh!*, it's enough.

We don't know each other, we have not sat and discussed but because it is an objective situation when we say enough of that governance, enough of abuse, enough of neoliberal policy, we express the same sentiment because we are all reached a certain scientific conclusion even though we don't know each other. We re-echo each other across the different horizons of the earth.

As long as we are objective and we look at our material conditions we will reach the same conclusions and we will eventually win against the detaining language of capitalism and neoliberalism.

In this regard, social media had been very instrumental in creating the newness of language that we need. We have started talking to each other, the oppressed of the earth, basically through social media and we're sharing the same stories and that is changing the tide and it's important that.

There's always a crack, there are always cracks in capitalism like John Holloway said, there's always an opening for us to attack capital and it's happening with the language, it's happening with the many young people who are now flocking the highways of the world demanding. We see what is happening in Chile, what is happening in Ecuador, we see what is happening in Haiti, we see what's happening all over the world. People rising up and saying "it's enough" and by far it's changing because we're changing the narrative.

These revolts are happening, like most of the times, not because people are exposed to some news stuff, it's because they cannot breath any longer, it's because they cannot eat any longer, it's because they've become insecure in their own land so they rise up.

You see capitalism has its high priests, it has churches and mosques, and they are constantly telling us: "It's okay that one is poor and another one is rich." Now, when we start changing that language, that ideal, we affirm that "no, people are poor because there's a system that created poverty and these bastards that are on the top they are rich and they are successful because they are ripping us off, the poor." So once people start realizing that, they start getting angry and they channel their righteous indignation into struggle to better their conditions permanently.

Third World



In my writing I invoke the term Third World a lot. What must be understood is that the Third World is a project, it's not a region. It's not a regional conception, it's a project. It's a project of non-alignment, of decolonization, it's a project of revolutionary practice in the Global South.

Now, during the so called Cold War with the East and the West, the West being the first world and Russia, USSR being the second world, which have since crumbled, African and Asian leaders came together and formed The Non-aligned Movement, an organization that became the pre-requisite for the Third World. Also I think of Fanon invoking the Third World because our struggle yesterday and today is not just an African struggle. Our struggle is Latin American, it's Caribbean, it's Asian because the working masses of the Global South who inhabit the Third World belong to each other. And the Third World achieves a specific meaning within Marxist circles because Marx and Engels had predicted that the proletarian revolution would be lead by the European workers considering the advance of their material conditions. They had technology and science where most of the world at that time was still under colonial domination and their people were considered retarded and unprogressive.

But we've found that all of the places where a revolution has happened were not the places that Marx and Engels predicted it would happen. First it was the USSR, then it was China, then Cuba, then the African countries, then Venezuela, then Vietnam.

So the Third World as a project achieved a specific significance. Today we can say that Marx and Engels were wrong in their analysis; today we believe the only people that can lead the world to the global socialist revolution and to its logical conclusion will come from the Third World.

But we must dispel the notion that the Third World is a region, that is the Neo-liberalist thought, it's the Neo-liberal conception that the third world is Africa and Asia, no.

The Third World was and remains a project of saying: “we are anti-imperialist, we are anti-colonialist, we are anti Neo-colonialist and we will be a people who determine our own destiny and we’ll be a sovereign people.”

So what’s the relationship, the connection and the continuity between Panafricanism and Third World?

We can look at Panafricanism as a program of action for uniting the African continent until scientific socialism succeeds, but how we perceive ourselves as Africans if Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are still exploited, divided and subjugated by the comprador class and its mandates?

We cannot say we are free, because the children of Africa who are still in Latin America, who are still in the Caribbean, who are still in Asia are still oppressed.

So let’s say that arguably Panafricanism is an extension of Third-Worldism but very distinct, because Panafricanism reflects a geography, an ideology and material conditions of a specific area and culture. Nobody can take Panafricanism and say let’s go and apply it in Latin America. It won’t work.

The inaugural moment of the Third World as a project is to be found in the Bandung conference, when the Non-aligned movement became a concrete project, but for me its highest expression it’s in the Tricontinental summit against imperialism in 1966 in Cuba where Amilcar Cabral delivered *The Weapon of Theory*, where Che Guevara spoke and along with them a host of revolutionaries from the Third World.

So the Third World again to repeat is a project for liberation, it is not a definitive designation of a region, it is a project for liberation. That’s why we consider ourselves Third World revolutionaries constantly reminding ourselves that we are children of the Third World.

Also, Third World is not necessarily a permanent name or a permanent fixture, every project has a phase out period, once the project of liberation is achieved, who cares what you call Africa or Latin American or the Caribbean.

But among the potentials of the Third World is its ability to cement us together: when I say I’m just panafricanist it looks like I am just concentrated on Africa and the African diaspora but when I say I am a Third World revolutionary - I don’t like the terms Third-Worldism or Third-Worldist - it means that I am in solidarity with the revolutionaries in Cuba and even in the Neo-colony of America, the black and brown people in America who live in the Neo-colony of the United States of America are considered to be a part of the Third World. Even in the West. Today people who went through Libya and the Mediterranean, the migrants who are in Italy and Europe are people of the Third World and the spaces they inhabit are rightfully to be considered Third World spaces. So the Third World is not a fixed, specific place, it is a reminder of who we are and where we inhabit and the forces of oppression that operate against us.

The same oppressors who operate in Africa, operate in Latin America, operate in the Caribbean, operate against the black and brown bodies in Europe who are migrants, operate against the black population of America and the indigenous population of America.

So we say wherever oppression exists, where colonialism, imperialism, the patriarchy and white suprematism co-exist, that is the Third World.

At the same time we must to be clear in making distinction to avoid misconceptions in identifying the peculiarity of the Third World spaces.

Just because a place resembles to the so called Third World doesn’t mean it is part of the Third World. For example the white trash of America where people are living in trailers, smoke crack and cook meth, they live literally like people here in Kololi but that doesn’t make them part of the Third World.

The struggle of the Third World is a specific struggle against the Neo-colony, it’s a struggle

against imperialism and it's a struggle against white supremacy, but foremost it's a struggle against Neo-colonialism, capitalism and imperialism. This is the struggle of the Third World, because the Third World came out of a specific event.

Also the Third World is a revolutionary concept that is very materialist and dialectical, it is not a flimsy ideal that you can apply to anything, it is a project that reminds Africans, Latin Americans and Asians that we must fight for self determination and as long as the Neo-colony exists, as long as imperialism exists in our lands we will continue fighting to honor this project.

I repeat, this project came out of when the non-aligned countries came together and formed the Non-aligned movement in Bandung, in Indonesia, when Nkrumah said "We neither look nor East nor West, we look forward." We don't look east as the second world, we don't look west as the first world, we look forward. This was a real problem during that time, where even socialist countries founded themselves trapped in, China and Russia had that issue, they had a split for this reason and Cuba too had a problem in the contradictions as whether to stick with Soviet Union or China. And we can find that Che Guevara was more with the Chinese alliance under Mao than the Soviet Union under Stalin.

All of these things played into the politics of the Third World because what their representatives were saying is "China as much as we love you and support you and Russia, as far as we support the revolution, you cannot determine our policy for us", because that was also a form of imperialism, the USSR wanted to control the countries in their fight against America to use and weaponize the Third World countries which had socialist inclinations.

So our people were saying "No no no, we don't want to be part of this thing, we are a sovereign people." That's why for example Amilcar Cabral was saying that "we have talked to the British and the French about our fight against the Portuguese, they're both imperialist but we're not fighting against the English, we're not fighting against the French, we are fighting against the Portuguese." This is a form of sovereignty of thought and action because if he with his country, Guinea Bissau, aligned with the Soviet bloc or the Chinese bloc or the American bloc, he wouldn't have been able to go and talk to any country he wanted to because these powers would have told him "No, these people are enemies."

It was the desire for independence and self determination that informed the project of the Third World.

But since the Eastern and the Western bloc are now part of the history of the last century, today the struggle of the Third World is against Neo-colonialism. The primary contradiction for the Third World project is fighting against the Neo-colonialism in our lands, the new form of colonialism that is undergirded and supported by European nations who were the former colonial masters, the IMF, the World Bank and the economic imperialism.

Neo-colonialism is both economics and political: economically the IMF and the World Bank decide our economies, politically we are still caught on the neoliberal democracy and this is just killing our people.

The project of the Third World is socialist, it is both political and economics and also cultural.

And it's cultural because it should involve the creation of a culture that is progressive and that is revolutionary. One that gives us our own worldview, one rooted in our own reality. A culture that promote a decolonized education, a culture that promotes the advancement of knowledge, a culture that advances the scientific understanding of the world, a culture that is progressive insofar as it is not identifiable with superstition, because one of the main thing that has happened is that African culture or Third World cultures have been identified as just mere superstitions.

No, we must say this is a lie because many of our cultural practices are very scientific as they are not based in mere ideas in people's head but they replicate beautifully in the life of our people.

This is the type of cultural motif and cultural revolution that is needed in the Third World.

What we call Western knowledge itself must be decolonized because Western knowledge is not Western knowledge, it is the accumulation of all of the world's progressive knowledge. Eurocentric understanding of knowledge itself must be decolonized and Europe and America must be saved from themselves.

Sometimes I hear people saying that either we use western medicine or we use our medicine, there's no such thing as western medicine, western medicine came out of a long line of knowledge that was created from the ancient black civilizations of Egypt coming down to the Greeks and to the Islamic Empire. For example we know from history that chemistry, as a science that deals with the making of drugs, came from Arabic Alchemy and it was developed by Arab and Muslim scientists. So it's not western science or knowledge, there's no such a thing. Science is science. Science is just human knowledge based on facts.

But a distinction must be made between scientism and scientific knowledge. Scientism and scientific knowledge are two different things. Today we have a problem with scientism, people worship science and technology, they don't establish facts. As long as somebody say it is science, people just follow it and this looks more like religion. Whereas science become important when it deals with the collection of data and empirical research.

So how do we move away from worship science to understanding it as just a tool for the advancement of humanity? We must stop using it as a colonial tool, we shouldn't use scientific knowledge as a worldview that denies someone and upholds another. When we look at the history of all the humanity we see that we all went through the phases of superstition, magic, religion and reason and these are not mutually exclusive one another. Yesterday Galileo's science was considered witchcraft. How is that different from let's say today someone using herbs to cure someone else and there are people that consider it witchcraft? Maybe these people are just primitive and backward as the people who called Galileo's science witchcraft.

We must be careful not to fall into that stereotyping. Labeling and naming can be very dangerous if we don't have foresight and knowledge. Because the herbs do heal, because herbs are material facts, they come from trees and most of our drugs are extracted from trees. So who knows that the science of the herbs cannot cure malaria or cannot cure diabetes or even cancer? A lot of people have made those claims in Africa, you just don't dismiss them as mere superstitions because the western world has established the fact or because the big pharmaceutical companies want to protect their interests. I mean, even if they claim to have a cure for malaria, we know that Moringa also can cure malaria., because the Moringa tree, we've known this for centuries. We've used it, I myself I've used it and it has cured me from malaria many times, the West denied this for a long time, now the Moringa tree is the most popular tree in the West, in the scientific research community they call it the medicine tree or something like that.

But in the mean time we are not going to wait for the West to validate our truths. That doesn't mean that anything that comes from the West is suspicious, no. We know that the accumulation of knowledge that happened in the West was because the West has literally stifled the whole world from scientific advancement under colonial domination and imperialist intrusions whilst they, they were relatively stable to do these advancements. Today we are fighting for that same freedom to be able to create our own destiny, to create our knowledge and to contribute to the happiness and progress of mankind. This the Third World project.

Neocolonialism



What is Neo-colonialism? It sounds very simple, neo in English means new, colonialism of course we know. Neo-colonialism then means the new colonialism which means that there is an old colonialism, that we call today classic colonialism as the historical moment when Europeans divided Africa into States or into entities so that they could profit from her raw materials and turn it into their breadbasket...

During classic colonialism it was the European themselves who were ruling directly the nations, the queen of England was the leader of all of the colonial world and she installed governors all over the colonies, who where white people, European people, the others.

With the advent of the decolonization movements in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s and 1970s the classic colonialism was destroyed. The Other was booted out, the white man was kicked out and at his place were Africans themselves who took over the mantle of the State.

But with the Africans taking over their lands came a new contradiction in how should we govern.

There were people who believed that it was necessary to accelerate the process for total liberation and amongst these people were Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure and other revolutionaries. On the other hand there was a second bloc mainly composed of Francophone Afrique who were still in bed with the colonial masters.

Now, the neocolonial State is different from the colonial State in that the neocolonial State has its own flag, it doesn't fly the British flag or the French flag, it doesn't sing God save the queen, it sings its own national anthem, it goes to the United Nations as an entity, it exists outwardly and externally as a sovereign State but inwardly it is controlled by other forces outside of it.

The IMF and the World Bank continue to draw the economic plans of the Africans states that came out of colonialism. The petty bourgeois of Africa who were the educated people under

colonialism, who came and took over, were not really interested in the liberation of the people, they were interested in putting themselves in the place of the colonialists so that they can continue to profit from their countries.

How would they profit? Of course, it's simple, they would continue dealing with the formal colonial master and selling off the resources of the people to them.

So, in essence the neocolonial State is not a free State, it's a State that is a direct investment of capital, it's not even a government in the true sense of the word because a government must be sovereign, it must decide, it must be self determined but it is not self determined, it is determined from the outside, its economic policies are drawn by the IMF, the World Bank and the EU and other international financial conglomerates.

Its natural resources are extracted from inside and are taken outside of it. So the State itself we could say that it doesn't exist, it's just a board of directors who sit at the company level to decide how that wealth would be distributed from outside the neocolonial State.

One word we often hear when talking about neocolonialism is post-colonialism. It's a term I don't like because it recalls an academic theory and as such has nothing concrete to offer us.

Post-colonialism presupposes or anticipates that there is a post in the colonial, I mean there is a sense, because we don't see the white man running around, now there is no governor, it looks like we have completely take over but it would be a weakness of the imagination to think that there's a post-colonialism.

Post-colonialism is a post-modernist project, it is not deterministic, it doesn't believe in absolutes, but us as revolutionaries believe in absolutes, either it's freedom or it's slavery, there is no middle ground between, there's no part-slavery or part-freedom, no. If it's neo-colonialism, it's neo-colonialism, it's not post-colonial. Post-colonialism is a literary movement that tries to reread into texts the protest of the author against the colonial establishment or the neo-colonial establishment one might say. There's an essay that Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan author wrote, called *The Writer in the Neo-colonial State*, I have read it a long while ago, I don't remember the theme but if there's any relevance to literally movements today it would not be the analysis that post-colonialism gives, in my opinion the most correct critique that has been elaborated so far has been that essay written by Ngugi wa Thiong'o where he explores the dynamics of Neocolonialism and how the writer confronts it and should confront it and will confront it.

There's an essay on my blog about post-colonialism, it's called *Fuck academic de-colonial philosophy**, which comes out of the canon of post-modernist intellectuals, because they use complex terms that nobody will understand because they're not interested in the masses, for them it's not about land, bread and water, it's not about the basics; for them is a philosophical struggle while our struggle is not a philosophical struggle.

We know that the one who controls our resources, the one who controls the material is the one who controls the philosophy; so unless we dismantle the material control of our resources, we cannot dismantle those philosophies.

It is also important to remind us that neocolonialism is a term that was given to us by Nkrumah, through his book *Neocolonialism: The last stage of imperialism*. He anticipated that neocolonialism is indeed the last stage of imperialism, that neoliberalism itself is a form of neocolonialism because its lackeys preach to you the wonders of the free market "if you have the free market this is what would happen" but we know it's not, we know that globalization is a form of neocolonialism because there is no globalization, it's just accumulation by dispossession: they dispossess the periphery and accumulate at the centre.

* Full text of the essay in Appendices.

Globalization presupposes that we are equal, that there's a global village but we forget about the ones who live in the global slums.

That in a nutshell is an analysis of what neo-colonialism means to me, now how neocolonialism affect a person, an African person mentally? How it affects the psyche? For example today we have been taught that for us to achieve material progress and prosperity we must fight for democracy and human rights, we must fight for these things, if we fight for these things then we will get these things.

What does that mean in the African context? It means that we can have the right to say whatever we want to say, we can have the right to protest and we can have the right to vote every 4 or 5 years.

This is the edifice of this democracy and human rights they're talking about; but they don't talk about the material conditions that can support this system of democracy and human rights, we're told not to be too interested in that, that we shouldn't talk about the economics of neocolonialism or the economics of the modern neocolonial State that much because if we achieve democracy and human rights then those things will fall into place.

Even though some of us see the contradictions in that system, many Africans still believe in this farce, we are told all over the place that this is the way forward, that we must have the rule of law. What is the rule of law in a neocolonial State? It means protecting the private property of the owning class, it means the hunting down of people that are considered criminals. And who are the criminals? The lumpen people, the people who have no jobs, the people who have no opportunities to mobile upward; these are the same people who go and die in the back-way because they have no prospects of living here. But even these people who go through the back-way are told to believe that when you country achieves democracy and human rights you will be fine. That's why the deportations have started, because they told us that Gambia now is not under a dictatorship, it's under a democracy, but what changed in the life of the people? Nothing, it's the same problems over and over and over again. It's the same poverty, it's the same clinics that are here with no drugs, it's the same schools that people fail that are still here, literally nothing changed. What changed is that one set of people were exchanged for another set of people to rule us.

But the material conditions of the people continue to deteriorate, continue to go down in the mud, and that affects us mentally and it affects above all the dreams, desires and ambitions of young people, because they can only look outwards, they must go to Europe or America to get something, as our countries have nothing.

The mental colonization continues as you can hear people saying things such "if we cannot have nothing it's because we don't have human rights and democracy, but Europe does, that's why they can have all that wealth" or "white people respect people's rights".

But this is not true, if there's any people who had destroyed the right of the human being and the life of the human being it has been Europe and the white people, as opposed to us.

But this is the conditioning of the colonial and the neocolonial State, because your enemies had come and told you that you must become like them and we know that Europe had to go through centuries and centuries of evolution to get where they got to, but within sixty fifty years they want us to get to that level; we know that this is not possible.

Another problem are the petty bourgeois of Africa who indoctrinated our people, and still today they manipulate their minds by telling them that they must measure up to Europe, that's why when we talk about democracy someone will say "Look at American democracy." We know that America has no democracy, America's democracy is a farce when it's killing its minorities, and a country that has a concept of minorities is not a democratic State because every human being on this earth is equal to the other human being. To talk about minority is such a backward tendency, there should be no basis for division or discrimination based on race, creed, color or gender.

If a country is saying we have minorities then, that country has not achieved democracy as they wish they could. And we know that under capitalism there can be no democracy, one man one vote, your vote is just a vote. The people you are putting into office will become more powerful than you even though they tell you the illusion that “the power belongs to the people”; the power can only belong to the people if the people are in direct control of the means of production.

But in the neocolonial State mentally we are told that the power belongs to us, that’s why we vote and change people but when we put these in power, these same people support the system and that system is the one that has the power, we don’t have the power.

So we must change that narrative through constant political education to expose the contradictions of the Neocolonial State, a State that has all the trapping of a national sovereign State but in fact it is an enslaved society in a slave system.

Race and tribalism



I do not intend to give an intellectual understanding of race and tribalism, I feel that I can only address it from a deeply personal point of view, of course I will come to theoretical considerations through my particular experience.

I was a kid who was born as a Fula amongst a Mandinka dominant society, that's why me and my siblings speak Mandinka because we grew up in a Mandinka society.

Throughout the years I faced a lot of tribal animosity and I remember when I was very young I wish I was a Mandinka and not a Fula, I had this dreadful feeling towards being Fula because it was cool to be Mandinka in that society. And the funny thing is that in the urban, when I moved to the urban the cool thing was to be Wolof. There was not a place where I lived where it was cool to be a Fula.

But amongst the Wolof as per my experience there was more appreciation towards being Fula than where I used to live in Sanyang where the majority are the Mandinka. I think these as very environmental factors, it depends on the environment, it's not an indictment against any ethnicity, it's more environmental and it also has to do with the way I grow up.

When I was growing up I remember how that element was ever persistently present in my life, this desire to be Mandinka and not to be Fula because all my friends were Mandinkas, all the people who were doing things were Mandinkas, the Fula were considered the others, the outsiders in that society, sort of, so that affected me.

But what is tribalism? Tribalism itself is a colonial construct, our people are not a bunch of tribes, because tribe, the term tribe denotes savagery and barbarism.

What I would say is that we are nations, it is more that all the indigenous ethnicities are nations, like when Evo Morales declared Bolivia to be a pluri-national State, so it's as if there were different nations within one nation. I think that this is the most respectable term because before the advent of colonialism we all were nations onto ourselves basically in

kingdom style at the time: we had the Fulani kingdom, the Futa Toro Fulani Kingdom, we had the Kaabu empire which was a Mandinka empire, we had the Jollof empire which was Wolof and then subsequently others and others.

The advent of colonialism then pitted us against each other, of course this is not to say that before colonialism there were not ethnic animosities, there would be, because when people live close to each other they would get into problems but these were not the underlying cause of our problems at the time. There wasn't tension in the State or between the people living together and that's why in our history we find the concept of joking relationship which more or less is a covenant that different ethnic groups took amongst each other to say that they would never fight again even on an individual level. For example, there are joking relationships between the Fula and the Serer or the Fula and the Kabunka or the Fula and the Jola. All of them are never supposed to fight even individually, and every time I walk into a Jola settlement or a Serer settlement they should take care of me and vice versa.

This long tradition is a reflection of conflict resolution that had worked for centuries amongst our people because they realized that when you live together you had to find a way to cohabit harmoniously.

But colonialism contributed into breaking these systems down because they had to define, divide and conquer, to use the term of Mahmoud Mamdani, define and rule. So they defined us, we are the natives, we are the tribes, we are the Gambians and the Senegalese. It fits into the narrative and even in our national politics today there's a strong element of tribalism and it informs a lot of people in the way they vote and who they vote for and the people they hate. And people are conditioned to it, it's more or less like racism, people have been told that these are the others. If you grow up in Europe you are told from childhood let's say for example if you live in Germany, that the Turkish community is the other, that they should bear your hate, or the migrants who are coming in they should bear your hate, they're the ones who bring all these crimes and violence in the society. So you find that in tribal languages too. You find people saying that the Fulas are betrayers and they take advantage of the people and you are conditioned to believe this, I mean of course, at some point it becomes a joke, you're a betrayer, but it has a foundation somewhere.

And you are told that the Mandinkas, they're very loud people, they're uneducated, they're not civilized, sort of, and you find the Serrahules that they do rituals against their relatives so they can make money.

All these things are just methodologies that were filled into the heads of the people so that there can be animosity and hatred and division.

But while I was growing up I heard for example some African say that they were never conscious of race until they went to the Western world, but that was not the case for us as Gambians. When we were growing up we were told that everything right was white, that if a person keeps their promise and he is kind and he is always on time he is white. They say "oh, this person is a *toubab* because this person keeps his word and don't break his promises, he doesn't lie." So there is that myth that white people don't lie but they always keep their promises, that they are always on time and that they are very organized.

Even today when one of us does this he is considered *toubab*. We didn't have a concept of assimilation because there were no white settlers but there were tourists, so whiteness was always equated with wealth, that's why today Gambian boys in their 20s can marry a 70 years old white woman.

It's not a problem because the white person has been lifted off the edifice of humanity, he or she is like sort of a god, but if you want to marry a Gambian 70 years old man that would be a national scandal, everybody will say what the fuck is going on but when is a white person, you'll hear that white people have something exotic, they are romantic, even the old white woman is

something else, she is okay because is equated with wealth, with material possession.

Also, when we were growing up there was the concept of the original and the mass product, for example, if somebody brought a shoe from Europe and somebody bought a shoe from Serrekunda market you would prefer the one from Europe because that's the original one while the one from Serrekunda is just a mass product.

Everything that comes from Europe is beautiful, is authentic, and this informs the way we think and the way we thought. It shapes the way we grow up, so whiteness has become next to god, they say cleanliness is godliness, we knew that whiteness is sort of rightness, it denotes these things. These are things every Gambian grow up with, literally there's no Gambian that can tell he or she was saved from this.

And that's why for a long time I had given up this, when they say you are black it means everything negative, even when somebody does something wrong they say *Hamnga afferi nit ku nyul rek*, meaning "you know black people this is what we do."

So everything that is wrong is equated with blackness and everything that is right is equated to whiteness, and this is not based on the whole things that we see in history, and the strange thing is that this cult of the whiteness persists with the popularity in our country of reggae music and the messages it conveys like black is beautiful. But these are realities we live and I live this shit.

And today because I read a lot and I talk about nice things and I am considered smart some people say "you are *toubab*, you are *whitenized*", or for example when I deny witchcraft or superstition people say "you've become too white" as if it is the province of whiteness to believe in scientific analysis of society.

But this doesn't want to be a diagnosis but a reminder, a reminder for me that this is a real battle in our society.

Why Gambia is a white tourists sex destination? Because there are certain mental thoughts and processes that are still very endemic and real and that can support this business on a material level.

And this is not because Gambia has never been a white settlement, even where there were white settlements, people still want to assimilate to whiteness, even in South Africa which has the longest settlement that is still there, blackness is considered bullshit, that's why in the heat of the apartheid system there was a black consciousness movement to remind people of their greatness and who they were.

That's to show that it has mentally destroyed those people but Gambia of course hadn't go through that struggle so it gets even more comfortable to believe that whiteness is right and even the people who live in Europe when they come back in Gambia they act like if Europe it's the best place, of course, they also recount the horrors of the discrimination but they will tell you "but you know, the white person is this, that, that." So this is a reality that we live and it's something that it's out here and it's real.

Human rights and democracy



Today we are confronted with a menace, the menace of liberal and neoliberal activism and morality which lends credibility to capital and empire; and as a child of the African continent, the beautiful African continent, I've seen this growing up.

They tell us to keep fighting for democracy and human rights even though we never really figured what those things mean, they just sound nice and very powerful and they come with some credence because the so called international community loves democracy and human rights, but who is the international community? What is the importance of this international community? What constitutes this international community?

Perhaps it's time we start questioning, perhaps it's something very wrong with this system they have given us to inherit, this system of "what you need more than anything else in your countries is democracy" and when they say democracy, what they mean is an expression of rights.

Now there's a list of rights that must be checked by the international community: freedom of expression, check; freedom of assembly, check; these two for them are the most important ones.

According to this view freedom of expression and of assembly are more important than our right to live, our right to food, our right to education, I mean, yes, they also talk about these things, they bring money and say "this is for education because every child must be educated" but then you must starve higher education so that you can feed lower education. And we know the rhetoric around primary education, that all new liberal bullshit of "we must empower lower education, a primary education for all" and they starve the higher education.

Now if there's no affordable higher education how are we gonna have thinkers? How are we gonna have our own engineers? How are we gonna have our own doctors?

How are we gonna create a culture of critical thinking, of critical undertaking of the structures that construct the norms and the values and the world-views that beset our society and the contradictions that beset them?

But no, they keep us busy with their discourse on human rights and democracy.

I grew up under a dictatorship, I am a child of a dictatorship and like me every '90s baby in the Gambia grew up under the dictatorship. I was 2 years old when in 1994 Jammeh took over through a coup d'état and for the next 22 years Gambia has struggled to reestablish democracy, to reestablish human rights and this informed the public discourse around the change, and now it has become a very toxic discourse that cannot be deconstructed and contested because for 22 years we were told that we don't have a democracy, we don't have human rights, we have a dictatorship. I mean in a nutshell this is true, but after 2016 we have what you would call a democracy but our conditions aren't changed. It's almost the same thing that we are going through, the same poverty, the same failures of institutions, the same wretchedness and corruption that you find in the halls of Neocolonial States.

So as a young person who became called an activist whatever that terms means these days, I was told that the most important thing for us to fight for is to have democracy and human rights, that we must have freedom of expression, we must be able to say the things we want to say, we must have freedom of assembly, we must be able to go out and protest if we want to.

They told us that these were the most important things, that what we needed were just reforms, they came in our country advising us "you need stronger institutions", "you need the rule of law", "you need to understand your constitution", "you must have to understand your civic rights and your civic duties".

I have always been very suspicious of these things, fact being that very early in my life I was very exposed to leftist radical politics, I joined the AAPRP, the All African People Revolutionary Party, and also I was reading a lot. Nkrumah, Marcus Garvey, Cabral, Rodney, all these people, I read them and they made sense to me.

But also I got caught in the tide of this mainstream activism even though I always had reservations before it, and in conferences, meetings and panels I was constantly going a bit more radical, I was one of the people who was like "let's push a little bit harder."

But over time, after Occupy Westfield in 2017, I had a radical shift, I can say I started really thinking. I didn't shift on practice but theoretically I started thinking "I must return to the source, I must go back to what I used to study." And there is so much more sense in that because after 22 years of clamoring and fighting for democracy and human rights we still have the same system of governance, nothing has changed, even though they tell us "but now you have democracy, you have freedom of expression, you have this this this." And still our healthcare system is messed up, still our education is messed up, still our people are hungry, our people still live in squalor and wretchedness and there has been complete failure, there has been no proper water and electricity in the Gambia under the guise that the National Water and Electricity Company is busy doing maintenance.

After studying this human rights paradigm, this sacred cow of modernity, I've realized I must return back to the source, to what propelled me towards political activism which was people like Nkrumah, Rodney, Cabral, George Jackson and the Black Panthers.

For example if the Black Panthers were talking about "we need democracy and human rights" at their time they would be useless, nobody cared about that stuff because black folks would still be killed by the police. And if Nkrumah and the others were like "We want more democracy and human rights" they would not have been able to liberate the continent from colonialism.

They made a case that was very clear "we want to liberate ourselves so we could be a self determined people, we could be a sovereign people, so we can accelerate the process towards

African unity under scientific socialism” which is an unfinished project to this day.

I believed my calling was to work towards the finishing of that project of African unity and total liberation from Neocolonialism and the client States of imperialism that abound in the African continent.

So I took a step back from all of the mainstream activism, I was like “I don’t want to do this no more.” I wouldn’t go to the conferences, I would not be part of those organizations, I would not be part of the so called civil society organizations.

And I started thinking what is that should be done? And I said that we must create an organization on the periphery, we must go back to the periphery and we must expand from the periphery to the urban.

Where would we go? What should we do? Where do we stand? Where is our position of strength? Where is our position of weakness? Who is our enemy today? And who are our friends today?

And that was where I began my analysis. I am not doing all that stuff. Even though from time to time I would come on Facebook and say something but I’m not active in the field going in and out, trying to organize protests and going to conferences and speaking. I stepped back from all of that.

Now what I am trying to do is to build an organization in Sanyang which is my birthplace because it is a position of strength for me, I know the people there and they know me so it will be easier.

So right now what I am about to do is to collect data, because now our activism must be not abstract stuff, must not be about “we want rights, more human rights blah blah.”

What we must do today first is to collect the data that inform our material condition. Who amongst our people is employed? How much do they gain? Who are the unemployed? Who is the revolutionary class today amongst our people? In classical Marxism the revolutionary class is the working class but we know the world has become more complex than that, that capitalism has intentionally created huge reserve of labor, through unemployment, and the Neocolonial State is constantly saying “we need create more jobs” but even those jobs they’re more like you are jobless because you get nothing out of it.

Our investigation would try to provide an answer to questions like, who are those who make the decisions? Where is the power in our community today?

But if there’s one thing we’re already certain of is that our organization will be modeled around the unfinished project of African liberation, around the projects of Amilcar Cabral, the projects of the Mau Mau, the Kenyan Land and Freedom Army and around the visions of Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Josina Machel and all of the greats that came before us.

How do we create something that will show our people the vision and the possibility of liberation from wretchedness, from poverty and from the robbing, the constant robbing of the Neocolonial State and the comprador class under imperialism?

We must return to the sources like Cabral said and that’s what I am trying to do today, to return to the source, to inform my activism with the reality that I live in.

My activism is not going to be informed by UN charters and documents, it’s not going to be informed by the constitution of the Gambia which are just papers, it is going to be informed by the basic necessities and the realities of our life, like Lenin said “Marxism is a concrete analysis of concrete situations.” And that’s what I am trying to do, a concrete analysis of a concrete situation to change the situation concretely and materially.

We cannot say we have rights and then the rights don’t benefit us, we are tired of listening that we have the right to health and there’s nothing in the Sanyang clinic that can save a life.

We must go back and we must create liberated zones in the spirit of the PAIGC struggle for

independence and we will declare Sanyang a liberated territory from Neocolonialism and the machination of the comprador class and from the primitive, feudal or war lords who claim to own the land in the villages. We will liberate ourselves from superstition and, as we flow towards a scientific understanding of reality, we shall rid ourselves of the burden of ignorance and backwardness with which the colonial state has intentionally struck our people.

That our people are not ignorant, our people are not backward, they've been intentionally back-warded, they've been intentionally silenced and we know that.

So when we create this we're going to question everything, we know that knowledge doesn't come from abstraction, it comes from social practice so when we look at knowledge, every person we approach is a scholar because their experiences have taught them, because what is the importance of knowledge if it's not rooted in reality? This is knowledge.

So we go back to our people using a grounding method like Walter Rodney's and we start dialogues between the people and us as being people who are part of them, willing to raise our consciousness together rooted in the experiences and the context of our time. We want that everybody can use their social knowledge, their experiences and their life to change the context and the condition that they live in.

Also in that vein I am trying to create the African Peoples Alliance and under this alliance there will be intense political education, not people educating people, but people educating each other through a popular education method like Paulo Freire's* methodology and under that organization we will build a school, the Walter Rodney Ideological School. We will also have corner-stores and we will call them the people's stores in the spirit of the PAIGC, who used to set stores in the liberated territories and called them the people's stores. And we will have people's restaurant, we will have our people's school where people will come and study but not the useless stuff that capitalism wants them to study but to study how to become a human being on this earth with a responsibility to lift themselves from backwardness, from the poverty and the squalor, to lift themselves from the superstitions that we have been kept in, to understand that life is real, that truth is objective.

That is the plan today, the plan is that in order to change things we must reflect our reality, we cannot just say "when we takeover then we will see the change" like the politicians would do. No! We are going to uplift our clinics, we're going to uplift our people economically, we're going to create solidarity economies and cooperative economies and create a sovereign people, we're going to create food banks and trying to have our people's gardens where we will feed ourselves. Our organization will fund itself, it will be a complete break from the neoliberal activism that we have which is funded by outside forces because we know that the internal contradiction must be resolved within itself, we cannot wait for an external force to change our reality, we have to have that internal dynamic and with it our economic base to create this newness.

* First published in Portuguese in 1968, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was translated and published in English in 1970. The book formulates a pedagogy with a new relationship between teacher, student, and society. Dedicated to the oppressed and based on his own experience helping Brazilian adults to read and write, Freire includes a detailed Marxist class analysis in his exploration of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Freire purposes to view education as a practice of freedom, which contrasts with education as a practice of domination. He argues that pedagogy should treat the learner as a co-creator of knowledge. Critical consciousness, or *conscientização* in Portuguese is one of the main points developed by Freire, it focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions. Critical consciousness also includes taking action against the oppressive elements in one's life that are illuminated by that understanding.

Freedom of movement



When we say freedom of movement, what are we really talking about? Freedom of movement is of course what we would categorize as one of the big sacred talking points of the project of modernity, because without the Nation State why would we conceptualize freedom of movement when people were always free to move around before the advent of the European Nation-State?

The notion of citizenship, the notion of immigration, borders, militarized borders and all of these categories are rooted in a capitalist understanding, where capitalism seeks to commodify and commercialize every aspect of human life. And so we find ourselves in a world where there are little invisible lines drawn at every point whether they are imagined geographies or imagined borders. We have ethnic borders, we have gender borders, we have a whole bunch of borders and all these borders feed the frontier, the border of Nation State and we know that Nation State cannot exist without a border because there has to be an inclusion and an exclusion in the same way as there has to be the citizen and the foreigner for these conceptions to make sense.

But aside from all the philosophical facade, I've always known movement, I mean my parents have moved from place to place growing up and not necessarily from one country to another but within Gambia, so there was always an element of movement and I think that it's also descriptive of my ethnic group, the Fulas, who are a nomadic people.

As I said, when we were very little, my father owned a shop which I never saw because I was a baby when he closed it. But as I grew up he became a herdsman, we used to herd cows, I used to go and help, I was little, I just used to go fool around the cows. So there has been that nomadic element to the family in and of itself.

The notion of movement, which is very endemic and intrinsic within the Fula community, was also present in my family because we were a typical Fula household: my father was Fula,

my mom is Fula, uncles, aunties, everyone. Then we grew up in a society where everybody in our environment wanted to travel to Europe or America, basically the West, before my teens I got already conscious of this, I remember when we were kids, when somebody did something nice they said "may you go to Europe, may you go to America!" As a sort of blessing. Whereas an old woman or an old man would say "may you go to Mecca for the Hajj!" Even in our prayers we invoked movement, I remember there was a prayer for movement, so either it was the holy land of Islam or it was the holy land of capitalism, movement was a constant reminder.

That went on and we all grew up, came of age in my teens. And even I, I was not exempt from this lust for movement. Of course, I mean, if you grow up in this society you have that desire. I am a child of my environment, a product of my environment and that was always present. It changed over time with attaining political consciousness, now I don't feel like I need to kill myself to go to Europe, I don't really care. But it used to be a burning desire and we would sit for hours, smoking weed and talking about it, "If I go to Europe the type of things I will do, the houses that I would build back home, the type of hustle that I would be doing in Europe or America."

So that desire was fueled and we were constantly reminding ourselves "we just have a transitional period here, then we'll move." But then, when I was very young there was this guy who used to take care of me, ok, so I was very stubborn and my mom would always get tired of me so there was this neighbor who was like a little brother to my mom, we were friends, so he would look after me, he would pick me from the street and ground me in his room, the whole day I wouldn't go out, because I was always roaming in town, always no where to be found.

He would ground me in his room and we would be there. Earlier on when all this so called back-way phenomenon started, and it started with people going into Spain, this guy was one of the first people who went to Europe, and he's still in Europe somewhere, I consider it as my first exposure to this transgression of the European border.

Afterwards of course people close to me left, then the route from Libya to Italy started, maybe 13-11 years ago. People I knew did it. Some survived, some died, some were deported back.

There was always this element that somehow I wouldn't trust in this all migration thing because I was reading. And I searched, and for me the best explanation came from the anarchist movement who understands migration as a force of nature and freedom of movement not as a privilege but as a right.

This is the problem that I have with the human rights discourse. The anarchist explanation of the issue made sense and then I started conceptualizing myself, perhaps these people who go through the back-way, they're like activists, involuntarily of course.

Because by them crossing and transgressing the border, they're transgressing the militarization, they're affirming the freedom of movement, they are in fact sacrilegizing fascism, capitalism, imperialism and nationalism. I mean not all nationalism is bad per se, but white nationalism and European nationalism have been always reactionary. That's why I am more comfortable with calling European nationalism fascism.

This glamorization of the western world which itself it's not to be considered stupid or superficial because it is grounded in our reality and it is very material, has a deep impact on our community and it continues to reverberate throughout the whole social fabric.

I mean you go to Europe, 1 £ is maybe 60 dalasis or 1 € is 56 dalasis, you have 100 € you have like 4000 dalasis and there are job opportunities there, no matter how bleak and menial they would be but they're still jobs.

You grow up in a society where there's no jobs so it is justifiable and also who the fuck says people cannot move? Who would decide that those people cannot come here? When we know that Europe and America were built upon colonialism. If you talk about the back-way who were

the first people to come through the back-way? It was the Europeans, they came with their ships and they entered the African continent.

So when I talk about migration and the freedom of movement it sort of has that personal anchor, it is something palpable but also it's not just Europe or America, it's also within Africa and African countries. I have been blessed to move around few African countries and we have started a continental wide conversation about these colonial borders that are separating and dividing our people. How do we talk about this? How do we talk about freedom of movement in the age of the refugee and displaced on the continent? Because of course we know all is not well with the continent, it hurts everywhere, there's a lot of things going now, civil wars, ethnic tensions so people are constantly moving not only because they want opportunities but they just want safety, they want peace, they want to be able to lie down and sleep in peace. That also is another conversation.

We've been having that conversation, how do we develop an African people's internationalism that transcends the borders? We've just being on an ongoing project since the sixties with the founding of the OAU, the Organization for African Unity, whose mandate was twofold: first to support the decolonization process and second accelerate African unity. That dream sort of died on an official level within the OAU when it became the AU, which is nothing else than a neoliberal organization.

The AU is just modeled around EU. The AU has a neoliberal agenda, it is not here to change the status quo politically and economically, even this economic unity they're talking about who does it benefit really? Does it benefit the African masses? Not really. It benefits the few rich people, the African business men, the African statesmen, those people at the top, the petty bourgeoisie, but does it help the peasants in the farms of Mali or the women selling on the streets of Kinshasa or the corner shop owner in Kololi or the students whose parents were massacred in Marikana*?

These are some of the things to be asked, so when they said they have trade agreements, free trade zones, what does that mean for our people? How does that translate to the proletariat of Africa and the peasants of Africa and the lumpenproletariat of Africa? How does it translate into the daily living of the person who supposedly lives on less than a dollar a day? We don't see any changes, there's been literally no changes, it has just been a continuous betrayal of the African masses.

So when we talk about our project of an African internationalism, of an African nation, what we want in essence is an internationalism rooted in the methodology of a righteous struggle that goes beyond all of these neoliberal policies, that seeks to destroy the class system of the Neocolonial State in Africa.

It's an internationalism that recognizes that we must now move as a people towards more scientific understanding of the reality, it's an internationalism that recognizes the evils of patriarchy, it's an internationalism that recognizes the corrupt nature of the Neocolonial State and imperialism in Africa at this point, it's an internationalism that recognizes the beautiful history of our people and believes in the potential of our people.

That's the type of conversation we want to hold, knowing that the people themselves are the only ones who can liberate themselves. But why is this conversation not really sustained?

* The Marikana massacre, which took place on 16 August 2012, was the most lethal use of force by South African security forces against civilians since 1976. The South African Police Service (SAPS) opened fire on a crowd of striking mineworkers at Marikana, in the North West Province. The police killed 34 mineworkers, and left 78 seriously injured. Following the open fire assault - 250 of the miners were arrested. This event culminated after an intense week-long protest in which the miners were demanding a wage increase at the Lonmin platinum mine in a wildcat strike. The shootings have been described as a massacre in the South African media and have been compared to the Sharpeville massacre in 1960.

It goes back to freedom of movement, it's very hard to move across the continent precisely because it is so expensive, because there's a monopoly of the air by few airline companies in Africa but also on the other hand with the advent of social media it's getting easier to communicate and exchange ideas.

So when I look at this, I am convinced there should have been a lot of conversations happening within continental Africans and Diaspora Africans but again the freedom of movement undermines this, every time there's a dialogue organized in Africa, the people of the Diaspora can't come in easily because they live in the West mostly, but for us to go to the West and sustain conversations it's hard because we are just seen as people who want to live in the West and that's another narrative that these western capitalists had pushed, that every time an African wants to go to Europe he or she wants to go there to get some money, to work and take their job from them, that's the thing.

But can't we move just because we want to move? Can't we move because it might not always be an economic factor? Can't I go and just see what type of barbarism Europe had done to the planet and Europe itself? So I can study and then come back and tell my people we shouldn't follow their path, we should create our own path. Can't I go and discover a place and name it after myself, my village, like they did here?

Impeding freedom of movement is actually impeding human knowledge, it's impeding on human progress, it's impeding on the continuity of scientific knowledge, it's actually impeding on everything that makes us a community in the world.

According to my experience growing up with people who have used the back-way, but also with people who have used the airports to get to Europe, freedom of movement cannot be stopped. It is really a force of nature, and as such it cannot be demonized, because migration will always happen and of course there is nothing like irregular migration. There's a regularized migration where some people decide what is regular and what is irregular. Who are they to decide what is regular and what is not regular? Why would we even have a prefix for migration? Migration is migration. Illegal migration? But for us to have a conversation around the illegalization of migration or the irregularization of migration we must have to look back. It goes back to the root of the Nation State itself.

Why is somebody illegal? Why is somebody irregular? Who decides this? Upon what premise? Of course the premise of citizenship, the premise of the other, the premises of the State.

Today if we want a world where there will be true freedom, the Nation State as we know it must go, because it is a tool of oppression and as long as there is a few people at the top controlling there will always be oppression, there will always be people deciding the destiny of humanity, people who don't care about humanity, that don't give two cents about humanity, all they care about is the accumulation of comfort, privilege and wealth.

We know that the otherization of the black and brown people of the earth, it's not just governments that benefit from it but corporations, capitalism benefits from this. Whatever capitalism benefits from, it will push. And I'm not talking about capitalism as an abstract thing but as a very concrete reality; I'm talking about corporations like Frontex, big conglomerations that need an army of reserve labor, who can exploit the labor and the toil of the masses of the world.

So of course I mean, we must politicize the conversation around migration, we cannot just treat it as one of the many slogan of the kind "let people move". No, even when people move there'll always be problems as to why they move.

So long as the Nation State as we know it persists, so long as borders are considered normal we won't be able to move forward the conversation. Because there's a lot of people who have conversations on migration and attack Europe's policy against migration but still we live in a

Nation State, still believe that borders are okay.

But we know this is not right, I mean, a clear example that show how stupid nations borders are, are the African borders which were drawn in somebody's dining hall.

In a nutshell it's not even freedom of movement, it's just movement. Why do we have to add freedom? You don't say I have the freedom to eat, you just say I want to eat, you don't add anything. So movement should just be movement, it should be something that it's just there, just like sleeping, waking up...And also, let's not forget the rhetoric pushed by populist movement about "when people can move they bring in a lot of new elements and criminals..."

Why people take people into jail to punish them? What are they punished for? What is the main tool of punishment in prison? It's lack of movement, so if you create a zone and say people cannot move, you have created a vast prison. Movement is part of the human condition. It is through movement that we got to where we are today. All of the scientific discoveries, all of technology, all of scientific knowledge rests upon movement. If there was no movement, if Europeans stayed in their corner and Arabs stayed in their corner, the Africans stayed in their corner and the Native Americans stayed in their corner, and the Aborigines of Australia stayed in Australia and the Indians stayed in India, we would never have none of this. It was a great exchange of knowledge and it has to be a constant exchange of knowledge, that's why I said impeding migration is actually impeding humanity, you are impeding knowledge, you are destroying everything that is natural to us.

It's only when we meet that we create knowledge, we create knowledge through social practice and there's no social practice without movement and there couldn't be knowledge without movement.

On indigenous healing, superstition and belief



Africa and we as Africans and black people who are part of world history and reality, we have our own creation stories, legends, ways of looking at the world before the advent of colonialism and before the white people and the Arabs came to fuck us up.

These traditions, cultural patterns and superstitions continue to inform the way we look at the world in many ways than one and I am not exempt from that because I am a child, a beautiful child, of the beautiful African continent which has been ravaged and damaged by the imperialist countries like England, France, Portugal or Italy.

I grew up in a society that believed that witchcraft is not an abstract thing but is real. A society that believes that people fly at night and eat the intestines of other people and that person, even if they are walking around and look fine, will eventually be found dead for apparently no reason, and other things like that.

There was a time when I subscribed to these beliefs, because I was a kid. I didn't know any better and this made sense. But then I started growing older and after analysis I realized that all this witchcraft doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

It's more endemic in poorer, less educated parts of where I come from. People in Sanyang believe in witchcraft and superstition a lot more than people who live in Kololi, even though I know people who live in Kololi and believe in this stuff, but it's not as endemic in the social structure and the social fabric as in the villages of rural Gambia.

But I remember there was a pivotal moment where I actually started to change my mind about witchcraft as it is foretold and explained in my society. As I mentioned before, this same event constitutes sort of a trigger for my critical thinking as well as for my questioning common sense. It was in 2003 or 2004. One of my friends had died in the village. The people in my village believed that the witches take loans from each other by way of their children, so when he died, they said his mom paid him off as a loan that she had taken previously. In the

spiritual realm of things, the witches eat somebody's child, so there will come a time when they also have to pay back with their sons. What I found troubling, as I have said while I was recounting the memories of my childhood, was that this woman was clearly very traumatized by the loss of her son. I was very young, I didn't have a conceptual analysis of the world but I sensed there was something wrong in the way people talked about his death.

I remember there was a girl in our class when I was in grade six in primary school and she kept saying "Yes, she is the one who ate his son because she paid him as a loan!" And I was like "Sis, I don't think it's that simple." I thought what the community should have been doing was to help this woman heal and not to blame her or put her deeper into misery and depression. That was the first time I started saying "This doesn't make no sense." Because the mother and the son, everybody knew that they were very close, he was like a mama's boy. So, how would his mom let that happen?

That's about the time I started giving up on this. I got used to saying "I don't believe in this," I would argue with my friend "Nope, it doesn't exist." And the thing is that nobody has ever seen a witch in action. If I had asked anyone "Have you ever seen a witch flying around or eating someone?" This same person would answer: "No." But you know witches? They would answer in the affirmative, that so and so person is a witch. "How do you know?" " 'Cause somebody told me."

There was no empirical evidence, there were no material facts about the existence of it, so I was more and more convinced that I should give up with these beliefs and I remember telling myself "Ok, that's it. I'm done, this just doesn't make no sense."

Now that I am an adult and have studied more and understood more, I start realizing perhaps these superstitions that our people hold are not necessarily things that are supposed to be believed and followed as if they were real but they were and they still remain in a way an attempt to explain phenomena in the absence of facts, data and scientific knowledge. And no society is immune to this: Europe had gone through it. There are still people there who believe in superstition. Asia too. Everywhere on earth. Africa is part of the world so as such of course it will have these same beliefs.

I remember when I was young I used to wear protection like talismans and jujus, whatever they are called. My parents would give them to me, but I wasn't comfortable with it. My friends could tell I haven't worn one in the past 20 years, I don't know, 15, 16 years would be more accurate. Since then I didn't wear one and I never went to seek any. But most of my friends believe in this kind of stuff and they wear these things. I, I wasn't comfortable with it, I had given up on that narrative when I was very young.

I remember one time we were going to school and my step dad who, by the way, is a marabout, a very respected marabout, he had made this libation before we went to the exams and he poured it in my head and my brothers heads.

We went to school, passed the exams and we had first positions, all of us, then he told us "You see, it's because of what I gave you." But we knew better. Even at that time we knew it was bullshit, because before he spilled that concoction on our heads, we had already first positions in school, so that didn't change anything. But there was that belief, that persistent belief, because my brothers and I, we were among the best students in school. People used to say "It's because of what your dad gave you - that's why you are like this." People believed that. Till today people think that I am smart because I was given something from birth. They say the Fulani give their children concoctions, because demographically most of the talented students in Gambia have always been Fulanis. Fula kids. This is a fact. They say the Fulas give their kids some intelligence talisman or some other strange stuff. I remember I used to say "I didn't have any!" and them "No, they gave it to you at birth. You wouldn't know it. You forgot you drank it."

I don't judge people for believing in that stuff. I would defend their right to believe in whatever they believe in, because scientific development in the part of the world where I was born and raised, has been very stagnant. And this is because imperialism and colonialism and today neocolonialism, have stifled the progress of our people culturally in order to make advances based on scientific knowledge and technology. Our people have been stifled. That is why today there is a sort of a clash when I say "I don't believe in this and that "and they retort "Ah, you have been westernized! That is why you don't believe in these things but this is our tradition." But no, this is not our tradition, this is just the effect of the stagnation of our culture and our tradition and I think it should be looked at in that context.

Now with regards to healing and treatment, what I know is that there is actual scientific knowledge in my community that deals with herbs, trees, grass which is based on facts, because a tree exists, it's a fact. It is not a concoction on someone's head.

For example we have the Moringa tree. The Moringa does exist, and it has the potential to cure a lot of diseases and there are people who know how to use it based on prescriptions and when used properly it is an effective medicine.

But also there's a lot of charlatans, a lot of people who don't know these things, they just claim that they have this knowledge like Jammeh did when he claimed he was curing AIDS with his mix of herbs.*

So, the thing is how do we differentiate between those who are charlatans and those who are scientific about it?

In Europe, US or elsewhere, diplomas and certificates can make the difference between a doctor that has a degree and someone who claims to be a healer but doesn't have the degree. So the point of discrimination is the academic status one has. But this doesn't work here.

Back in the day there were mechanisms. Before the advent of scientific medicine and drugs as we know them, there were diseases and there was sickness in these places. How did they cure it? How could it be that our ancestors lived longer than we do today? The older generations lived longer than us, their life expectancy before the advent of colonialism was more or less higher. They ate good food, they didn't eat all of this junk food. They knew the herbs. There were people who were specifically dedicated to that because our society had a division of labor. There were the blacksmiths, the healers, the griots, the ruling class, we had all these different categorizations. Among these categories we found the healers. Their knowledge was scientific and was passed down from generation to generation, but with the advent of colonialism there has been a breakdown in the social structure. People were torn apart, communities were ripped apart and there was a condemnation that everything African, was savage.

As a result people who went through colonial education started rejecting these things in their entirety, without looking at the nuances that exist or some of the things that we could have retained.

For example growing up here everybody know there are times you get malaria, and when you are sick you just boil Moringa and you drink it and you get well, so there's a knowledge here and these herbs are still here.

However, there is a need to distinguish between those who claim to have the knowledge and those who have the knowledge, because even the herbs and the healing through traditional means have been mixed with a lot of incantations, jujus.

All of these things which are clearly just superstitions: you can't tie a juju and say "I'll be protected from the evil spirit." Where is the evil spirit in the first place?

* For Jammeh's policy on HIV see Chronology of Gambian contemporary history.

Of course this was an attempt by our people, trying to realize themselves in the grand scheme of things, there were things that couldn't be explained at that time.

But if there had been a continuous progress of knowledge, Africans would have given up these superstitions because there would be more knowledge to understand why thunder happens, why lightning happens and how the rain comes. But things are changing now. People are beginning to realize "maybe after all this doesn't make sense", there's a lot of people rejecting this witchcraft and superstitious stuff.

On the other hand it can be very condescending when people just attack our people for believing in these things because they may think they know better and that they are superior.

There has been an attempt to reevaluate the use of traditional herbs and medicines even in Gambia as some institutions started certifying traditional healers, but it has to go deeper than that. I think that what we need is a dialogue between scientific assessments - science as we know it - and the knowledge our healers bear. Of course both of them are to be considered scientific as anything that is based on fact and that has been hypothesized, observed and experimented.

But here I am talking about the model of pharmacology, although there needs to be a dialogue between pharmacology and chemistry and traditional healing on behalf of which facts can be established.

For example, somebody has malaria and his lab results confirm that he in fact does have malaria. Then, they bring the traditional herbs to heal the person. Then somebody tests the patient again and certifies that the malaria has gone and through that, based on the conclusive facts that have been established, we can ascertain that some of these herbs do indeed cure malaria.

But we also have to know that climate change has impacted the environment and now most of the trees that have been used for healing are disappearing and it's becoming increasingly hard to find some of these trees now, due to this.

There's a need to preserve our ecosystem but also to make sure that there's smooth transition from the traditional treatments that have been used up to now to a new approach able to exploit the potential of these two knowledges in a balanced way.

At the same time it is difficult to ensure a positive and fair collaboration between big pharmaceutical industries and traditional healers. More often than not, the pharmaceutical companies want to steal knowledge from the communities, exactly as is happening in Amazonia. They just use the shamans for their own profits. However, on the other hand the traditional healers might just want to preserve their knowledge and do not want to see themselves spoiled and robbed by the global market.

That's why for us to preserve anything decent within human history, capitalism must be destroyed. As long as capitalism exists, everything that is deemed sacred by indigenous people will be robbed from them.

It is up to us to create an alternative world where people will be honored and dignified and where their knowledge, conceptions and world-views will be respected and not used for profit or end up being commercialized or commodified. This knowledge has never been practiced for the purpose of being commodified. The healer heals because that is his path, he doesn't heal because he wants to become rich. He heals because it is his social responsibility. Usually these healers, these 'herbsmen', don't do this as a profession or as a full time occupation. Most of them are farmers, so they are able to sustain themselves. They don't sit at a desk like doctors do in their offices. No. Theirs was and still is a communal service they have to offer to hold the social fabric together. And this is not limited only to their category. For example, the blacksmiths are also farmers so they can sustain themselves.

Back in the day there was no such thing as a farming class, because farming was seen as a full production for yourself to sustain yourself, so people had their occupation at one point and after

their day on the job, they went to their farm and farm with their families to sustain themselves. There are a lot of things we can learn from our ancestors. There are a lot of things that we lack today. How were they able to resist ethnic wars, even though there were a lot of contradictions? How were they able to coexist peacefully? While we in the modern world cannot coexist peacefully. We are always fighting and as the world and the technology warfare have become more advanced every time we fight, thousands and millions of people die.

We also need to understand that technology does not mean that we are moving forward or we're developing. Let's look for example at the way Africans farm. Even though they use a hoe and are considered backwards because our agriculture is not mechanized today, what we find is that their method is more environmentally friendly than using big machinery.

How do we bring the conversation between tradition and modernity? If modernity should be treated as a project of advancement which itself is problematic, on the other hand tradition needs to be conceived as the latin word *tradere*, which means to hand over, a transmission. What has been transmitted to us? Because the people who transmitted these things are also human, the people who created these things are also humans, and as humans they're not perfect. There are certain things in our culture that must be given up on. There are things that we must preserve if we are to survive.

But our people went through a romanticization of our cultures, because colonialism happened and the people felt they must hold on to their culture, because they thought that this was what distinguished themselves from the colonizers and those who have been mentally colonized, and also because there had been a cultural onslaught. When you conquer a people culturally, you completely dominate them. The people have attempted to keep their cultures to say that we are human. That we are here and we will be here and we've been here, and that's why we preserve our culture and traditional norms. We will be here and this is why we perpetuate. To say this is our identity as a people, the white man or the colonizer would not try to create an identity for us to fit in.

Reflections on mortality



2019. Babou died. Frazer died. Sankung died. Brainz died. Manjang died. Sise died. I hope they're resting. I hope they fare well in the beyond.

It gets deep. Loss. Grief. Death unfortold. Where do young souls go?

It's said when it's your time go, it's your time to go. Time that kills is the same time that heals. Time is strange. It promises nothing and holds back nothing. It just gives and takes.

Life. What is that? How did it all began? Why do we go? Why do we grief? Where is the tears lodged?

They say it gets better with time. Prolly. Prolly not. Reconstruction of memory of those gone never gets better. They say they're in a better place. Then who goes to the bad place? Do we lie to comfort. Or we just might never know?

Questions can be answers. Blessed are those who defend the territory of life. Those who resuscitate. Those who defend the last living cell. Peace to the healers, doctors, nurses and those who tell stories to keep us alive when we leave for the beyond.

Power and strength to those who see and are walking to new worlds. The revolutionaries. The righteous vanguard. Those who celebrate life. Those who defy death.

Time doesn't heal. It doesn't kill. It doesn't feel. We heal, Kill and feel cuz we be time. Time is mortal. But love is eternal.

We all die someday. May we find the courage to confront it with ease and peace. May we find the courage to live. To live. To live.

When I look at mortality and the question that has confronted us as human beings since

the beginning of time, I can only arrive at a simple observation: human kind has always tried to confront the conundrum of death and by confronting the conundrum of death we also confront the conundrum of life because what gives meaning to life, is death. If there was no death then perhaps we wouldn't be talking about the meaning of life. We would not be talking about our purpose on earth, but because we know the temporality of our situation, the impermanence of our condition, then it has hasten some of us to wonder "What can be done before the time comes when we go back to our ancestors?"

Why do our ancestors themselves gain so much recognition and respect and a sense of the sacred and a sense of the holy? Perhaps it is because of death, perhaps not, perhaps because of a sense of continuity but there wouldn't be importance in continuity if there was no death.

The ancient philosophers spoke of *Memento Mori* - remember that you will die, and because of this remembrance, the human beings straighten up their lives and do what must be done in all earnest and in all seriousness. We also find this theme in all of the sacred traditions, all of the holy traditions that we are inheritors of.

I am an inheritor of the Islamic tradition and there's a profound story in the tradition of Islam about death that I want to share. One time the prophet Muhammed, peace be upon him, came upon his companions, his disciples, who were sitting and laughing and joking and he said to them: "Whilst you are doing this don't forget to mention and to reflect on the destroyer of pleasure, which is death."

Because in the religious tradition, death carries a special significance. The beginning of the human soul's journey comes from the nothingness, as reflected in the Quran, in a verse where God reminds the humanity of a covenant they took with him time before time came to be, when he gathered all of humanity souls, all the souls that are, were, and ever will be.

Because God in Islamic tradition is the Lord of what that is, was, will be and never will be. And he asked them: "A-lastu bi-rabbikum?" "I am not your lord?" And they replied in the affirmative: "Qaloo bala shahidna", they said "We'll be a witnesses that you are indeed our Lord."

That's why in the Islamic tradition faith is not something that you come to through reason, faith is a memory that you evoke because it was a covenant you took with the Lord of all the worlds.

But the central theme of the message is that, in the beginning, the soul travels through various stages to be on the earthly plane but the earthly plane, this world, is not the end of the journey, but just another beginning to eternity.

And today we are confronted by this. Is there an eternal life? Why do we talk about eternal life? Perhaps it is because the human being doesn't want oblivion, doesn't want to disappear forever, wants to continue on and that is why we talk about heaven and hell and say, maybe perchance, when we invoke these entities, perhaps we will live on through them. Maybe they exist. Maybe they don't.

But we invoke them here when somebody dies and that's the point: we give them a sense of continuity and we like to imagine our lost ones as residents of a better place, in the bosom of the good lord.

But a reflection on mortality is also a reflection on life. When we are confronted with death and loss and grief and the departure of a loved one, we either enter into a state of paralysis or we live on knowing that ours will come and the phone that you pick to call to announce the death of another will perhaps be the same phone that will receive or will make another call to announce your death one day - your departure from the earthly plane.

In this do we enter a state of paralysis? Or we enter into a state of great wonderment and great celebration? A festivity - a festival of life to honor death by celebrating life and to honor life by

celebrating death.

And this is what we are confronted with today. Today we must not just sit and weep and mourn and grieve, even though we must take some time for this because farewells are hard; goodbyes are hard and nothing is harder than knowing you will never ever see that person again. Ever. At least not on this earthly plane, in this world. But we pull through and move on.

One of the great wise men used to say: the death is all around us, but God veils it away from our eyes so that we can continue living. But death is heaving all around us: the insects are dying, the planet is dying, everything around us is dying, the animals are dying, people are dying, the water bodies are dying, the Amazon is dying.

There's death all around us but somehow we still make time for joy, for celebration and there's nothing more profound in knowing that everything is dying around us but we are still trying to sustain life. We're still trying to defend the territory of life.

So today we honor those who died in the Neocolonial regime. In the heat of the Neocolonial State by calling for a profound structural change and systemic change and we honor those who die in the high waters of the Mediterranean trying to enter Europe by calling for a world of no borders. And we honor those who die in the hospitals without equipment and drugs for proper health care; those who died in bad roads instead of proper roads. But we know that is not the end of the problem. The end of the problem is the destruction of a system that claims the disillusionment of the very soul of the human being: capitalism.

Capitalism is anti-life. Production, productivity, profit, surplus are more important for capital than creating joyful societies and joyful histories. Thus, our challenge today is honoring our ancestors who fought against the system, who fought against the domination and the deception and the destruction and the tattering of the human spirit; we honor them today by continuing to fight, continuing to go on into dignify our lives with the perseverance and the dignity and the integrity of holding on to life.

Life has become like a burning coal that we grasp, there's a tradition of the prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, when he said "Islam began as a stranger and it will end as a stranger and blessed are the strangers", and in another tradition he said that there will come a time to hold on to religion, faith, the primordial path of God and it would be like holding on to a burning coal because nobody can hold a coal of fire in their hands, because it is hard.

And today by extension, to hold on to life and to persevere in living a joyful existence, spreading joy and revolutionary love is like holding on to a burning coal during this time of great, great sadness and depression. In this age of pessimism and cynicism we are called forth as conscious elements of the human race to promote optimism and the possibility of the preservation of the human spirit and not just the human spirit but the spirit of all that is considered living.

That the highest goal of the human being is to spread mercy on earth and to tread the earth humbly, knowing that the earth that you stamp on one day will be home so perchance you should treat it well for one day you will be its guest and one way of honoring the earth is to preserve her and the living beings who live on her.

And that calls for revolution, today what we need is revolution. Whether it is going to be bloody or not, that remains a question for the ages. But we need a revolution of the human being, not just a political revolution, not just an economic revolution but a revolution in the soul of the human being itself.

A profound revolutionary change that would recognize the importance of life, the importance of the planet, the importance of the earth, the importance of the water bodies, the importance of the human body and the animal body and the spirit body and all bodies that inhabit this earth and even beyond this earth.

And that is what must be done today. That is the only way we can confront death. That is the only way we can confront this great conundrum of life. And when we win, we win for all of humanity and when we lose we still keep going knowing that success and failure are just dialectic, there's a thin line between them. But we don't give up, what we must give up is the idea of giving up.

And we do this knowing that we're honoring generations and centuries and millennia of struggle. The greatest thing that can die is the spirit of resistance and love dying within us, it's not the dying of the human body. But when we give up we die a slow and painful death because when we give up, we give up our dreams, aspirations, wishes, continuities of a millennia of struggle. And when that dies it is just like you have killed generations of human beings who put their life on the line to create a newness, to create new worlds.

Today we must operate to create a newness, to create new worlds, to create worlds where people don't die because their conditions are bad, where people don't die because some people militarize their borders. Where people shouldn't die because their brown, black, female or Muslim body has been rejected.

We must live in a world where no human being dies because of their color, because of their race, because of their sexuality, because of any other thing that is inherent in them or because of where they come from.

That is what must be done today and I believe we will win because we are many and the consciousness is spreading. We are righteous in calling for this and righteousness always triumphs in the face of great evil. But we must come together. We must build. We must organize for this new world, the new world we want to see.

And of course, there's an undeniable political link between mortality and injustice. I have explored these questions a lot in my writing and as an activist. If we had good hospitals, good healthcare and proper shelters a lot of lives would be saved in our society but our people die because they go to the hospital and there's no medication. Proper medication is too expensive for you to afford, so you just end up dying or you die in an accident like my friend Sise did recently. On the same route where there has been an accident just two days ago where eleven people lost their lives. Bad roads, bad driving, bad standards - that has caused a lot of death.

The Neocolonial State is a deathtrap, it's an investment and only interested in protecting private property, private investments and doesn't care for the lives, the deaths and afterlives of our people.

We see this reflected in policy, we see this reflected in the speeches of politicians, we see this reflected in the ever deepening divide between the rich and the poor. We see that life expectancy is higher in certain sectors of society and lower in other parts of society and that owes itself to how people take care of themselves and the amenities within their reach.

Gambia has a very high level of maternity deaths. Recently rich folks have started taking their wives to Europe in order to deliver, or they take them to a place where they can get affordable ante natal care and they don't die. The babies don't die.

We find that problem, so of course, death is political, it is not just a spiritual matter, it is a very political matter. When a society cannot sustain its healing, when it cannot take care of the sick and the elderly, when it cannot take care of the conditions that might lead to death, of course there will be more death in that society.

If we had modern roads and highways with a proper traffic system, then there would be less accidents. There would be less people dying on the roads and if we had a proper healthcare system, people with hypertension or high blood pressure - which is what killed my father - would go to the hospital and they would be taken care of. They would receive the appropriate

diet, they would eat the proper food and eventually would be able to control the effects of these conditions like diabetes and live a longer life.

But no. Our people are too poor. They don't get choices like that. They don't get told "don't eat this and don't eat that" when that's all they have.

And this links itself back to sovereignty and self-determination because when people don't eat what they grow then they have no food self-determination. They have no food sovereignty. When people cannot go to a clinic and get medical assistance at an affordable price, then they have no health self-determination, they have no self-sovereignty.

So it goes right back to the edifice of the state itself. Who created this state? Who does it serve? What class of interest does it serve?

Today, that's what I tell my comrades. When we look at a politician or a political party, we must first ask ourselves which class interest does it serve? We don't just listen to the rhetoric, we wonder what class is it defending? Is it the class of the oppressed or the class of the oppressor? Is it the class of the working people or the class of the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie?

Then we can make an analysis and say "no, we cannot be with these people because they would only lead to more death, misery, desolation, squalor, plunder and looting of our resources."

So even grief itself has a political dimension, how can you grieve properly when you don't have proper food to eat? When you have to go and struggle in the plantation to feed yourself and your family, you don't have time to sit and deal with the sense of loss.

A lot of people walking around are just people who are laden with grief but they don't have time to process that, to fully grieve. You have kids to feed, you have your own health problems to take care of.

But that's why we must create a world that can afford human beings the dignity to grieve, the dignity to mourn, the dignity to live honorable lives in the face of so much loss and grief.

I think even at the communal dimensions of health in our society, when people are more prone to superstitions they will say "no this is not a matter of western science or medicine, this is black magic and we have to deal with it this or that way."

Why is a society gravitating towards the assumptions that this is black magic, this is superstition, rather than using scientific methodology to understand the cause of their illness?

Because there's no affordable means and because there's no heightened political consciousness for being able to transition the society out of a superstition-based society into a science-based society. And to make people understand that their suffering is born out of material conditions.

But why is the system not declaring war on superstition? Because it benefits from superstition, the system benefits because it's easier to convince people that God put them in office so they would not challenge their authority. Also, because it's easier to persuade them that they have powers and that if they don't vote for them, like Jammeh did, they will unleash black magic on the society. So we see that the maintenance of the structure of superstition and the structure of primitive thinking is instrumental because it helps them to perpetuate themselves ever on in power.

So that is what we are dealing with today, everything is political in the Neocolonial State, everything is a political matter, it is not just spiritual or social. No, it's political and it's economics because the political is economics in the Neocolonial State and vice versa.

The political economic dimension of death and grief and loss and mourning are very much central to understanding the Neocolonial State and the contradictions that sustain it. That is very necessary to understand and on a very personal level, I have come to deal with this. It has become sort of therapeutic to know that when we destroy the actual system and replace it with a more humane system, a more egalitarian system, then we will have less deaths.

That sort of inspires the struggle that I have embarked on today, that is why I don't have time to burn out and say "I can't do this anymore!" because I've realized lives are at stake.

Our struggle is a struggle that affirms life, our struggle is a life affirming struggle, it's a struggle that affirms our lives, our dignities, our deaths and our afterlives.

And it inspires my struggle in many ways than one that when we organize ourselves and seize the means of production and give it back to each other then we will live in a much better society.

Imagine a society where you have one doctor for at least five people and you have proper medication; you have proper food because you're producing your food and it's being distributed justly. You have proper shelter: people will be healthier. And if there's proper education and it's an education that uplifts the community, that makes you human, that doesn't dehumanize you. It doesn't teach you just how to become a machine in the capitalist system but to become a full fledged human being, an education that doesn't teach you to be a competitor but to become somebody who cooperates with your people and all of human kind to advance the progress of humanity.

So today that's the work that we are embarking on: it's to create liberated territories, to create liberated zones because the Neocolonial system is war because it's neoliberal and neoliberalism is war on the lives of the people.

How do we enter the war zone today? How do we survive the war? We survive the war by creating liberated zones and liberated territories.

Every territory becomes free because the people are free. You cannot have the one without the other. Once the people are free the territories become free. When the people are enslaved and are subdued by the system then no matter what system you create, that place will still not be considered a liberated territory.

So how do we talk about the concept of the liberated zone, the liberated territory under the neoliberal onslaught and how do we realize it?

This is a matter that I have been dealing with for a while in my head. I haven't spoken about it yet and it is necessary that we explore this question in the near future.

Coda. We fuzzed in the sunlight, waiting for something to happen



ALIEU: In conclusion, this recording has been like an event. It has been like a process and it goes back to the beginning which is *Qarrtsiluni* - sitting in the dark waiting for something to happen. But we didn't sit in the dark, we fuzzed in the sunlight, we walked in the sunlight together, discussing. We sat in the dark room in the hot humid west African heat. In the room we recorded, we confided in each other and we came to an agreement that so much needs to be done, that the story of a life is just the story of a generation. And the story of a generation is the story of a human being's becoming in the world. The world is old but the future springs from the past and it's important that we keep this in mind. Our story is not merely said or narrated in a vacuum. It comes from a society. It comes from the people and the recording of my story is the recording of the story of my people. Because I'm no different from my people. I am one with them.

This was a very exciting journey we undertook. It was healing, inspirational, sometimes frightening. It was beautiful, it untangled a lot of emotions and I came to terms with a lot of things in my own way and for that I thank you.

GIULIA: We witnessed many different things while I was here but there are two things that I want to mention, specifically. The first one is a sad event - the death of the people from Barra* in the shipwreck in Mauritania where 56 or 60 people died while trying to reach Europe through the back-way only ten days ago. The second is a beautiful counter-powering act. As we assisted together with the vibes and the energy of the people manifesting against the government on the 16th of this December.*

* <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/21383/gambian-town-mourns-migrant-deaths-at-sea-off-mauritania>

* <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/years-gambians-protesting-191216134431488.html>

Maybe everything in our lives has a positive pole and a negative pole and the fact that all these people were there marching against political system that they believe is unjust, makes us and you as a Gambian along with all the other Gambians, grateful. Grateful because people haven't given up their fight and they're ready to build something more just than the failure and deception of these years. But this uprising is not only confined to the scorched sun of the streets of Banjul. We're witnessing crises all over the world. In South Sudan, in Venezuela, in Bolivia, in Chile. And that's why we must look at Gambia as one of the many seeds alerting us that there's a new course out there in the peripheries as in the centers of the world and that the people are already engaged in the streets, dancing, marching, meeting and discussing to construct new ways of living.

ALIEU: We live in the days of revolt. We live in the days of uncertainty, we live in days when even the simplest-minded people understand that there's something profoundly wrong with the way the world is working, with the way the things are and the way they're not supposed to be - but they are. So the masses of the people all over the world are rising up in defiance, resisting, calling for a new order of things.

And that's not at least surprising because capitalism and imperialism have gone into crisis and people have begun to see that something profoundly is wrong with the human relations, with our relation to nature, with our relation within ourselves.

But the thing is what is the way forward? Where do we go from here? Are we going to rebel and revolt and then we will bring back the same idiots to rule over us? Would it be just reinventing the wheel or starting the circle all over again or we're going to break the cycle this time and create a new cycle? That is the question that we must ask now because the people are rising and the people will continue to rise but what will be the end goal of the rising? Would it be just the same thing over and over like we've seen? Because the world has been rising, the people have been rising for centuries.

So today the conversation should shift towards what is it that we want to see? And how do we bring it about? Is protesting enough? Is rising up enough? Or should it go hand-in-hand with something else? It seems to me that today we must protest but we must also be very introspective. We must deeply reflect about our reality. We must look within ourselves and look at the ugly traits that we have inherited from our societies, traits that we have to heal, we must purify ourselves 'coz we can only create a new world when we become anew ourselves. You cannot bring all things inside something new and you expect to be new, we must repair ourselves, we must heal our souls, we must heal together as a people.

Racism, xenophobia, homophobia, islamophobia, all the phobias, all of these have deeply destroyed us and it's time for us to look at each other in the eye and speak some very painfully and powerful and healing truths to each other.

That we can only move collectively as a people and we're not better than each other, that we are all equal, striving in the dark, you know, sometimes waiting in the dark for something to happen, sometimes groveling in the dark waiting for something to happen, sometimes clamoring in the darkness waiting for something to happen and searching for the light that should heal us.

I think that is what the whole world is looking at today, it's looking for that light so people are rising up. But amongst that rising there's also a lot of manipulation from certain quarters, it's like the Bible says: there's spiritual wickedness in high places. And that's what we witness today, people manipulating people to rise up but not for the interest of the masses.

Eventually the people will learn from this, the people are learning it today because the people are active agents in their own reality.

In conclusion I would say that it would get better than this. I have high hopes in humanity. I have

great optimism in our survival. I have profound respect for all the people rising up, saying that we must create a new order - another way of being in this world, another way of existing, another way of recognizing our inherent humanity and not our bestiality. I think that it's very encouraging but also we must look within ourselves each other and every single person must look inside himself or herself and say it would only work when we make it work.

The only good work begins when we purge the negative attributes, the greed, the envy, the loss, the jealousy, all these ego driven traits must go out of the window so that we can create a new world.

25 September 2019, 11.51PM

Dear Giulia,

Please do keep writing in English. Keep recording the sights, smells, sounds, tastes and the vast poetry of a people coming into their own. You exist at a critical time...a transition.

A time filled with so much light it has turned into darkness. So tell our story so we never forget.

You have a beautiful way of writing. You have a sense of the monotony and the monologues of the mundane.

Keep on! Am with you!

Love,

Aliou

Just before our plane is about to land on the runway of Banjul airport, the rain comes down in droplets. While we prepare for the descent, I look out of the window at the lights below. The ground seems dark and poorly lit.

Once on the ground, the world that opens up to me is, suddenly, the concretization of a culture. It is punk, or the 1970's Vivienne Westwood, the Clash and the Sex Pistols all rolled into one and reminds me of my very first trip abroad, to London. However, this time I have travelled to Gambia. A country I approached thanks to Bob and Karamo. A gradual and progressive knowledge, the construction of an intimacy mediated by the internet, hundreds of Whatsapp messages and YouTube videos: a transnational bond - concrete yet evanescent because it has become part of my daily life through the appropriation and the concretization of an image: these are the imaginary worlds of Michael Jackson experienced not by the interlocutors this time but the anthropologist, i.e., myself.

Horizons of meaning to explore in myself, and in my ability to grasp the ways of existence, of living in this country through the kaleidoscope of stimuli that comes to me from outside, from the landscape, from the dirt and unpaved roads, from the mud puddles where, as an inexperienced apprentice I find myself walking, from the smells and the eyes and the words of the people, and this sense of anger that catches me in not understanding the Mandinka, the Wolof or the Fula.

Reorder. I try to reorder.

The airport looks like an impromptu and volatile structure, an unfinished construction site with piles of rubble sprinkled everywhere on the ground and large black PVC panels that function as makeshift walls.

I find my luggage and head towards the exit. Claudette has reserved a taxi for me and waiting for me is Nesta, with his old yellow Mercedes.

"WELCOME TO GAMBIA", reads the welcome sign on the concrete bridge when we pass on the Brikama Highway. Then we take the Senegambia highway and finally end up on the Bertil Harding highway.

Rain and mud! On the roadside the frogs resonate, deafening, imposing, they are really everywhere.

One day I want to record them, Steven Feld comes to my mind, the acoustemology and voices of the toads in Accra, a 360-degree sound landscape where there was room for everything from jazz to Coltrane to Afriphone and the klaxons with trumpet of the taxi brousse.

As we get closer to the city, over frogs have the best amplifiers of clubs, restaurants with bright signs and the music. Reggae and Afrobeats, I see colored lights sparkle inside the clubs and the restaurants, in sharp contrast to the dim street lights that barely illuminate the roadway. Perhaps that's why it seems that driving with one's headlights on is the norm for everyone.

We stop to leave two Finnish women and then we go and get Alieu, who has managed to convince Nesta on the phone, to get a ride. We are not far away. His house is less than ten minutes walk from the room where I stay in Kololi.

Even though it's the first time we've met physically, face to face in the real world, I feel like I've known him for ages. I had no expectations of any kind yet it seems only natural to talk to each other and resume our conversation that was interrupted the morning while I was in the hostel near Barcelona airport. He is wearing his Occupy Westfield T-shirt, the movement created by him and other activists who took the streets of Serrekunda last year in order to protest against the blackouts of electricity and water.

We sit outside my room facing each other, drinking red wine and smoking one cigarette after

another.

I am positively launched by the proposal I often mentioned to him during the past months - that of telling his life story in a way not unlike the collaboration between Malcolm X and Alex Haley that gave shape to Malcolm's autobiography in the form of oral history. A dialogue of two, a reconstruction of an experience. A dialogical architecture whose strength comes from having someone in front of you with whom you dare to be an open book.

Maybe I should tell you how I met him.

A show on the national radio dedicated to the new generation of African activists, his passion for books, Franz Fanon, Rodney, Cabral and his fervent belief in Marxism-Leninism. From there our relationship slowly takes shape through Facebook, Whatsapp, long phone calls, by night and by day, and the through mutual exchange of books, ideas and texts.

Always in contact through our various movements, wherever I was in Venice, Rabat and then southern Italy, and wherever he was in Gambia, Ghana, Uganda and Kenya.

Proximity in distance, I think of the formula repeated several times by my professor in his course of ethnography: it is a challenge, the relationship we have makes things more difficult, too much proximity, but it is to be seen a proximity that does not eliminate the distance. Maybe it is from here that we should start to explore what separates us. The relationship filtered by the media has allowed us to deepen the similarities, to share books, reflections and music. Now I'm here, in his city, in his country, living with him every day will show us how far apart our worlds are?

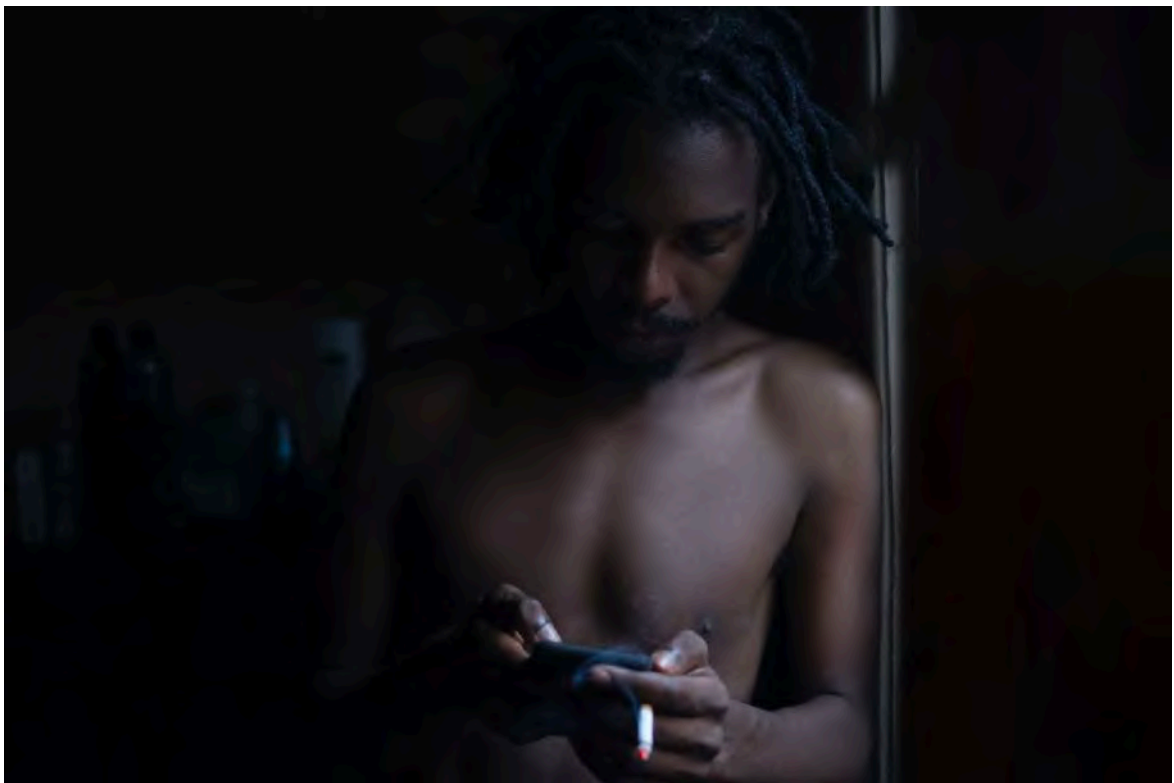
"Do you remember that call in Uganda?" He asks while we walk in darkness.

I reply "yes". I don't tell him that I suddenly see myself in my bed, half-drunk, late night, talking to him sincerely and unequivocally as I have never done before with anyone, or how much I care about our friendship and how much until now he has helped me in understanding the world more deeply and my role in it.

It was a hot summer's night in my hometown and in the house, everyone was sleeping, but I wasn't worried that my voice might wake someone up.

As he opens the door of his house, he says, "You should start with saying that friendship is very important for me."

His room, the wooden furniture, the mattress on the floor, and the volumes stacked on his desk, Rodney, Fanon, Lenin, on the shelf Nkrumah and many, many others...



To simply try to write down what I feel, see, perceive: the problem is selection.

I wish I could keep everything, the street names, the signs, the mud smells, the croaking of the frogs and toads. Walking in the evening in the dark and trying to avoid puddles full of water after a whole day of rain. It's about learning everything again and having the humility to let yourself be guided by those who were born and raised here in these streets.

I took it badly at first. I felt like a burden, and I felt terribly clumsy and constantly out of place.

Today it gets better; I just have to accept my non *savoir-faire* as a gesture of openness to impregnation. On the other hand, why I should feel a burden if there's someone who naturally feels to guide me in this new environment, I ask myself.

Yesterday we spent some time in Sanyang; Alieu showed me the place where he grew up. We went to the Caravan, a bar on the beach, where his friends were waiting for us to celebrate Alex's birthday. Alex is married to a Slovenian woman, much older than him, probably in her fifties. She's the one who prepared the feast we ate. She goes back and forth between Gambia and her country; she's not the first woman I've seen since I've been here with a boy who's much younger than she is. Older white women hanging out with young black guys – that is just the way it works here.

In addition, it's real and touchable; I can feel the sexual vibe coming from the body of these middle-aged women and the way they believe to be appreciated by their partners. Moreover, I just don't know how to feel about this. Somehow it makes me feel uncomfortable. Maybe, it would be better to stop judging these people and just accept the way they have decided to live.

According to Alieu, there's some tension between whites and Gambians. He's trying to make me aware that they are buying everything, forcing the locals to move elsewhere: especially in Kololi and Bijilo, the gentrification is visible more than other places. He explains to me that the young people have no more places to stay. They can't sit on the grass because people do not only fence the houses but also the gardens. Thee 8-foot high walls built around the buildings somehow enhance the feeling of the riches to be protected against potential thieves.

Earlier this morning I found confirmation of this situation: I was in the office of Claudette, the owner of the guest house where I will be staying for this first week before finding a definitive room, and she kept saying that you couldn't reason with Gambians because they are not educated. As an example, she took the way she saw a man beating his donkey and then decided to buy the animal to take care of it on her farm in Mariamakunda, where she grows fruit and vegetables and manufactures jams, soaps and creams.

A young girl who appeared in the office door interrupted our exchange. When the young girl, employed as a cleaner in the guesthouse, asked her "Can I come in?" Claudette replied "Yes, of course". I later saw that same girl washing the floor in the office without a broom – hands bare, using only a towel that forced her to stay on the floor on her hands and knees with her head turned to the ground.

I don't think it was the girls' personal choice, so here's the contradiction: Claudette treats the employees almost as servants, without allowing them the luxury of using a broom. Is this a matter of money? What I mean is, in order to save on laying out money for essential cleaning items, so she can increase the profit of her business. Surely, this does not make sense. What's more, all the while telling herself with conviction that she is doing good, believing that she is helping the people by employing them and giving them jobs.

Just yesterday, Alieu was explaining to me the meaning of "flop" - a local expression that means raising together money in order to buy food or beer and share it, this morning Claudette has given me her point of view on this practice, which turned out to be very unethical, compared to

that of Alieu. She thinks that people don't have freedom here, especially the women. They are responsible for all the chores in and around the house and are further obliged to share everything with their families, with whom they share compounds with. According to her, sharing is an obligation that must be fulfilled, irrespective of whether you want to or not – you have no choice. She came to this conclusion one evening when, after giving a woman a lift home in her car, the woman thanked Claudette by telling her in Wolof, "*Yall-na sutura Yaga*." An expression roughly translated into English that means "pray for your privacy". She interpreted these words as a complaint of her oppression, mixed with a bit of envy towards the freedom she has as a rich white woman.

However, Alieu explains to me that her interpretation is an incorrect result of the literal translation from Wolof into English. "*Yall-na sutura Yaga*" it's a thanksgiving to God for not being in a position to expose poverty and thus be able to maintain dignity in front of the society. This is because bare poverty, plucked into the face, impossible to hide from yourself and from the others, is synonymous of lack of dignity, is a factor and a vehicle of shame. I think it is simply a way of seeing what is positive at times of adversity because, in spite of everything, you are not on the brink, at the limit of basic necessities. In addition, all this thanks to the sense of intrinsic community with which you are born, grow, leave and return here, without forgetting to help those who stayed at home or those who come to seek your help.



At Alieu's house. Ef's friend helped me to prepare coffee. They were sitting around the low table in the living room. Maimuna, Ef's 4 years old daughter, was playing with the boiler. I can still hear her screeching jokingly with the cat who lives in the parapet of the window of Alieu's room. The sky is cloudy. It has not rained yet; Alieu, half asleep, is telling me that soon it will start to rain.

He lives in a two story house, he shares the place with Ef, Maimuna and Tom, an Austrian man who's not here but will come at the end of the rainy season. I see a lot of people passing from the house during days. They sit on the couch of the living room smoking weed, chatting and listening to music.

Yesterday evening when we came back from a family restaurant in Fajara where we ate spicy fish with lime, onions, potatoes and cucumber, we found them in the living room listening to Damien Marley's *Living it up*.

I spent the evening taking photos of Maimuna who enjoyed being my model. She put on her favorite shoes - a pair of pink small heeled sandals covered with shiny glitters, and started posing like a diva in front of the camera. She kept calling me *toubab* but yesterday I eventually succeeded in persuading her to call me by my name. She's also started speaking with me in English, telling me that next month she's going to start school.

She's a smart kid with acute eyes, endowed with curiosity: while I was trying to write a little bit she noticed photos on the screen of my laptop . She started asking me pointing her finger at each photo "what is this?", I satisfied her curiosity, commenting on each shot and giving her a brief explanation of the setting and the subject. "Kids in Rabat, a man playing the *guembri* in the Medina, a kid just like you coming out of school" and so on.



Alieu is trying to arrange things to help his little brother to pay his school fees which amount at 300 euros.

He seems so much implicated in taking care of the people, not so long ago he has helped a deaf girl pay her education through a campaign on Facebook; within 24 hours he received 12,000 dalasis from a Pakistani who follows him because of his activism.





"The colonized is a very paranoid person." Frantz Fanon

Alieu is on the telephone with a comrade discussing different topics: "the need to fight homophobia and FGM with our own reasoning, crafted by ourselves as Africans and not using the rhetoric of the western NGOs." "This way our people will truly grasp."

"You cannot transplant systems of thought coming from the West in the African society hoping that the people will adopt them without any clashing. IT'S AN IMPOSITION FROM ABOVE, it's an imposition of meaning and ways of understanding things from a foreign culture."

Within myself I think that it's like importing the model of western democracy into the African nation, it simply cannot and won't never work.

What about the misleading vocabulary of capitalism to hide the oppression and make the people believe they are free? Expressions such GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPING PLANS, HUMAN RESOURCES, MULTIPARTY DEMOCRACY prevent raising the consciousness and the organization of the masses in order to build another society free of oppression.

Eventually, yesterday night he opened himself to me for the first time. He told me about his childhood in Sanyang, the muddy house where he used to live with his family and his two brothers. His father died after the birth of Muhammad who today is 16 years old. When his father died, Alieu was 11 years old, at 14 he would have dropped out of school. In his words I perceive anger, suffering, but above all a desire for redemption. It's evident above all in the care he gives to his younger brother. I wanted to record his voice last night, as he told me of the many nights he had to go to bed with an empty stomach, of the generosity of his mother who, even though she had to look after her children, was always ready to offer food to everyone in the village. Then, in order not to weigh too much economically, at a certain point Alieu went to live in a family whose father gave him the leftovers of the dinner. Every evening he would heat them up on the tea stove.

Always in the same compound, with electricity, unlike his home, Alieu could devote himself to reading. Then one day the rain melted the mud walls and ruined all his books. Leftovers. His condition is that of many other kids. Leftovers from society. Destined not to survive, born to die early of hunger or malaria, those born not to survive. They are those whose body, soul, history and voice are crushed, depersonalized and reduced to bare life. A life whose flesh is a waste to be thrown away.

Carcasses of life.

To be born and grow as the burden of society.



Almost a week has already passed.

I have found a house, it's a small-furnished room, on the ground floor, 8000 dalasis per month.

The gentrification is everywhere here, Alieu constantly points it out to me. Two-story buildings, well maintained, with inner courtyards and wide open spaces. Freshly painted gates, surmounted by spirals of barbed wire, interspersed by a swarm of scruffy buildings, with peeling walls. Patches made of discards of metal and wood to cover the architectural voids. In addition, everywhere, on the ochre-colored streets, damp with rain and sewage, waste of all kinds.

As we drive through the centre of Serrekunda, I am struck by an observation coming from his mouth "Everything is collapsing here." On my left, at the roundabout, there is a pole supporting a road sign placed horizontally on what was once supposed to be a flowerbed.

We weave through the traffic and the people come out of everywhere careless of the cars and the efforts of the drivers who, like Baks, find themselves avoiding these unforeseen appearances. Urban slalom. The wind increases as the traffic decreases. We move away from the centre. The smell of gasoline and the smoke where people are cooking corncobs disappear as well as the music and the lights rarefy.



I don't feel like writing. Kind of a crisis. Just moved in this new place but roaches, all kind of insects and humidity are killing me. At least, my neighbors are Nigerians and have been playing Afrobeats since this morning. In addition, I just don't know what to write. A feeling that I can't breathe. Like rocks in my stomach and heaviness in my breath. The air is thick and smells of sweat and humidity.

What should a fieldwork journal record? Situations, feelings, faces, places, thoughts and words? I feel like I am only scribbling confusing sensations. Writing is not being a vehicle to comprehend and express the situations I am passing through or the conversations I've been listening to and in which I am involved. I feel like I can't organize the flow of my thoughts. Are thoughts words?

If it so, then, mine are pre-thoughts, aborted thoughts.

Ahmed, one of my neighbors, enters his apartment with a white woman in her fifties, her skin reddened by the sun. She is overweight. She wears diva sunglasses and a long blue dress that highlights her breasts and her flabby arms.

Then Mbacke appears, the owner of the house. It's Friday and he has just come from the mosque, *Jumuha*, that's why he's wearing a traditional emerald green suit.

Kindness and equivocal hugs all around.

After seeing me wandering around the building, he stops me, so I try to explain my situation to him.

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"I moved in yesterday."

He claims that the smell is not moisture, but fresh paint. He takes me to the terrace, a concrete clearing, poles that support black plastic wires.

"You can hang your laundry here or come here and study with your chair. The sun will set soon."

Sure, the idea is romantic but not feasible. Bring the chair up? The sun is scorching despite the leaden sky. Eventually he promises to work as hard as he can to find other accommodation.

He takes my phone number and remarks the picture on the screen of my iPhone.

"Who is he?"

"Thomas Sankara, do you know him?"

"Of course. When are you free?"

He hugs me.

"I'll find the best accommodation for you", he tells me.

"You're beautiful."

"Are you free tonight?"

"I have to meet a friend of mine to organize my research."

Doing fieldwork: PLEASURE, PAIN, and PASSION.

Hannah Arendt: "the power of narrative to remake reality" or the power of everyday narrative?



It's not easy to do fieldwork if you're a woman in a country where women work at the market, owe shops and restaurants while men hang around, sit and sip *attaya*.
I am constantly sexualized.



A group of kids from the neighborhood surround a huge mask made of leaves and as they walk the mask beats two machetes whose metallic sound chases away the evil spirits...

It's the *Kankurang*, the circumcision rite for males, Soulayman explains to me while we walk around Kololi.

I can't go around without being stopped by someone willing to chat. Yesterday was Moses, today, it's Soulayman turn. He is very young, 20 years old. He's an artist, people call him Arty, he paints panels for bars and restaurants. He proudly tells me about his last work at Willy's Bar, "do you know Willy's bar?" I reply no, then he promises to bring me there one of these days.

He's handsome, talkative and easy-going. His eyes are small and joyful, he finds me easy to get along with, but while he shares this first impression with me, plain talking, I keep it with mine, in my head. He has a golden circle on his right ear, on such an innocent face. I find it beautiful.

I ask him about his family and he tells me he has only one elder brother, he is 29, he left the country last year. He used to work at the beach, sometimes as a chanter*, other times fishing.

He met this American woman who was here on vacation, married her and flew to California.

Like Alex, Alieu's friend, Soulayman brother's wife is older than him, the narrative is recurrent among the youth. I am reminded of Alieu's words. A few days ago we were talking about this topic, as he perceived some prejudice in my analysis of this phenomenon, he interrupted my observations — based on what I've read in Ismaila Ceesay thesis and seen on various documentaries — and asked me: "Why do you think these guys engage themselves in these relationships? Have you ever thought about what motivates them to marry middle aged white women? They have no other available choices."

Poverty, lack of employment, the need to contribute to family needs, personal accomplishment, and the desire to live the consumerist lifestyle promulgated by the designers of the cultural alienation hired by the capitalist wolves, who runs the Earth.

Everything is legitimate then as they too, deserve to have access to this marvelous wealth made upon the blood, the flesh, the starvation and the rape of their ancestors. One of the many forms of reparation, a concept that I often hear in Alieu's speeches. Soulayman is waiting for his turn too, and nothing will prevent him to success.

These days, as we walk through Kololi road or down on Bertill off highway, a feeling of uncomfortableness has penetrated my body, especially at the sight of these couple, these women with dyed hair, difficulties in walking, falling arms and legs. An aesthetic of decadence.

Sometimes I feel just like them - as if I were here to enjoy casual sex with some young Gambian dreadlocks, but I realize today while writing that this self-rejection is getting me nowhere.

Better, put aside this paranoid attitude and focus on Alieu's life story with the discoveries of the everyday, the smells, the sounds, the words and the faces surrounding me.

* Chanter is the way beach hustlers call themselves because they consider the term *bumster* too much derogatory.



22 September 2019

In Alieu's room. Sitting on the bed under the fan, feeling hot and weak I keep coughing all day.

"Choose a language and struggle with it" Alieu has advised me.

Today is my second Sunday here. I've met Alieu's younger brother, Muhammad. He's shy as only introspective young boys and girls can be. Alieu says he loves books just like he does, and since his childhood Muhammad has read all the books that his big brother has lent him, while Alieu, him during his teens, had to struggle from house to house, libraries, expatriates and sensitive teachers to find something to read.

His thirst for knowledge is always alert but it is not filled with arrogance and conceit. His is a passionate commitment to enlighten the people around him; no matter if it is one of his closest friends like Famara or the daughter of a rich international lawyer who pretends she's not a privileged.

He speaks in plain language and explains his views, justifies his historical and materialistic conception of reality as he tries to move his interlocutor to gain awareness of the present injustices, inequities, privileges and sufferings that dot the third world.

23 september 2019

Progressively discovering how difficult it was to find healthy food, I was looking for a pressed orange juice this morning at the market but found only cans of juice full of additives and colorants.

Fear of having lost the ability to write as I am focused mainly on reading essays.

How can I record people's stories? How to capture their everyday life? I can mainly depict what I sense. I don't feel myself at ease with English and I have no skills in Wolof, feeling ridiculous.

Deprived of any language, feelings of linguistic alienation.

However, if I keep focusing on this frustration I won't be able to enter in a constructive writing. Discipline, need discipline.



Monday evening in Room C, a quiet time, nobody's chatting outside, only my neighbors, a woman on her forties, I can hear her cleaning the floor with the broom in the backyard, I suppose she's Wahabi because of the black niqab that frames her face. She wakes up early every morning and comes in the backyard to start her daily house chores. Today I saw her helping her daughters to get ready for their first day of school.

Later, at Serrekunda market I saw many students wearing their green uniform, coming out from their classes at lunchtime. As they saw me, some of them smiled, saying "Hi", while others were just retelling the word I'm gradually getting used to, TOUBAB.

I took a taxi to go back home because I didn't want to walk through bamboo again. But eventually, I bargained the ride for 100 Dalasis. The man who drove me was very smart. We spoke about the conformation of Serrekunda, a conglomeration of various villages, which improperly only, can be defined as a "city". He explained to me, as we passed through Kotu and Manjai, two neighborhoods divided by one of the uncommon tarmac roads in Serrekunda, that yes, Gambia is a poor country however, within it you can find different couches of poverty. If Kotu, Manjai, Bundung (the area where he lives which is also Alieu's little brother's neighborhood) are expressions of the real urban misery, Kololi, Kaninjing and Bijilo could be

defined as the richest spots. Even if it is still hard for me to see the difference, apart from Kaninfin, which distinguishes itself for the presence of medium high buildings seemingly reminiscent of metropolitan areas, I trust him. As a newcomer, I can only try to grasp these differences, even if the truth is that I feel like I am living in a poor environment.

Then after commenting about the average income of a waitress here, which is 2000 Dalasis, I asked him: "How much do you need in order to lead a good life here?" It was at that moment that I realized how sensitive and deep he was. He said to me: "You know it depends, what is the meaning of a 'good life'? For me it can be one, for others - who knows." I feel him, totally. Then I added: "You're right, I mean, just enough to be able to afford to eat every day, pay school fees, have a house with electricity and water." 10000 Dalasi monthly, if you live alone and own a house, 15000 if not, was his reply.

The sun was scorching; the heat penetrated the car and made our bodies sweaty. I kept drinking small sips of hot water to stay hydrated, while he dried his sweat under his shirt with a towel.

Maas is not satisfied with the condition his country is living in, the roads are just messy, and the confusion in the market earlier this morning which made me almost faint. Even if the clouds covered the sun, the hot air seemed to choke my breath and paralyze my thoughts, especially when I was walking with Lamin, a young man who last year started selling secondhand phones at the black market, to get a café Touba from a street seller.

Even if his parents could never afford to send him to school, he can speak English pretty well. While watching a session of the TRRC we started discussing the importance of education, his complaints about the cost of annual fees reflected Alieu's concerns in finding a sponsorship for his little brother, Muhammad.

This deep, encompassing sense of community that makes life possible here, nobody could escape to it, even me as a novice I find myself involved in a spontaneous flow of giving and receiving, of caring and being taken care of.

His eyes, fixed on the screen of the heavy old television placed on the counter, are absorbed in the witnessing of one agent of the former NIA, the National Intelligence Agency. Around us, scattered everywhere on the desk of Ndiaga, his colleague, are microchips and electronic components. His job is to fix broken phones using a UV lamp.

Fixing the broken, this poetic of the leftovers has a symbolic power and works as a metaphor encompassing the rejected from the globalized market, the forgotten by the system and those betrayed by the political turnover.

The buildings themselves function as leftovers. Crumbling walls, fading painting, broken doors and fragments of glasses, unfinished fences, skeleton of stairs in the middle of backyards and rust creaking gates.

But there's beauty, dignity, love and care in these buildings that are all but silent ruins in slow abandonment.

Immersed in rumors, movements, childish voicing, sounding of footsteps, brooms and water these concrete walls absorb and release the power of the human beings, the struggle of the grassroots, the care and the dignity with which they inhabit spaces where you can never feel the thud of loneliness.

These are the very places within which my body and my feeling-thinking are surrounded and I'm trying to comprehend, write and act in defense of this worlding, whose common sense ignores, victimizes or criminalizes.

One writes out of a need to communicate and to commune with others, to denounce that which gives pain and to share that which gives happiness. One writes against one's solitude and against the solitude of others. One assumes that literature transmits knowledge and affects the behavior and language of those who read... One writes, in reality, for the people whose luck or misfortune one identifies with— the hungry, the sleepless, the rebels, and the wretched of this earth— and the majority of them are illiterate.

How can those of us who want to work for a literature that helps to make audible the voice of the voiceless in the context of this reality? Can we make ourselves heard in the midst of a deaf-mute culture? The small freedom conceded to writers, is it not at times a proof of our failure? How far can we go? Whom can we reach? To awaken consciousness, to reveal identity— can literature claim a better function in these times? In these lands?

Our own fate as writers is linked to the need for profound social transformations. To narrate is to give oneself: it seems obvious that literature, as an effort to communicate fully, will continue to be blocked, so long as misery and illiteracy exist, and so long as the possessors of power continue to carry on with impunity their policy of collective imbecilization through...the mass media.

Great changes, deep structural changes, will be necessary in our countries if we writers are to go beyond the elites, if we are to express ourselves....In an incarcerated society, free literature can exist only as denunciation and hope.

We are what we do, especially what we do to change what we are. In this respect a "revolutionary" literature written for the convinced is just as much an abandonment as is a conservative literature devoted to the contemplation of one's own navel....

Our effectiveness depends on our capacity to be audacious and astute, clear and appealing. I would hope that we can create a language more fearless and beautiful than that used by conformist writers to greet the twilight.

A literature is taking shape and acquiring strength, a literature that does not propose to bury our dead, but to immortalize them; that refuses to stir the ashes but rather attempts to light the fire perhaps it may help to preserve for the generations to come "the true name of all things."*

* Excerpt from Eduardo Galeano, *Days and night of love and war*. (1983)



25 September 2019

We're in Bijilo, at the clinic where Alieu's stepfather is recovering from pneumonia. He doesn't remember exactly when he was born, here many people, especially from the countryside, don't really care about date, years, time, birth and ages. Vagueness and approximation are widespread. He's sitting under a mango tree with his friend and Muhammad. He seems relieved from his sufferings.

Muhammad confesses that he has promised to quit smoking and reduce coffee and tea, then he goes out to look for charcoal to prepare *attaya* for everybody. I notice the needle that penetrates the back of his right hand.

The clinic is a small two-story building surrounded by a garden with mango trees, birds and monkeys. A few nurses come out to greet Alieu.

Alieu's mom is walking toward us. She was resting a bit. She wears colorful clothes and a veil in a way that reminds me of the Berber women in Essaouira.

Her gait is elegant. In the way she sits, in the way she walks I can see the same deportment as Alieu. Her eyes and nose are the same as Alieu's. He inherited a feminine and hieratic attitude from her. I see her joining other women for the dhuhur prayer. She calls him and he joins her on the mat after the ablution. She used to sell fish at the beach and took Alieu on her back during her working days.



Night blackouts while we discuss politics, society and revolutionary practices. I look at the ceiling of the room, the fan slowly stops, and the noise of the propellers vanishes, making our words more consistent.

Famara's voice is intertwined with mine as anger and love for his land do not prevent him from lucidly describing the material conditions of a large part of the population.

The lack of proper housing, the public health system ghostly dismantling, the dalasis that slip from the hand daily and yet another day begins with a four-digit number, 7000 dalasis for the life of your stepfather, to free his lungs from the fluids of pneumonia - the price of a life expropriated of the well-being that should be rightfully due to him.

For 5 dalasis, you could go to a public facility but the price of the ticket corresponds with the quality of service where you end up finding yourself in a large room with other sick bodies, waiting for impractical treatment due to a lack of drugs and staff.

Who would dare to make a beloved one a double victim of the distortions of the bad policies of a system that sinks deeper and deeper, even though someone from above claims to have re-established democracy in the country?

When the word democracy functions as a veil to the conscience, to the agency of the people; when the government of the people becomes a verbal cunning whose only objective is to perpetuate the alienation of the masses, making them unable to analyze the impasse and the prevailing degradation as the starting point to act, unite and organize against the privileges and monopolies of the ruling class, it is up to the vanguard to conquer the glimmer to get out of the mist.

The richness of this vanguard is not in their diplomas nor in their degrees or academic career. It is in the deep knowledge of the concrete reality in which they struggle daily with their people since the ruthless white people landed on their shores.

From then on, history has been repeating itself all over again, reincarnating in twisted terms, sick structures and toxic processes, all devices aborted by the delirium of Western omnipotence.

The vanguard can only be constituted by the children of the oppressed, the suffering, the forgotten in rural villages without electricity, the deprived of freedom of movement, the expropriated from the agricultural products, the condemned to adapt to their dehumanization because it is the only way to survive.

Tonight I have the privilege of sitting with two of them and I try to connect my soul to their struggle in the darkness of my room seeking to absorb the thirst for justice, the desire for a possible future, the realization of a socialism capable of emerging from the ruins of post-capitalism, African gerontocracies and NGOs - sultans of pity no less devious than the predatory inclinations of finance and banks.

In Famara and Alieu, shine the ideas, values and challenges that animated the songs of independence when popular music was at the service of the revolutionary culture of Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Sekou Toure and Julius Nyerere.

However, not as monoliths of betrayed hopes but as a connection to a story that is up to them to write through the action and the organization of the masses. The examples are many, like E.T Mensa's highlife singing *Ghana, we now have freedom, Ghana, land of freedom. Toils of the brave and the sweat of their labor. Toils of the brave which has brought results*, Independence Cha Cha, the hymn of the DRC freed from Belgian rule, the Bembeya Jazz celebrating the Guinean army with their song *Armée Guinéenne* or Nyerere's concern in developing a style linked to the music of the Wanyamwezi and the Wahehe, two major ethnic groups of Tanzania.

Alieu falls asleep on the bed while I listen to Fams talk about the absence of a minimum wage in

Gambia and the great discrepancy between the cost of living and the purchasing power of people.

2000 Dalasis per month if you work as a waitress, even in a European owned bar or restaurants in Senegambia. 3000 Dalasis if you are a teacher and you have not yet joined your colleagues who increasingly leave their place to become the lackeys of some NGOs funded by the Netherlands or Germany.

In Sanyang the communal rice crops are being replaced by open-air sand mines whose economic benefits will never go to the hands of those who have always lived there. To them, only the disastrous consequences of a now inevitably conscious abuse of the earth and still unsolved the problem of independent subsistence.

All needs to be re-discussed: to invent new worlds means to act in practice.

When I hear him mention the working class of Gambia, I provocatively point out to him that there is no working class here. There is no industry, no popular culture of resistance, no class consciousness as in South Africa among the trade unions or the miners whose protests have shaped the spirit of Marikana, an insurrectional legacy rekindled every time the working class decides to raise its voice against the corporations and the government.

Its reply rather awaken me.

"You should come with me one day; I will show you the men but especially the women who work in the fields without fixed wages, dispossessed of the product of their work. These men and women are the working class of the country and it is from them that we must start. We cannot just offer them words - we must offer them material support and show them how they can, on their own, produce and live off the fruits of their work."

To end with the fake benevolence of the elite who distributes bags of rice in the villages just before the election, the establishment of a common effort to identify the abuses of the system is crucial. There is also a need to work together in order to build an autonomous community, based on the production and the consumption of its resources.

These are men and women who throughout their entire lives have never had five hundred Euros in their hands. These are the mothers and fathers of the country and their sons are willing to build a better present, for themselves. They are tired of sleeping on uncomfortable beds, tired of the flooding rooftops, tired of the stalls destroyed during the rainy season, disgusted with the smell of the market and the mismanagement of the cleaning services.

These young men wish to never see a naked child in a dusty street of Manjai or Kotu again, washing himself with a plastic cup. They wish to never encounter a group of children playing football with a holed soccer ball again.

However, they never cease to smile these kids, as the ones I've met yesterday near the clinic who let me play with them. The only girl in the group was nonchalantly wearing a white tutu and she smiled curiously at me every time I passed her the ball. I was enchanted by her innocence and shyness. Maybe she was wondering which planet I came from.

At one point of the night we realized that Sankara could have been wrong when he said in Cuba, remembering Che Guevara, that while revolutionaries as individuals can be murdered, ideas cannot be killed. Together with the people, their ideas can also die, killed by necrophilia of the Western opulence, by its continuous insertion into the lives of others, the others whom, after hearing the mea culpa of their former colonizers for almost a century (in reality it takes very little to denounce this nursery rhyme learned by heart), continue to be variously labeled as in need of humanitarian aid, migrants, potential terrorists, rapists, victims of tribal conflict, genital mutilation and witchcraft, unable to adapt themselves to the modernity of Western science and above all, clouded by their attachment to traditional medicine. Ultimately inferior beings.

Condemned to an eternal Middle Age built ad-hoc by the rational man devoted to transnational imperialism.

And so here we are again in this era of revolutionary blackouts. Before the light returns to barely illuminate Kololi, the giant suburb of Serrekunda, showing through a weak glimmer the people gathered under a veranda, the women with their hair finally intertwined and the children in their arms, exhausted from the hours spent playing in the street. We are already busy imagining new ways of life, filling the darkness with the passion that brings all of us close to the people. Yet, with different backgrounds, stories, privileges and sufferings. Nevertheless, we have managed to approach an objective that we feel urgent. Starting from below to build a new humanity full of love, solidarity, and dignity, with discipline. A humanity entirely responsible of being the demiurge of its very becoming.





Experimenting with neighborhood life is sitting in the yard of Aissatou, Awa's mom.

A compound built with unstable concrete and pieces of sheet metal. The girls are sitting under a mango tree, Rohey busy braiding her elder sister's hair and Aisha, whose face unmistakably resembles that of her mom. A typical Friday afternoon, drinking Vimto, chatting and waiting for the early afternoon heat to cool down.

I was coming back from a walk around St. Anthony's Church, when I suddenly felt drawn to a girl in a long dress with oriental motifs, the hood on her head made the suit vaguely resemble the djellaba of Moroccan women.

"You don't recognize me?"

I hesitated... "Awa, Fanta's friend?"

"Yes, come inside this is my mom's house."

We left the sandy road behind us and as soon as we have entered the courtyard Awa has arranged a wooden chair under the mango tree, I sensed a gesture of hospitality, but I have preferred to sit on the small wooden stool that reminds me so much of the one my grandmother used to reach the highest shelves in the kitchen.

Being finally surrounded by only women is a soothing sensation, I feel an intimate opening in this circle and I dare to share with them the growing discomforts of my new everyday life.

It seems impossible to walk without being stopped by a man ready to flirt with me, to ask for my phone number, to propose a date out together even when I confess to be sentimentally engaged. Awa has no words of comfort, nor suggestions on how to act to overcome this hassle.

I want to be kind and friendly, I don't want to hurt them, I just want them to understand how annoying it is to feel constantly sexually assaulted.

But Awa shifts the conversation as she sees me taking pictures of her and her sisters with my camera.

"You know Giulia when a woman is married you have to ask her permission to photograph her, with me you don't have to do it but for most women it's like that. My husband doesn't care, he doesn't mind."

"So you're married?" I ask her.

"Yes, I do."

"And where is your husband?"

"At home, I just came to see my mom and sisters, but I don't live here anymore."

"I thought you were selling fruit and vegetables with Fanta near my house."

"No, I don't work, Fanta is a friend of mine, sometimes I go at her place for a chat."

Awa is 22 years old, I have no idea what her husband does or how old he is, when she confesses to me that she is three months pregnant. I am stunned.

She smiles and adds "you can't see anything because I wear large clothes."

Not far from us, her younger sister teases her, coming out of the small canopy made of sheets of metal where their dad sells handmade coal.

Then suddenly a child of around 8 years old, enters the gate to ask for coal but Awa tells him to come back later because they have no change.

For them it is common to rest during the early afternoon. The sun is extremely hot. There isn't even relief from a fan.

Rohey, one of Awa sisters, the one who is braiding Aisha's hair, explained to me that her name has Indian origin.

"Will you remember it?"

I say "yes of course" as I promise to bring the nail polish with me that I put on my toe nails

because she says she likes the color.

Since I am here, women and girls of my neighborhood, like Maria, half Lebanese, half Sierra Leonean, Fanta or Anchu, the woman from which I bought yesterday okra and kassava, don't hesitate to flatter me. You know, things such as "I like your style, the color of your skin, you're beautiful", stuff like that. Female appreciation of beauty differs from male one. When a woman compliments you, it is for real, it has no double meanings and no hidden agendas. It is sincere.

I see beauty in them too as I try to depict them with my words, but I'm starting to do the same with them. Today, while greeting Acha, my Nigerian neighbor, I told her I that really liked the dress she was wearing and that it fit her body perfectly. She smiled with a sensual pride and thanked me.

I am discovering a deep sense of sisterhood against the childish competition I always felt in my teens with my female peers.





An afternoon walk in Manjai Kunda, an open-air camp, streets full of sand, and just behind, the mosque and the concrete highway that led to Serrekunda Market. Boys running, a football camp, on the wall of the gate a QCELL advertising hand-painted, somebody's playing inside, an officer just opposite to the entry stands firm in his fake leather boots. Further, kids playing football in the sandy streets, women walking in black niqab, petty shops, parked taxis waiting for customers, the logo of the UPD, the united Democratic Party of Gambia, printed on a two story building, two hands that hold on to each other, door and window closed.



From my room I can hear Maria singing to her little son Jamal. The air is thick because since yesterday evening the light went out again.

A status on the Facebook page of NAWEC, the national company for water and electricity, apologizes with the customers explaining that due to the high tide, the karpower ship, a big ship supplying electricity to the whole country, "drifted from its fixed position and some of the cables transmitting electricity sagged dangerously close to the sea...Our Engineers are working closely with Karpower staff to restore power."

When the light went out, around 9 pm, we were at the beach in Brufut, with some of Alieu's friends, two of which enjoyed like him the path of the Tarbiya, the Sufi initiation.

Under the sky full of stars and the sound of the shore in the background, sitting in circle, Alieu starts talking about MOJA, the Movement for justice in Africa, a political organization founded in 1973, inspired by pan-Africanism and revolutionary ideas and the role some members of it had in trying to overthrow Jawara government through a failed coup d'état in 1981 whose leader was Kukoi. Some of the former members are still alive and live abroad like Uncle A and Koro, both of them kind of mentors for him.

Alieu shares with us the importance to preserve the history of these revolutionaries for the present generation; their efforts show the existence of a political movement in Gambia willing to genuinely transform the society according to the principles of socialism.

What Alieu reports is still now an untold history, as an interlocutor of these post-liberation revolutionaries he has knowledge of many details directly told by those who have experienced them first hand.

"You have Gambians who went at University with Walter Rodney; you have Gambians who joined the liberation struggle Cabral was heading in Guinea Bissau and still others that supported financially the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa."

A sense of pride and respect fills his voice while recounting us this hidden inheritance. He feels he must somehow transmit these events because official history, often colonialist, cannot continue to prevail, neglecting the historical evidence of the facts and continuing to form generations of people ready to receive orders from above.

When it comes to organizing, acting for the wellbeing of the people, trying to upset the corrupt system and sow the seeds of a new humanity, Alieu's eyes become intense. He has this ability to capture his audience, and while I listen to him, I can't help but see this passion, energy and tenacity. Alieu knows how to involve you; he knows how to make you uncomfortable.

It happens every time that the historical past that divides us as belonging to two different epistemological categories, re-emerges from our conversations. The oppressors and the oppressed, or as Eduardo Galeano says in the first pages of *Open Veins of Latin America*, those who have specialized in winning on one side and on the other, those specialized in losing.

As a member of the second group, he's constantly making me reflect on my privileges as a "granddaughter" of the colonialists, I'm forced to carry with me the burden of white supremacy and the will to power that continues to reign undisturbed in the political and financial cabinets of the world where I come from. In addition, that's my heritage.

All this makes me feel more than guilty and sometimes I find myself considering my presence here as useless and dispensable.

"We can take care of ourselves, come back to Italy and teach your community how to defeat the superiority complex you've been dragging around since the days when Mussolini dared to challenge Haile Selassie."



I would have never thought of experiencing racism in such a concrete way, even if Alieu is constantly reminding me of it, up to now, I hadn't seen nor experienced it firsthand.

After all, how could white people living, working and engaged with local people be so distortedly convinced of their intellectual superiority over black people? And how can they be so explicitly racist when they decided to live the rest of their lives in Africa?

I am at the Teranga Bar, sitting at the table with Franc, his new Gambian girlfriend and his friend, who is from Nice, France. He is a retired sailor in his 60s who married a Senegalese woman and moved here.

It is about seven o'clock in the evening and there is a football match on TV. We are the only white people, along with a man sitting at the table next to us, completely absorbed by the game.

I met Franc at the laundry where I take my clothes and a few days ago he invited me to have a drink with him at the bar.

It is a coincidence that I meet him here - I just wanted to take a walk. I was tired of sitting at home so I said to myself, "I'll take a walk, I'll look for a bar, I'll drink something and I keep writing."

I don't feel like declining the offer to sit at their table. We cover several topics, although I notice that what is most important for both of them is to judge the way of life of the Gambian people.

"They are too slow. They don't want to work. Women are the mainstay of African society. We have tried to give them a job but they don't want it - they just want to rip us off. These guys with dreadlocks, they just think about smoking and flirting with European ladies."

A series of clichés follow one after the other with nonchalance, between a sip of beer and another, without feeling any kind of discomfort in front of the presence of Mary, Franc's girlfriend, who is Gambian.

"The laziest are the Gambians themselves, not the Africans in general." Yet another stereotype coming out of his mouth, "my laundry team works as it should because I hired two Guinean boys", at the peak of the monologue, he finds himself confessing to me that after so many years he is proud to be a racist and he's comfortable with it. According to him there is nothing to be ashamed of.

It's a fact. For the same reason he praises Salvini's policy, "He was right - Italy cannot bear the problem of immigration alone."

After the politics are aside, he gets down to a personal confession. I don't know why he decides to share it with me, we barely know each other, and I have the feeling that before the story of his previous relationship with a 'peul' woman, he's looking for support, approval of consultation from me.

In short, he tells me that he was totally dedicated to saving this young peul woman from the streets. She had come to the laundry and asked him to take care of her.

"She was ready to open her legs, as she is used to doing."

But he magnanimously took care of her and her family without asking for anything in return - at least at first. The sex would come later.

I just listen without saying too much, and then I receive a call from Alieu. I go outside the bar for a moment and answer the call.

"Hey Alieu. Where are you?"

"I'm at your place."

"Okay. I'm out, I'll come back soon, wait for me."

Franc resumes his memories "...eventually I left her because she was sucking my existence, not so much her as her family, her brother especially, a rasta bumster. Now she is in misery again.

I go to see her sometimes and I give her something. I even talked to Mary about it and you know what she told me? She said she's ready to share everything with her and this has literally shaken me up and I don't know what to do."

"Maybe she doesn't see anything strange about it because she grew up in a society that embraces polygamy, but why have a double relationship if you don't feel affection for her?" I ask.

"You're right, but you know it's because of my humanity - in the end despite their faults you're here to help them if you have the means to do it, it's empathy that drives me to help these people."

I think he's simply employing incorrect terms, empathy instead of pity and compassion, humanity for complex of good conscience, but I let him speak because I'm not here to judge anyone but more to listen.

Did I act correctly? Once home, I tell Alieu everything. He is disgusted, to say the least.

In addition, I feel uncomfortable, somehow complicit in my silence.

"You should have thrown his beer in his face and left."

"That's why I'm telling you that it's your job to get back to your people and explain to them that they should stop being racist."

"But you didn't react."

And he's right.

I didn't do anything when he tenaciously and convincingly asserted, "I have to admit that I've become racist".

Tonight I learned a lesson. Even if I have less experience and even if I am younger than my interlocutors, it does not mean that I don't have to take a stand when I am faced with people who hold opinions that I do not share. Opinions devoid of ethics, so absurd as to be incomprehensible, unjustifiable, whatever bad or unpleasant experience the aforementioned white man might have had.

This is my duty, I can't betray my convictions, I can't help but act on the ground, making theory a daily practice.





In the afternoon with Famara, we take a taxi from Senegambia to Tanji and as we leave the city outskirts, the green increases immediately after Brusubi, one of the most gentrified areas.

It is here where there are concentrated resorts. 5-Star hotels and immaculate residences, each with its own guards. All the outer walls are surrounded by barbed wire and inside the gates, expanses of well-kept lawns increase the visual contradiction.

Shortly before arriving in Tanji, we cross Ghana Town, a Ghanaian settlement that was established around forty years ago. A pile of houses made of concrete and sheets of metal concentrated on each other in a few square meters. In the main street there are some shops with colorful hand-painted signs.

As we approach the sea, we get to a forest where the green is lush and Famara tells me that it is one of the largest in the country and that from time to time you might meet groups of monkeys crossing the road.

Tanji is the largest fishing centre in the country. A swarm of confusion of human smells, fish, sea and smoke coming from the premises where the smoked fish is prepared. At first glance it reminds me of one of the villages near Essaouira, but there's no portico here as there is in Morocco. The structure is not linear but still reminds me of certain parts of the Medina of Meknès, the most isolated spots.

We head towards the sea where piles of colored wooden canoes are lying on the shore and groups of men are busy offloading fish and transporting it to the market in wheelbarrows. Others pull the ropes to which the boats are attached.

Closer to the road under wooden canopies I can see sellers who buy the fresh fish from the boats and store it in large refrigerators. Further on, women sit under small umbrellas in front of wooden banquets, display a variety of piles of fish: catfish, bonga fish, red snapper and butter fish are the most common species.

Famara tells me that if you buy the fish directly from the fishermen, you pay less but the women can scale it for a few more dalasis.

Auntie Yasin is one of them. She has a welcoming smile and a radiant face and she lets me stand next to her while I watch her clean the 5 red snappers that we bought from her for 350 dalasis. Before gutting the fillets, she removes the scales that look like glittering sequins scattering in the tray and in her hands, using a sort of brush with metal bristles.

It is not difficult to see how these women and men are the real resources of the country, yet neglected by the greed of the government.

Famara, who was also born in a fishing village, knows the fast pace of daily life very well.

"The fishermen arrive here every day at five in the morning and work uninterruptedly until late afternoon. However, look at the unhygienic conditions. What is the point of paying taxes for cleaning costs when the local council is not doing its job?"

Famara shares some of the socialist beliefs of Alieu, although it seems to me that his ability to empathize with people is more evident than Alieu.

He can easily talk to people and pick up complaints, just as he does with Sifo, a man we meet in one of the places where you smoke harangues.

Sifo confesses to us his disaffection with politics, while intent on explaining the smoking process. He has been working here since 1988, every month he has to pay the government 200 dalasis for the maintenance fee but every damage to the structure, like the shaky roof, he has to repair himself, from his own pocket.

We all agree that paying taxes without having any material evidence on the improvement of infrastructure is a real abuse.

The oven in which he works was built by President Jawara, shortly after independence. Since then, no government has been involved in maintenance or renovation work.

It is not that business is bad. Quite the contrary. Sifo proudly tells us that customers for his harangues come from as far as Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria and Burkina Faso and fill their cargos with his fish.

As he explains to me how every day he comes to check the fire at 5 in the morning and to put the harangues under the ashes that have to cook slowly for five days, I feel like photographing the moment as the light is perfect.

The fissures penetrate beams of light that illuminate the place and leave his face in a twilight.

Sifo lets himself be photographed on one condition only - that the next time, no matter in how many years' time, I come back to give him his picture.

While from the viewfinder I watch him gently move the harangues lined up next to each other on the grid, Famara's words ring out to me when just before entering the kiln we noticed the general poor state of the market and the buildings. The floor is a mixture of mud, sand, water, organic and non-organic waste.

"These men and these women are the engine of the economy, if they stop the country no longer walks."

Yet I see, how invisible they are, and not because they are unable to make a living or don't have skills. It's the lack of adequate means and conditions that give dignity and increase the quality of their work, their life and their health.

Once again, I find myself in front of the nobodies, temporarily trapped in a spiral of blackouts, of roads flooded by the rain, of lack of welfare and social services, while the rich are enjoying their shining jeeps, their gardens with impeccable lawns and their private clinics.

Powerless, I find myself reflecting on the sense of memory and of my witnessing as someone from the outside, from an overseas where privileges are made up by continuous rejections.

How can ethnographic writing become a commitment to fight in the field alongside these people? Once I get back to Serrekunda by bus, I take a taxi at the turntable, but my thoughts are still in Tanji, as we slowly move towards Kololi.

Now, accustomed to the congested traffic of the afternoon I let myself go and begin to share this tangle of sensations that are still struggling to find their own form of expression.

I immediately recognize the anger in my words, as I tell Foday, the taxi driver, how unfair I find that the workers of Tanji are forced to go on day after day, without mobilizing or organizing and go to the headquarters of the council of the area to expose their requests.

Without realizing it, I find myself talking about politics for the first time with someone other than Alieu or Famara. Foday doesn't bother to tell me how beautiful I am and to ask me where I come from, if I have a boyfriend and if I want to get married. And he surprises me.

On the contrary he follows my reflections and comfortably decides to share with me his point of view.

"You know, even if they went to complain, no one would listen to them. They would pretend to get to negotiations that will never result in actions but will remain unfulfilled promises. That's what happened after the 2016 elections. That's how Barrow goes on, going around, talking abroad, fully fucking about his people."

"So you won't be voting for him in the next election?" I ask him.

"Of course not, but even in 2016, I did not vote for him, I voted against Jammeh. Anyone would have voted anyone to cast him out, even me, if I had been the chosen candidate of the coalition, I could have become president."

“Those are the same words I heard from a friend of mine, Alieu, you know?”

I go on saying that the most ridiculous thing is that instead of fixing the infrastructure that serves the needs of the population, places such as the markets, the roads or improving the electricity service to solve problems with light cuts, the government is busy building big infrastructure to show international observers that a democracy is under construction.

A democracy of big useless projects, such as the Senegambia bridge or the conference hall actually under construction right in the heart of Bijilo Park, in front of the Kololi beach resort, where international guests will surely stay.

He especially agrees with the negative consequences of the bridge, the gasoline costs too much, the traffic congestion is increasing while the revenue of the ferry companies are collapsing.

“In these conditions, you realize then that the only solution we have is to take the back-way. My brother lives in Milan, I would like to reach him too but I don't want to take the road he took, he told me how dangerous it is.”

I told him that my friends told me gruesome stories about Libya, the prisons, the forced labor, the frustration, the beatings and the sexual abuses, and especially the signs visible not only on the surface of the skin. Sutured scars dialogue with the inner ones, which are much more difficult to heal.

Could it be a suitable image, that of the fresh scars, to describe the actual conditions of the country?

“You understand, however, that it is not at all easy to live with 3500 dalasis per month. The rent of the house and the car I'm driving is not mine. I pay the owner 1000 dalasis every month and even if you don't earn so much in Europe, in the end is always better than staying here.”

Living, surviving, struggling: three modes of existence that reflect the everyday life in Serrekunda. Sometimes they meet. Often, they clash shoulders with each other, they are all slowly corroding the people for poverty or for disinterest in human lives.

The hustlers, the bumsters, the corrupt politicians, the businessmen, the street vendors, the women at the market, the entrepreneurs, the landlords, the children selling fruit on the highway, the prostitutes, the drug dealers and the smugglers.

Arrogance, capital accumulation, the wicked management of public and private resources are some of the causes that fuel the desire to leave, but above all it's the material perception of the effects of these causes on one's own lives, and this starving, this real starving cannot be compared with the debts and the crises that are alarming our parliamentarians and the European Central Bank.

Before opening the door, Foday asks me to tell my people when I come back to Europe about the conditions they're living in and to explain them that the only solution they have in front of this reality is to take the back-way.















Maybe all these stupid beliefs about being independent and autonomous are just bullshits.
How could I not be dependent on someone here?
If you want to survive here, then you realize that interdependence is the core of everything.
Another new lesson to learn and reflect on in the coming days.

*Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.*

— Maya Angelou







Yesterday for the first time I found myself in a situation that I might call uncomfortable and disappointing. Maybe I could call it harsh because it revealed an aspect of reality to me, that I had not foreseen or imagined could unfold in this context.

Junkies trying to extort money from tourists under false pretexts; a wedding and the excuse of wanting to introduce me to the bride.

A proven and experienced tactic in Paris, Milan or Rome is when junkies stop you at the station with the excuse of needing money to buy a train ticket.

For the first time my idealism clashed against the evidence of the facts and in the face of such a dishonest and infected behavior, I felt disappointed, bitter and teased.

This happens when you experience contexts that you have not chosen.

When you leave your microcosm but not necessarily your home microcosm but also your adoptive microcosm or to put it more simply, the people I trust here, the circle that is gradually becoming a sort of family.

I was alone yesterday afternoon in the street and this man stops me at the edge of the road and in his right hand he has a smartphone and in his left hand, its box. I immediately think that he's trying to sell it.

As soon as he sees me he stops and asks me "You remember me? You didn't come to my wedding yesterday, why? You would have enjoyed it! We ate *benachin* and danced all night. Follow me, I want you to meet my wife."

Even if I perceive that there is something wrong with him and in his striking and exaggerated manners, I don't know why I decided to follow him.

We walk towards a secluded street, at the end of which I see this girl sitting on a wooden table outside a ramshackle bar. She has a cigarette in her mouth and another resting on her ear. Everything in her is unkempt, just like the guy I'm following. Both have rotten teeth and marks on their arms.

"There's my wife", he tells me, "her name is Fatima."

"Best wishes", I say, uncomfortable, having now realized that they are pissing on me.

"You have any pictures of yesterday on your phone?", I ask her just to play the game and see how far they can go. Then one of their friends intervene, after introducing himself as the musician, he tells me "no you know how it is, we are waiting for the photographer to send us the photos."

That's strange, "I understand, but at least you should have a picture on your mobile phone."

Meanwhile the groom walks away from us to look for something behind a mango tree just close to the mosque and once back he explains to me that his father is the imam of the mosque and asks me to write my name on a list and next Friday he will pray for me.

On the list I read European names, their nationality and written in numbers the donated quota. When I ask him what kind of donations these are, he replies that it is for a small contribution for their honeymoon in Casamance. Everything he tells me has no substance and it is precisely this incoherence and desire to make fun of the other that makes me suddenly lose patience.

In a calm way I say "Look, if you need money there's no need to tell bullshit me, okay? It is clear that you are lying to me, that there was no wedding. But you don't have to lie. I understand that if you need money, just ask."

I take 50 dalasis from my waist bag and give it to him and then I walk towards the main road. He follows me and tells me that I can get my money back and I tell him "no, keep it, but next time please don't lie to me. It doesn't make sense. I'm not from your country but I'm not stupid. There are certain things you can feel, and from the beginning of our conversation I felt that you were telling me a bunch of lies. You talked about respect as soon as you stopped me. Respect for people

and kindness in greeting them and I am telling you now that you are the one that should reflect on respect, because the way you behaved with me is not at all respectful.”

Afterwards I tell the whole story to Famara and he says he knows the guy as he too was stopped a couple of times when he was particularly well dressed.

“You know they do it not only with tourists, but also with the people here who are well-off.”

Then he remembers that he had a similar experience in Dakar when a boy had asked him some money for his mother who was ill. In the end he found out that it was some sort of organized group that acted like this to extort money. They take you into their slums and showed you a sick lady trying to move your compassion in order to receive a donation.

We both agree as we share these experiences, that this often happens when we leave our comfort zone and immerse ourselves in a social context that we know little about.

In a way, then, the experience has been constructive because it has allowed me to explore a slice of society that I was unaware of. No one here has ever told me about junkies, nor had I read ethnographies, or articles or news about them.

What I find intolerant is dishonesty, no matter what the reason.

However, as I discuss with Famara, I realize that the situation is more complex than my first reaction may have been, a mixture of indignation and irritation.

If these people are dishonest it's because of the system of which they are part, they are the inevitable product of corruption, lack of inclusion policies and of interest especially for the most marginalized of the society.

They are the visible product of a system whose main actors prefer to be behind the scenes, avoiding appearing in public or showing themselves too much in the street, just like President Adama Barrow.

Although the meeting made me restless, before blaming them I should think about what made them give up their dignity. I believe that every human being grows up acquiring a variable dose of dignity according to his own context, I think back for example to the proverb in Wolof “*Yall-na sutura Yaga*” whose meaning was clarified to me by Alieu.

Sacrificing one's own dignity must not be easy for anyone because it means abandoning a significant part of humanity.

Sometimes you have no other option, sometimes you are too weak to react, others you let yourself go following the example that comes from the bottom or the top of the system in which you were born.

I am not trying to justify anyone or to go back on my steps, it's just that in the gesture of the man intent on giving me back the money after the brief discussion with which I moved away I could glimpse a sense of dignity resurface from the darkness of humiliation and from the daily sale of himself, because I dared to speak to him in a simple, direct, concrete and objective way.

The intent of my words, far from wanting to blame him, was meant to be an incentive to make him take into consideration how harmful was that way of living for himself first, and then for the others.



Alieu is acting weird. He has decided to give up his social media and has temporarily closed his Facebook and Instagram accounts.

He says he doesn't want to be recognized in the streets anymore. He wants to be anonymous just like the paper he sent me, written by Steven Salaita once he decided to give up his academic career to become a bus driver for children.

I can understand his feelings, the pressure of being constantly questioned about actual burning issues in his country, together with the responsibility of being kind of a model for citizens.

Nonetheless, he had this deep discussion, which lasted almost half an hour with Abdul, the owner of the bar in Senegambia where we had a drink this afternoon.

We choose it 'cause it seemed to be a quiet place, we wanted to read a bit, I came out with Eduardo Mondlane book's on the revolution in Mozambique and he put in my bag a book with some speeches of Amilcar Cabral.

Abul is in his fifties, he's from Sierra Leone but has a firm opinion on Gambian politics. He recognizes Alieu as the activist who speaks at the television. He summarizes his standpoint by the statement: "Barrow is the same thing than Jammeh just without killings."

They go on discussing and the waiter joins the conversation sipping coffee from his cup, supporting Alieu's criticism on the uselessness of the infrastructures just being built for the inauguration of the New Democratic era.

"You know, Senegambia Bridge closes at 6 pm and there's no light."

"Unfinished projects being opened just for gaining popular consensus" Alieu comments, they don't want to improve the country, they just want to show off that their collaborating with their liberal neighbors, i.e. Macky Sall, and catch the attention of the international funders.

For him even the tourism market is dying, not to mention the negligence on environmental issue, the desertification is out here, visible at the northern border with Senegal. But nobody cares as long as they can sit on their chair, put in their pockets public money and pay the fees of international colleges and universities to their sons and daughters.

After promising to Abdul that we will come back, we leave the bar and walk on Senegambia.

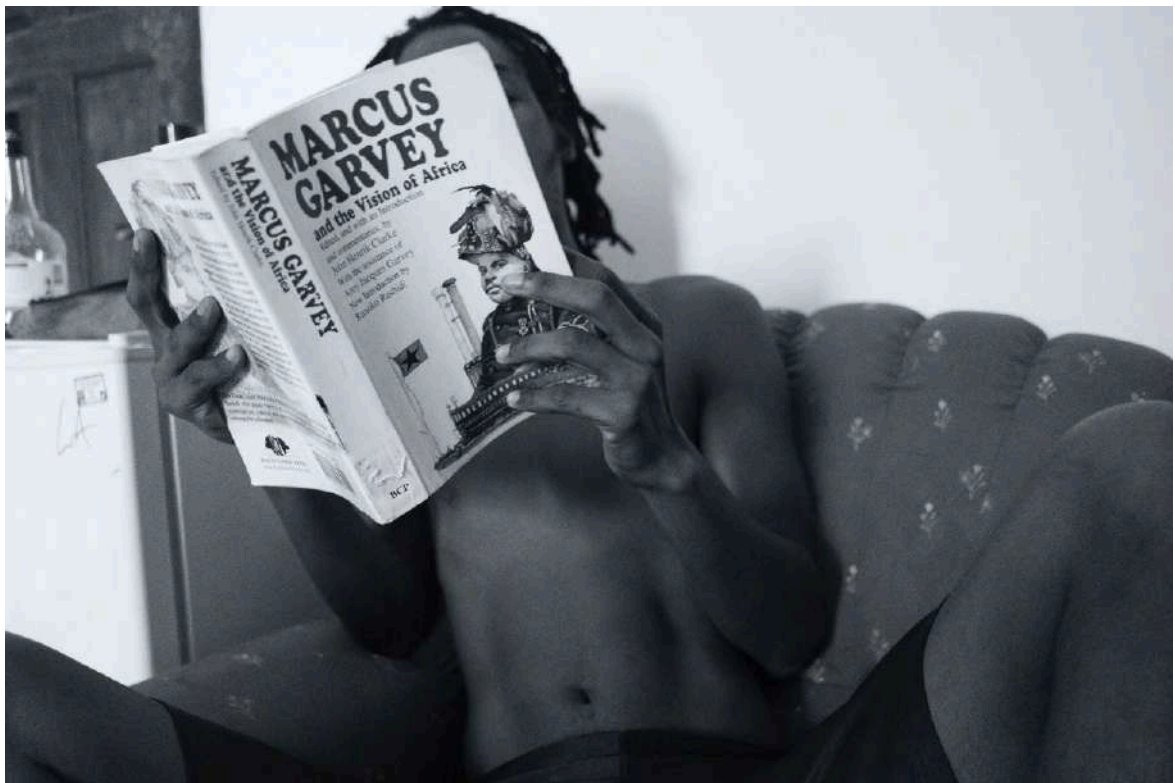
I give a last look at the building behind us, a huge two story building in construction to host Europeans for the tourist season about to start.

Why nobody thinks of using this construction to house the Gambian people?

Then in my head echo Alieu's words while talking with Abdul, the idea of opening a restaurant in Sanyang where people would pay only 15 dalasis for a meal at the condition of washing their dishes and spoons once finished. A way to educate them and in the meantime to show them what they can obtain by themselves collaborating together, since everything that should be given to them as a right by a righteous state is lacking because the state is a conglomeration of selfish and opportunist puppets.

Instead of complaining, the communities must hasten in take the way for creating alternatives social lives imbued with optimism, mutual aid and self-confidence.

Once back home we sit in the darkness on the couch. We stay silent for a while. He opens his bottle of brandy, lit a Piccadilly, looks for the ashtray. Then he breaks the silence. Definitely, he says that this activist bullshit needs a real shift. No more talking, this is the time to start acting. Next week he says he's going to start a grounding activity in Sanyang, building cells for the autonomous organization he's willing to build there. You'll document everything with your camera and we'll make an exhibition, he says to me while I drink the last sip of my Pearly Bay, the sweet rose wine from South Africa, I've got accustomed to since I'm here.



Bakau is a fishing village, I thought it was part of Serrekunda, that it was kind of a village within the city, although it is improper to call Serrekunda a city, but Famara told me that it is a settlement town.

The first impression I get when we arrive is of tranquility: less traffic, fewer cars, fewer people on the corners and in the streets. The fish market is poor and the beach is almost deserted. Men sit around a wooden structure, maybe an improvised bar, waiting for the day to end, because today is not a good day. They went out with their canoes earlier in the morning but came back empty-handed.

Famara would like to get to the bottom of the pier. There is no lighthouse, as is the norm in Italy, but a bridge built of iron, four iron axes that allow you to see the water under your feet. For the first time in my life I'm afraid of the emptiness below me. I feel an onset of vertigo and I'm not ready to cross the whole bridge.

A man is walking on the shore under us and while Famara tries to incite me by encouraging my with "you can do it" he looks me in the eye - perhaps he sees and feels my fear?

He turns to Famara in Mandinka says, "no, don't go there, she can't make it to the end."

I smile at him, as to thank him for having sensed my sense of insecurity. As I go back on the ground, I am literally amazed by the man in front of me who nonchalantly walks towards us from the end of the bridge to the shore, "Experience!" he smiles, and I just say "Wow.", totally in awe.

Bakau is mainly inhabited by Mandinka, an ethnic group that was of little concern to Jammeh, since the military coup as the population never supported his policy.

Jammeh, as Jola, has always preferred to pursue a tribalist policy, favoring his own group to the detriment of others. Bakau was the first tourist center in the country, Jawara had a house here and also the richest industrialists in oil. However, since the coup, things have changed and Bakau has fallen into a state of neglect, because of the dissidence of its people.

At the port there is still what remains of a structure that was intended to be a community project for fishermen - a sort of co-operative and above the uninhabited entrance doors I read, MEETING ROOM and OFFICE ROOM. Projects inaugurated and never completed. Perhaps lack of funds, perhaps of will or of cooperation, who knows.

Compared to Tanji and its confusion, its murmur of voices, the movement of the wheelbarrows, the smoke coming from the gas stove where the women fry fish and the mixture of smells, Bakau is a small silent port.

The leaden sky swells the silence, the clouds are mirrored on the sea, an imperturbable table, indifferent to the fishermen. The canoes are parked in a neat row on the shore and on the descent that leads to the pier, groups of fishmongers sit on their refrigerators. Some have lunch together as they share the meal from a large bowl of rice enriched with *domoda*, a caramel-colored peanut stew.

On the other side of the beach you can see the smoke coming out of a ramshackle building. It is the only oven used for smoking harangues, where two middle-aged women work. For Famara it is the evidence that belies the stereotype that Gambians don't want to work.

Outside the oven is a pile of refuse. Smoke and unlikely objects crammed in bulk.

A group of younger women cleaning fish fillets and one of them interrupts her work to prepare *attaya*, while another one crushes the big bones of a butterfish with a stone in order to prevent someone from inadvertently stepping on them. They smile at us, despite their fatigue and they speak to us and ask our names. Then they resume their work - their hands covered with blood and their foreheads wet with sweat.

















Yesterday, Sise, a colleague and friend of Alieu, died in a car accident.

She was a journalist and a committed activist in the fight against FGM. Her passing pushes him to reflect upon death, loss and missing someone in the third world. Last night, he emphasized the difference of the meaning of death in my world, compared to his world.

We were in my room and he was sitting on the chair, drinking whiskey and cola and I was lying in the bed trying to be supportive, even if I couldn't grasp his feelings.

Empathy sometimes doesn't work. The best thing that I could do was remember the death of my grandmother when I was 12 years old, which after 27 years in this world, still remains the only loss that really shocked me.

There's always a reference death in the course of one's life, and every time we are faced with a new loss, we experience this pivotal death over again. Death is a chain reaction. Each ring as constitutive of a loss, ties in with the others, provoking the re-emergence of all the lost ones.

Suddenly Alieu begins to talk about his father's death. Could his father's death be his reference death?

The odds are good, as it seems to impact him in a similar way to the way in which I find myself mentally reliving the memories and images that I link to the death of my grandmother.

I distinctly remember the visit to the hospital. It was night and we had just returned from Calabria. She was awake and had her nightdress on – hair impeccable as always.

I remember thinking to myself that she was really getting better. She looked fine. I remember promising her before we said goodnight, "Grandma, tomorrow morning I will bring you some flowers."

She never got that bouquet of flowers, because that was our last goodnight, our last hug, our last farewell.

Through the words that become images, Alieu tells me about his father's death and the return to the courtyard of his house from the football field. "Your father is dead", a man revealed to him. Incredulously, he runs home and sees his mother crying as he has never seen her cry before. For him it was an event that left a terrible void. A void that he could not process given his age. He was just a child when he lost his father.

What it evokes is the sense of a loss destined to be reworked later - an incomplete mourning which re-emerges with maturity and asks to be addressed later, as far as it is likely to always retain a little bit of incomprehensibility.

And it is almost paradoxical how death, associated with black, emptiness, formlessness, darkness, is revealed this night, once again evoking images that we draw in twilight through the trait of words. At times a hesitant, uncertain hatching, then less nuanced, then more vivid and precise, when the power of listening and resonance make the contours sharper.

In his own words, Alieu paints the death of his father in an ambulance, "He had stretched out on his side to rest on the way to the hospital". Then he speaks to me of the serenity of the minutes before death as a constant.

"All those who are about to die, in the moments immediately before the end, stop suffering. They seem serene because they have to say goodbye to their loved ones."

At the arrival in the hospital, the exhortation of the nurse remains deaf to his father's ears "Mr. Bah wake up, we're here".

"My father had told the man who was with him in the ambulance that he was feeling better."

"All those who are about to die, in the moments immediately before the end, stop suffering. They seem serene because they have to say goodbye to their loved ones."

No one before had suggested a meaning to me to the enigma of that night when I saw my

grandma Maria radiant, her beauty and elegance intact despite the suffering of the previous days. Before returning home, he shows me a black and white close-up of Haile Selassie.

The light complexion, the curly hair, the look at the camera between the reflective and the absorbed. He says that his father was very much like him and every time he wants to remember his father's face he takes a picture of the King of Kings.

"I want us to talk about loss and death in one of the next recordings."

"Are you sure? If you feel the need we can do it, but it's a chapter that can stay out, it can stay between you and me."

"No, you can use it."

What is memory, if not resistance?

It's in the act of remembering that we can say we are human and in the listening that sustains the weaving of the words that make up the fabric of memory, lives cross, share, try to understand each other and sometimes, connect.



It's raining again and there's no light. Drops are falling noisily on the aluminum sheet that protect the wall of the room from the water.

Lit a cigarette and try to write using the torch of my iPhone.

Outside Jamal and Elijah plays in the stairs while eating the biscuits I bought for them at the cash power shop. Sometimes I find myself fearing of having no feelings. It's a strange thought that invades me, and I think of it especially when I am faced with the deep sense of community here. Is this a legacy of the individualism ethos I come from? Productivity and individualism go hand in hand and they are married to the imperative of saving time. Saving time is the key to success. What is success? Why am I so deeply concerned with this question that without doubts comes from the heavy heritage of the bourgeoisie morality?

I want to hear and collect and write and spread people's stories through words and photography. I am constantly repeating that to Alieu when he poses the question "what do you want to be reminded for?"

I really look at this as a necessity. The life of the people must be preserved, recounted and spread: their sufferings, their joy, their happiness and struggles, the unremarked details that you can never find in books, but only when you put yourself in their reality, that is, their streets, their gatherings, their words, their houses and porches, the places where they work.

Not as a meager depiction in order to raise money or as a means to pleading with the rich to donate to the poor, but rather as a commitment to their everyday battles.

Witnessing their daily life as a weapon to the conquest of justice and freedom.

Being part of the chain of these human beings who struggled all their lives to improve the movement for equality.

Alternatively, as a way to help the people recognizing whom and where the enemy is, and why, only united, we can act efficiently for the dismantling of all the lies that keep this breathless system alive.

Earlier this afternoon, Anchu told me that she has closed her stall. It's been almost three days that I've found the aluminum sheet that functions as door, locked with a chain and a padlock.

I sort of missed the sight of the wooden table on the little hill of sand where she laid small bunches of yellow peppers, kassava, okra, tomatoes and sweet potatoes.

I didn't dare to ask her the reason, though but I remember that a few days ago, while sitting in the living room of Maria, Jamal and Elijah's mom, she told me she was tired of the business.

So I assumed she wanted to take a break. She also mentioned that Daniel was suffering badly from pimples caused by the rain and she had to take care of him. Daniel is the 2-year-old baby who she takes care of, born from one of her friends and a Finnish man.

Where they find themselves is still an open question.

I've seen Daniel's little body twisting because of the itching caused by the bubbles.

Last night, while coming back home I saw him wrapped in a blanket, sleeping peacefully on Anchu's lap, who was sitting with our neighbors outside the terrace of Ef's restaurant, in the darkness of yet another blackout.

And now I just listened her telling me that she was forced to close the business because her mom needed help to treat her asthma and she had to give for the care of her mother everything she was saving to buy fruit and vegetables at the market for 2,500 dalasis.

She didn't want to talk about it with all the other people at the restaurant - which is a sort of meeting point for the neighborhood. This means that, even if you're not hungry, you can always sit there and feed your child, eat your porridge, style your wig or just sit. Like Jessica, whose skinniness strikes me and I can't understand how she could have had Alex, the child who spends

his afternoons playing football outside my front door.

I followed Anchu outside the restaurant, Daniel in her arms and I noticed the scabs instead of the inflamed bubbles of a few days earlier. This confirmed Anchu's words when she said "he's better, much better". I could also see it from his eyes and his smile that had returned. Like he was when I met him the first time with his pale complexion and very curly hair.

Then she confessed to me "I can't have any regrets, I can't say to my mother - no I can't help you because I'm saving money to be able to secure a job here."

I told her that I understand. Alieu did the same a few weeks ago for his stepfather and he used all his money to pay the costs for the hospitalization.

That is something that he had to do, and that is what she had to do for her mother.

While my parents in Europe paid our tuition fees, our concerts and travels, our drugs, the internet bills, and bought Christmas and birthday presents for us.

Privileges.

Western privileges.

To be dismantled in order that everybody in this world, no matter what skin color, income, society we live in, would be able to receive what is due to them and give what they owe to the others.

I told her, "hey you know what, you can wash my clothes if you want, normally I go to the laundry, but you can do it for me if you want."

She said "Ok."

Help your neighborhood.

I can't stop thinking about this. In the near future, I would like to come back here and do something, a kind of project, with women. Women like Anchu, Maria, Fanta in Kololi, by following their needs, listening to their experiences, seeking out projects with them and building something useful and necessary for their daily lives. It could be a shop, a urban crop or even a school.



16 October 2019

I talked briefly with her a couple of days ago while she was sitting on a chair under the patio of Ef's restaurant.

"Jessica died yesterday", Julie, one of my neighbors told me just as I was asking her where Anchu was.

She was at Jessica's house, standing inside the big gate in front of the restaurant. She is the only one who was close to her.

Nobody was able to tell me the cause of her death. I approach Fanta later to give her the empty bottles of water. She refills them with local water and sells every day at Serrekunda's market, after carrying her daughter Fatima, to school.

I feel worried. I remember Jessica asking me a few days ago if I had a baby. I said no, adding that I was a bit scared. She breathed and commented alerting me "you know, delivery - it's very painful."

She had this melancholy, this sadness in her eyes and she lacked the noisy effervescent energy that I noticed in almost every woman here. Perhaps my perceptions were due to her being so skinny.

What about her son Alex? I think to myself. Will he be able to play football with his friends with the same light heartedness as I've captured him on my camera? Of course not.

Somehow this will inevitably change his attitude.

Just yesterday morning Alieu said something like "I'm just messing with you because you have to work on your strength."

A black Mercedes is parked outside the gate. I remember her bony arms, her rib cage visible under the thin layer of skin and I am reminded of the years that I suffered from anorexia.

Her body makes me think of the senselessness of the pathologies born by consumerism and the types of body that the women are driven to desire by Western society.

All these wanderings were a sort of mourning?

I couldn't sleep tonight. Lightning and thunder kept me awake together with the sound of the fan and the voices from the movie my neighbor was watching on TV.

But for some strange reason, life goes on. In the neighborhood everyone was carrying on his own routine as if it were just another day. Fanta sells oranges; her daughter plays the bell game; the guys at the corner drink *attaya* and Bolonkononko looks for charcoal to prepare a cup to greet his friend who just arrived at the restaurant. I was finally able to fall asleep for a couple of hours.

20 October 2019

Strange days. I felt weak for a couple of days. I have headaches, stomach ache and then a pain in my back.

I finish reading *Walter Rodney speaks* and started reading *The communist manifesto*.

Insightful perspective on the role of the intellectual and his writings that should not only be addressed to academia.

He refused it, and after writing his thesis following the standards of the university, he turned to another kind of style, more directed towards the people and that is how he conceived *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*.

Capital alienates the working class and deprives the worker of his own individuality, making him dependent upon the bourgeois entrepreneur who exploits him.

The Capitalist system produces an ever-growing range of bare lives.



Eduardo Galeano recounts in *Days and nights of love and war* how he, immediately after being cured of an acute attack of malaria, understood that he was destined to write. He was around the age of 30. He speaks of it as a rebirth. Telling stories, dedicating his life to narrating stories because he felt he had a lot to say.

That night, alone in a hotel room in Caracas, he realized he was a word hunter, he was still recovering, his body sweating, his chin that didn't want to stop shaking and an insomnia that prevented him from finding some quiet in sleeping. A bit like me last night, come to think of it.

I was unable to fall asleep for the strange habit (passed onto me by Alieu) of night coffee, for the itching of mosquito bites on my right arm and thigh, and the smell of the mosquito repellent on my skin.

I thought I knew some good stories to tell to the people, and I discovered, or confirmed, that I had to write. I had often been convinced that this solitary trade wasn't worthwhile if you compared it, for example, to political activism and adventure. I had written and published a lot, but I hadn't had the guts to dig down inside and open up and give myself. Writing was dangerous, like making love the way you should.

That night I realized I was a hunter of words. This is what I had been born for. This was going to be my way of being with others after I was dead and this way the people and the things I had loved wouldn't die.

*To write I had to get my feet wet. I knew. Challenge myself, provoke myself, tell myself, "You can't do it, I bet you can't." And I also knew that in order for the words to come I had to close my eyes...**

It's the third time I've read this passage. It's 11.08 am. Exactly ten hours ago I read it for the first time and then I read it again and it made me think about my experience, in perspective.

I was alone in the room, Alieu had decided to go to the concert of Killa Ace. Only the noise of the fan, the emergency light in the neighbors yard that filtered through the window and the wind that occasionally raised the curtain over the sink.

It's not that I was as convalescing as Galeano, however, there is some slight coincidence.

The index finger of my left hand is still bandaged, even though the wound is healing and I can finally move my other fingers after almost a week.

Exactly since last Sunday I have not been able to write or walk around taking pictures.

The physical torpor invades my head and I begin to think about photography and anthropology. I remorsefully reconsider the choices not made, again, "if I were a nurse I would no doubt be more useful in this context."

I cut my finger while I was preparing dinner. The blade of the knife came off the handle and penetrated my index finger. At that moment, I seriously thought that I had detached my whole finger. The blood started to leak on the sink, on my legs and on the floor. I instinctively opened the door, which fortunately wasn't locked, and I rushed to Maria's house. I knocked on her door, "Please help me, please." On the threshold Monica saw me bleeding and I don't remember her words exactly, I just followed her into the kitchen. She tried to stop the flow of blood with a cotton cloth and she asked me if I had any salt. We went back to my room, the floor of the hallway and of my room sprinkled with drops of blood. I took the salt from the jar and passed it to her, then I began to feel my head pulsating and becoming heavier and heavier. I was sure I was going to faint. It always happens when I lose blood. "Monica, I think I am about to faint." I sat down on the couch and asked Maria to pass me some water. Sipping water helped me to feel better and not to faint.

* Excerpt from Eduardo Galeano, *Days and night of love and war* (1983)

It's like a small personal victory, to remain conscious, to endure the sight of blood and the burning of salt and then walk with Monica to the pharmacy for the dressing.

I can hardly forget Maria and Monica's concern for dabbing the wound, for cleaning my arm and legs of blood and for helping me to cut the remaining vegetables. "We're women, we need to endure this, cooking is part of our fate. Be strong and let the men taste our blood."

Maria pronounced something like that not without irony and sarcasm, as if to say that yes life is ruthless, but what can you do about it, we are women and despite the wounds we must remain strong and proud of ourselves.

I have never been able to take the solidarity of others for granted. Maybe it's my sensitivity and the jokes of my peers when I was a teenager to make me aware that human relationships are full of gestures, allusions and behavior that you can't take for granted.

That nothing is due to you, that good education is the mask of bourgeois pettiness and solidarity is the resistance of the poor and the oppressed, of those who don't need prompt speeches on authenticity or empathy. Everything resonates because for them life has always been a research in the field.

I realize that I am reflecting on these methodological pretensions not without self-criticism and distrust towards anthropology.

The presumption of wanting to build social theories from individual stories, the objectivity of the social sciences, the respect of criteria standardized by the university. Despite the subjective turn, I cannot help but think that perhaps that anthropologist was right when he stated that anthropologists are untalented writers, converted to the study of man, of cultures and societies scattered on the planet.

What if I simply tried to tell stories from below, from the workspaces, from the compounds, from the unpaved roads, like Galeano?







26 October 2019

Adama's in her early 20s, she's in her first year of college. She's studying to become a nurse. I'm waiting for her to end a phone call, while sitting in the chair of the infirmary of Dr Sallah's pharmacy. Unlike Acha, who studies pharmacy and always dresses with long and colorful clothes, Adama wears her uniform religiously.

She has just come from the university; she tells me as soon as we start chatting.

A white coat, under a pair of blue pants and on her head a hijab of the same color blue. I take my eyes off her silhouette and turn briefly to fix the scissors, the gauze and the disinfectant on the desk covered with a flowered tablecloth when a row of red ants busy moving diagonally on the wall behind me, captures my attention.

On the ground under the couch there are two buckets full of water and a kettle for the ablution.

"I am sorry, I was talking to my mom."

"Don't worry." I tell her.

"What's happened?"

"I was cooking few days ago and then I cut my finger."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

After slowly removing the gauze from the old dressing and the sight of the wound, Adama repeats, mortified, "I'm sorry."

"Don't worry it's getting better." I reassure her.

She asks me what I am doing here and where I come from.

"No, I'm not on vacation."

"Italy", she says, "must be a beautiful place".

She's named as President Adama Barrow, but she's Jola as Jammeh.

She invites me to her birthday, next January 1st.

She tells me she decided to become a nurse because she wanted to help her people and herself.

27 October 2019

He impresses me with his unusual presence. I've never seen him before in the neighborhood. Dreadlocks, slim physique, sneakers and t-shirts. He pushes a wheelbarrow full of pineapples.

"Want some?" He asks.

I don't really feel like pineapple, but then I think about it, and ask him for a 50 dalasis pineapple. He starts feeling the various fruits, taking a small one and begins to clean it meticulously with a knife.

Oumar comes from Guinea Conakry, so we begin to speak in French.

First we speak about politics, I don't know how, but at a certain point we find ourselves discussing democracy, leadership, corruption, the demonstrations of protests by the people in Conakry against Alpha Condé - who wants to remain for a third term by amending the current constitution that limits the office of the president to two.

He is well aware of the European political situation. He is aware of the current Italian Government, of the agreement between the Five stars and the League, now replaced by the PD, he is familiar with the positions of the European nationalisms of Orban and Le Pen, of Visegrad countries reluctant to become further involved in the EU after the collapse of England due to Brexit.

"Notre problème, ce sont nos politiciens, nous n'avons pas de sens de démocratie, nous ne savons pas respecter les droits des citoyens, parce que nous n'avons pas de modèle politique. Il faut commencer de quelque part. C'est pourquoi, quand je me retrouve à discuter avec mes amis, je ne

suis pas comme eux tout à fait contraire à la voie européenne."

Europe as a democratic model, why take our failures as an example? Of course, autocracy is more latent in Europe, so apparently we can believe that there is greater respect for the individual.

But which individuals are we talking about? When we consider migrants, talking about respect for humankind becomes a joke. And what about the various populisms and the emergence of villainous men like Salvini?

With the closure of ports, thousands of human lives being prevented from docking in Italy and the prosecution of those who are trying to save lives at sea. Who would dare talk about protecting human rights?

No, I say to Oumar, I believe that it is you and I in Europe who must invent a new model that respects our aspirations and sweeps away racism in Europe and tribalism in African countries, together.

To resume in hand the aborted or undertaken and then unfinished projects of Lumumba, Cabral, Sankara, Mondlane and Nkrumah in Africa and try to internationalize their vision at a European level, then why not on a global level?

To build networks of political and social solidarity ready to fight the decadent capitalism in which we live.



Anchu is an incredible force. Sure of herself, she's a tough woman, one of those who never lets anyone push her around.

I think of her taking care of little Daniel, the son Aisha had with the Finnish man, after escaping from Sierra Leone during the civil war and settling here in Kololi, where she says she feels at home. Although the situation has since improved in her country, she wants to stay here because she has unresolved issues with her family.

Anyone who doesn't know her at first glance, just like I did, would be certain that Anchú is his mother.

I remember a few weeks ago when she asked me to help her buy a jar of Cerelac for Daniel, who was not well because of the red bubbles that were covering his body, a skin rash typical of children here during the rainy season. His was a genuinely maternal concern, and with me she is like that, a mother, an older sister, and a mentor in one.

A little while ago, we were talking in my room - it's very easy to chat to her and I get the feeling that she has a rare gift of listening, without judging.

She was sitting on the couch and I was sitting on the bed. Today she decided to keep her hair natural. She wasn't wearing that wig with a smooth cut and fringe or one of her colorful head-scarfs.

Small black braids start from the forehead to the nape of her neck. She had a pair of black leggings and a grey short-sleeved t-shirt. The way she was sitting, with her back on the couch and the legs folded down made me comfortable. She knows how to put you at ease by making herself at home. With Anchú there have never been any formalities. She is one of the few people who, even from the beginning, never called me *toubab*, but always Giulia.

"Giulia, do you have water?"

"Yes, of course let me give you a glass."

"I am tired, I have just finished cleaning the floor at my place."

"That's what I should do too, I've promised to do it as soon as my wound was closed".

My wound is better, I can now move all my fingers and the pain has gone away almost completely. I just have to be careful not to bump my finger against something and avoid getting it wet.

"You know what, I am tired too. I just want to finish my university and look for a job. But now I am no longer sure of where I'll end up living. Gambia, Italy? My relationship with Alieu is becoming deeper and deeper. He's the one who introduced me to his world, his friends, his family...but more than everything he's my friend and this is the most beautiful thing we share."

"I know, Alieu is a good guy, I have always told you."

She's convinced that I can get a good job here, "with your education and degree you will surely find a well-paid job here."

"I can teach French..."

"I want to learn French, can you write in French too?"

"Of course yes."

I didn't ask for explanations, she just told me that she wants to learn French to write on Whatsapp, as soon as she has the money to buy an Android.

Then I ended up confessing to her my perplexities, my insecurities about my studies. Which profession awaits me?

"My regret is that I wish I could go back to my early 20s with the head that I have now to become a nurse."

She is also a nurse. I remember the photo on the wall of her room, she was standing in the surgery

wearing a white coat next to a doctor.

She told me about the nursery school in Bansang, two and a half years she worked there and how she left her job when she was told that they were moving her to a rural village, because she would be paid even less there.

She worked the night shift for years in Kaninfinfing Hospital. While there, she also worked in the mornings and afternoons and assisted in the pharmacy of a Nigerian woman, "do you know the shop named Amsterdam, it is nearby."

With a monthly wage of 7000 dalasis at the hospital plus the 9000 dalasis she earned working at the pharmacy, Anchu could be considered a privileged person, here in Gambia.

According to a 2005 article I've found online, a nurse in Gambia can only earn 1000 dalasis per month while a doctor earns an average of 15000 dalasis.

Problems and misunderstandings with the Nigerian pharmacist, who was too full of herself, led her to leave this job, too.

"She demanded that I greet her when I was already at work and she would come to the pharmacy and complain to me about not greeting her. I left the place for her attitude, rather than for the salary. The salary was good, but she doesn't know how to respect people. You know what, if you want to be a nurse I can take you to Auntie Elizabeth, she's one of the greatest nurses in the country and she opened a nursing school."

I would like to say yes, take me. I just want to forget what awaits me in Italy, the writing and the photography, my family, my uncertain future...

But then I remind myself to stay grounded and I just said "Well, we'll see."



Yesterday while I was on my way to meet Mustapha, the founder of YAIM, a group of youth against illegal migration. I had a brief discussion with a taxi-driver, Mohammed. He told me that in December, there would be a lot of bustle in the streets.

The Three Years Jotna movement has decided to take to the streets in order to protest against Barrow's decision to remain in power no more for three years, as it was signed by the coalition at the time of the decision to elect Barrow, but for five years as specified by the constitution.

He will not support them, Mohammed said. He is not satisfied with the policies of the Barrow government but he doesn't want to sacrifice his income and December is the peak of the tourist season.

Even Mustapha, who I met briefly after, seemed to be wary of the movement. He said that behind it there are members of the UDP, even if they continue to deny that they are the organizers of the protests.

Mustapha doesn't want to support them because according to him, they don't have any project or proposal. For him they just want to create confusion in the streets, in short he sees nothing constructive coming from this protest.

Alieu didn't take a clear-cut position when I asked his point of view this morning. He noted the contradictions of the parties at stake; on the one hand the dissatisfied ready to take to the streets and exploit December to gain more visibility, while on the other hand the workers of the tourism industry, fearful, angry and restless that a group of outraged people threaten the tourist season.

The problem lies precisely in the disappointment for its own sake, as Mustapha noted, and the lack of ideologies, something that Alieu discussed this morning with Sonko, an activist from Kenya and a very close friend of his. They both feel there's a need to train a new generation of political activists and get rid of the vocabulary of the neoliberal humanitarian sector: civil society, democracy, accountability...

One of Alieu's projects is to open a political school, the Walter Rodney Political School where people could study the African thought of Marxist inspiration and pan-Africanism. Nkrumah, Sankara, Rodney and Cabral instead of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, starting from a past consistent with the territory and the context of today's struggles.

He wants to be concrete and he wants to ground with the people following the same line of Cabral during the meetings with his PAIG comrades, instead of speculating on the theories of Marx and Engels - he wants to sit with the people and with them identifying who their enemies are and who their allies are.

On the phone with Sonko, he talked about a political school in Ghana and I noted his skepticism, in his opinion, is too focused on the study of the classics, which leave the neophyte more confused than ever before. When discarding the European tradition is inapplicable to the local context. Or rather, readjust it by referring to the reformulations produced by the generation of revolutionaries who have decolonized Africa.

2 November 2019

Last night, Alieu confessed to me that he was afraid of the protests in December.

He knows that he is a police target, and I remember a phone call in which he told me that some officers had entered his house to look for weed sometime during the summer.

"I don't want to go to prison. I have too many issues already. I don't want to go to jail", he says.

My body stiffened and this morning I woke up with these words in my head.

He's determined to leave the country during December, he'll travel but he doesn't know where yet.



3 November 2019

Yesterday morning I was wondering around the neighborhood taking pictures. The wound is healing nicely now. However, I feel that something is changing and I can't explain myself. It's like I'm not interested in taking pictures anymore. It's the same feeling I have about my writing, but with one substantial difference. The uncertainties about photography are total, whereas for writing it is different.

It's not that I want to abandon it - on the contrary - I would like to try a new type of writing, one that would be all-encompassing and to which I could dedicate my whole self.

If expressing and telling are two possibilities that can be contemplated both by writing and images that during the last years I have used in parallel, this moment I perceive the need to make a decision.

It's like being at a crossroads, an *aut aut*. Not by imposition, but I realize that to perfect one of the two instruments of expression, I have to understand in which direction the needle of the scale is the heaviest.





Evening at the beach in Sanyang for the birthday of the owner of the Caravan. Sitting on the base of the column in the middle of the dance floor, I observe people. Most are locals and friends of Alieu and Famara. The sound system churns out reggae classics one after the other. Chronixx, Burning Spear, Peter Tosh, Bob Marley. Behind the counter Mary, Matar and Famara are serving beer and soft drinks to the people. Further on, an abandoned caravan with a neon light in the back from which perhaps, the bar gets its name.

Mary is wearing skinny jeans and a black fringed top that highlights her breasts, partly hidden by the braids that hang under her back. While she's busy serving Guinness, Vimto and Lemonade, Alieu hugs her jokingly saying "This is my worst enemy."

She plays the game and grimaces at him. We are introduced to each other and she adds that she would like to meet me in Kololi during the next few days.

I instinctively find myself looking for women my age and I notice a column a girl behind the counter, dressed in a tight black dress with two boys, perhaps Nigerian.

To the left of the counter, a group of white European women in their 50s sit at a table. Their skin is white and pale, their thighs and arms uncovered, they smile, dance, drink, and are entertained by a couple of local boys young enough to be their children.

I just can't get used to this kind of situation, I've been here almost two months, but every time I come across a couple like that, so-called bumster in their twenties, with dreadlocks and a slim body going with a middle-aged European woman, all drooping flesh and dyed blonde hair, I feel really uncomfortable.

And yet no one seems to care, except me.

I address Alieu and share my thoughts with him, "You think they were hippies when they were younger and have now decided to make a living here? In this sense there would be a minimum of consistency." I look at the lady sitting at the table a few feet from me, dreadlocks, afro pants, smoking weed and drinking tea. "Or they are just middle-aged middle class people who have recently realized how sad and flat their marital life has been and have decided to leave Holland, England or Sweden in order to discover sexual pleasure?"

Alieu is not particularly interested in my conjectures, he just tells me "I don't know".

Shortly after Sam joins him and they start dancing.

I talk a bit with Yaxci who's 23 years old and he tells me he's already recorded five songs and he would like me to listen to them. He's an aspiring reggae artist. He points at two guys sitting at a table in military suits, are smoking weed and drinking Vimto. "One of them plays the guitar. If you want, maybe I could ask him to play and I could sing you something..." he says.

Tired of dancing Sam approaches me, he's a bit drunk because I can understand very little of that which would be a monologue on how to use the bark of the Moringa tree.

Back home Bob told me about it and that burning the bark helps to keep mosquitoes away and Fams tells me that studies are underway in Europe to exploit the therapeutic effects of the tree.

Sam briefly walks away from me and then returns with some gifts for me. A bag full of Moringa seeds, green powder made from crushed leaves and a pile of bark.

I just understand that I have to take a bit of powder in the morning, mixing it with coffee or meals, he says it has beneficial effects for my immune system.



Days and nights of blackouts. Nawec is working on the electrical system and a status update on its Facebook page announces that the maintenance will last three weeks.

This means a routine of candles, recurring blackouts, nights sleeping on the floor, skin against the floor tiles to find a bit of coolness as long as you deal the next day with the pain at your arms, legs and neck.

On the terrace and at the beach the air is fresh, especially around six in the afternoon. Yesterday on the roof with Jamal we built a sort of tent with what we found abandoned on the floor. Black tubes, pieces of tiles and a sheet.

In the evening a new blackout, Alieu and Famara went up on the rooftop, while before reaching them, I lie on my stomach down on the floor and watch a documentary about the way made by one of Alieu's friends, Baks, in which Alieu appears.

The documentary investigates the reasons why young people embark on the sea and risk their lives for 'greener pastures', mainly for economic reasons, lack of policies that favor the employment of young people and the possibility of continuing their studies.

Among those interviewed, a young man points out that the main problem is that everyone now wants to have a job in the third sector, everyone dreams, according to him, of 'white collar jobs' and nobody wants to be a mechanic, a carpenter or a fisherman anymore. According to him most of the manual jobs are now carried out mainly by neighbors from Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Everyone dreams of being able to travel, return home in the tourist season, build houses and take care of the family like the semesters*.

The diaspora's Gambians are the ones to enjoy the greatest prestige in society.

Yet Famara doesn't agree with this analysis that in many ways recalls southern Italy, specifically my hometown and my experience. We all turned eighteen, nineteen once and passed our high school exams and we all shared the same ambition, enrolling at university in Milan, Rome or Bologna or went to France and England to look for work - usually in the hospitality sector - at least for those of us who had no intention of carrying on with their studies.

Then there are those who return and those who have never left and are now close to thirty, who decide to invest their energy, creativity and imagination in the country.

Famara and Alieu are among those who have never left and who are trying to build something in their country.

Of course Famara has a much more entrepreneurial spirit than Alieu who instead, alternates moments of full activism, writing, reading and training to periods of silent pause and hustling.

While Alieu is asleep, his back against the roof, I share my perplexities with Famara about the situation of young people in the country.

It's a matter of perception, it's a petty trap to eradicate and that will remain active in all its dangerousness as long as people continue to look at those of the diaspora with greater respect, the children will keep dreaming of being like them, the young people who don't have the money to leave will still suffer from stress and look with a pinch of envy at those who have gone away or

* Ismaila Ceesay (2016) describes semesters as "Gambians living in either the US or Europe who return home on holidays flaunting their wealth and live in opulence. They build big houses, drive nice cars and randomly distribute money. Some send their parents to Mecca for the pilgrimage. Although semesters are known as Gambian hustlers living in the West, what is not known is the nature of their hustling. Most claim that they have decent jobs, but there are suspicions that some are engaged in the drug trade as no paying job can provide them with the amount of money they display after being away for one or two years."

are about to embark on the journey.

“Fams, why aren't your efforts recognized as well? This rhetoric of the value of the help and the support of the people who live outside overshadows all those who, like you, are here and don't forget their duties to the family. I will give you an example from my personal experience. Alieu, as I believe you do, takes care of his younger brother Muhammad, as well of the medicines for his mother and stepfather. A month ago he had to do his best to cover the medical expenses for his hospitalization, 7000 dalasis. Isn't that taking care of your family as much as people living in Europe do?”

Famara agrees, but only in part as he also takes care of his mother, but their efforts are not at all comparable to what the Gambians of the diaspora do. They build houses, schools, associations to support the education of children or women's businesses.

We both believe that the problem is at the root, in the system, in the government.

In the great inequality of the value of money and work between the 'third world' and the West.

In addition, for Famara also, the greatest chance for success in Europe or the United States.

It's not that I want to contradict it - I am not saying that I am against emigration - it would be a paradox, considering my life and my movements in and outside Europe, Milan, Paris, Lanzarote, Venice and Rabat. What I am trying to say is that I do not see why those who go out, those who leave their country, are worthy of greater esteem than those who try to move forward here by way of a corner shop, a restaurant, a local pharmacy or vegetable stall.

I'm thinking of Ef's restaurant, the corner shop of the young Fula boy, Annemarie's bar and Dr Sallah's pharmacy.

I think of every time we eat *plazas*, *domoda* or *benachin* cooked by Ef, of how much I need the corner shop where go to buy water, bread, detergent, soap and milk every day. I think of how much I need the pharmacy where I've been going these last days to medicate my wound. The onions, the local tomatoes and the okra I buy from Fanta, and the evenings chilling at Annemarie's bar drinking Julbrew and white wine.

In general, it's the details that make the difference, it's the little things that make any experience valuable. For me it's the pleasure of chatting with Anchu, of clothes, of blackouts, of when we're going to dance at the club, and of hearing 'you look amazing today', of asking Ef to lend me a plate because we're three at dinner tonight, because at home I only have two plates. To sit on the step next to Fanta, taking some photos of her and her daughter.

I would like him to understand that it's not the quantity that counts but the meaning of the gesture. Not all these people might be able to build a villa, but it's no less difficult for them to help their families, just like last night Fams brought dinner home for Alieu and me.

The problem is always the same. It's capitalism and its corollary. The cult of individualism to ensure that it's not the state that should be responsible for building houses and roads, that should take charge of educating the young and the health of the elderly and the sick, but the individual who has the financial means. People who work within this rotten system, in the areas of finance, ruthless trade, banks and economy.

In such a society, it is no longer the state that takes care of welfare, but the individual who, of course, will help his family and friends, his neighbors.

A world of preferential lanes is an unjust world that truncates dreams, talent and ambitions.

It shapes people's minds from childhood, their desires and ambitions end up coinciding with that one percent that controls the wealth of the planet.

For this reason, those who don't have the time, the will, the opportunity to discover the way out for the transformation of the status quo, or perhaps better to say, for the destruction, upheaval and complete reconstruction of the society under the banner of values, unthinkable for

capitalism, such as solidarity, community and resilience, the only outcome remains the dream of climbing the stairs that lead to success and gain. How can't we realize that in most cases we spend our lives climbing on mirrors, blinded by false promises and illusions nurtured by unchecked egoism and insatiable careerism, consumerism and social media?

As if completeness depend on an SUV, a pair of three-zero shoes or a house with a green lawn and a swimming pool.

Before the consciousness of the revolution there is disenchantment and the realization that what they would like to sell us is only short-term food, not sovereignty.

Capitalism attracts because it knows how to seduce but its counterpart, socialism, anarchism or communism, whatever we want to call it, has never really been realized historically.

These experiments have been carried out badly or have been frustrated by the fury of having to compete with the capitalist countries and this has led them to the collapse and to the betrayal of their ideals. The race to conquer space is only the most famous of many examples.

Everything is still to be built, to be experienced; despite the times we are living in, made of economic and environmental crises in which the rampant negativity feeds the global populisms.

As a starting point, nothing has more value and meaning than putting into practice what Fanon suggested at the dawn of decolonization, questioning the sun, the stars, the land, the rivers and why not the animals, to be able to rediscover us and then see ourselves in the eye, perhaps for the first time in millions of years, as human beings.

*The gift of oneself, and the contempt for every preoccupation which is not in the common interest, bring into being a national morale which comforts the heart of man, gives him fresh confidence in the destiny of mankind and disarms the most reserved observers. But we cannot believe that such an effort can be kept up at the same frenzied pace for very long. These young countries have agreed to take up the challenge after the unconditional withdrawal of the ex-colonial countries. The country finds itself in the hands of new managers; but the fact is that everything needs to be reformed and everything thought out anew. In reality the colonial system was concerned with certain forms of wealth and certain resources only precisely those which provisioned her own industries. Up to the present no serious effort had been made to estimate the riches of the soil or of mineral resources. Thus the young independent nation sees itself obliged to use the economic channels created by the colonial regime. It can, obviously, export to other countries and other currency areas, but the basis of its exports is not fundamentally modified. The colonial regime has carved out certain channels and they must be maintained or catastrophe will threaten. Perhaps it is necessary to begin everything all over again: to change the nature of the country's exports, and not simply their destination, to re-examine the soil and mineral resources, the rivers, and — why not? — the sun's productivity. Now, in order to do all this other things are needed over and above human output — capital of all kinds, technicians, engineers, skilled mechanics, and so on. Let's be frank: we do not believe that the colossal effort which the underdeveloped peoples are called upon to make by their leaders will give the desired results. If conditions of work are not modified, centuries will be needed to humanize this world which has been forced down to animal level by imperial powers.**

* Excerpt from Frantz Fanon, *The wretched of the heart* (1968)



On the roof. It's almost six o'clock in the afternoon and the clouds cover the sun that is about to set. I take a photo of the foliage of the trees in front of me, then another one of the twins with their older sister playing in the courtyard of Anchu's compound, Yasin greets me from below raising her head.

As I move to the other side of the terrace to photograph a group of boys with their backs resting against a gate, Anchu also recognizes me, she calls me from Ef's restaurant where she is sitting like every day.

"This is my princess!"

I smile and answer "Wait, I'm coming".

I descend the stairs quickly and walk along the corridor of the building to reach the road.

In front of the gate, leaning against the wall, in the shade of a large tree with a thick trunk, a pair of armchairs unhinged. I've always been fascinated by them, sometimes children sit on them, sometimes I find them standing up trying to climb over the wall to reach the abandoned garden behind the road.

Today I try to capture them, left to their own devices, but part of the neighborhood at the same time, they define the space giving it a certain identity.

Then I reach Anchu. She is sitting with Julie and Daniel and the other girls who help Ef in the kitchen.

Spread on the white table are bunches of handbags in different colors, a pair of pants and a belt of patent leather. Anchu and the others are busy poking into a large black python bag at Julie's feet. The bag is full of ballerinas and brightly colored sandals with overly high heel. Anchu picks a pair of silver toe flat shoes signed Top Shop and tries them on.

"What do you think?" She asks me, as she walks back and forth on the terrace to test out the comfort.

I remember the chat I had with her a few days earlier, "you know Giulia, it's easy to sell clothes because everyone cares a lot about style and loves clothes".

Under the veranda of the restaurant it can happen really everything, it's a meeting place but not only, in fact, I have rarely seen customers eat under the terrace. Since I live here I see almost every day the girls busy styling wigs with braids, fraying jeans, preparing powdered milk for the children and having pedicures, Bolonkokonko, Ef's brother, preparing *attaya*, Yasin dancing mbalax with Mohammed in her arms. Today Julie is selling clothes, shoes and accessories arrived from some European cities through a container sent by a family member or some friend that emigrated to the north.

If you think about it, it seems ridiculous, we are buying clothes, shoes and bags for 75 dalasis each, the price of this same stuff stored in large European shops with air conditioning and underpaid jobs wouldn't be less than 50 euros per item.

A great mockery to the value of these products that are shipped here to be sold for a few euros as rejects of the opulence of capitalism that end up their superficial existence here.

The girls know the brands like any Italian or French or English girl, River island, New Look and Top Shop, "these are good European brands I know", says Yasin.

Meanwhile, Anchu, who now knows very well my tastes, tells to Julie, "show Giulia that short dress like the ones she uses to wear."

I go inside the restaurant to try on the black mini dress. In fact, I have to recognize that it's just my size, Ef, lying on the mattress for an afternoon rest, comments, "you look amazing!".

Anchu and Julie are also of the same opinion, so I decide to buy it, and Julie gives me a special price, 75 dalasis.

While Julie puts everything back in the bag, Anchu, holding Daniel in her arms tells me, "come on Giulia come with us to the shop - we're going to help Julie sell this stuff."

Sitting on the ground against the wall of the abandoned garden, bare torso and shorts, is the man who occasionally washes the floor and the stairs of our compound.

Anchu whispers in my ear, "don't shoot him, this man is a psycho".

"I know he is a bit unstable but don't worry I wasn't about to do it."

A few days ago I was on the roof with Alieu and Victor, my Nigerian neighbor, we were talking about all kinds of things, at a certain point Alieu pointed out to Victor, the man who is usually sitting against the trunk of the big baobab tree that reigns unchallenged over the neighborhood.

"Does he have any issues?" he asked.

"Yes, he was a former soldier, he fought in the Sierra Leone's civil war and after that, he lost his mind."

Not long after we heard him sing very loudly in an unknown language as he was washing the floor upstairs.

As I approach the boys sitting in circle with their chairs under the tree, Anchu responds in Wolof to the man who stopped her.

"Giulia, come back and snap this man, he wants a picture."

I feel a bit flattered by this denial, it's not that I talk to him a lot, but every time I meet him usually in the morning, we say hello briefly.

While I'm taking photographs of him, some of the men amusedly comment, looking at him posing in front of the camera, "true African warrior!"

One of them asks me if he can take a look at my camera as he's convinced that I shoot in analog.

We begin to talk about darkrooms, prints, chemistry and we both agree that the real essence of photography is in film. The film is capable of revealing the magic of a landscape, the intensity of a face or an apparently trivial object.

We share the same belief about the potential of analog photography, but I explain that I had to switch to digital for economic and practical reasons...Imagine if I were here with my Nikon fm2 and about, let's say, fifty rolls and then once back in Italy, I discover that for some reason, half of the negatives are burned or no good!

I reach Anchu and Julie at their friend's corner shop where we also find Aisha. She would like to buy a pair of wedged leather sandals, but has no money. She asks Julie to give them to her, saying she'll pay later. Julie refuses because it's not her stuff, she still has to pay for it.

That girl is always scornful and pissed off. Then she turns to me and tells me that because I am white I have to take care of her son, Daniel because he is a *toubab* too, I have to buy him milk and pampers.

"Can you tell me what happened to your husband?" I ask her.

"It's a long story" and she tells me to "forget about it." As to make me understand that she doesn't want to talk about how and why the Finnish man with whom she had Daniel, disappeared.

Always pissed off, always staggered, I reiterate.

To ease the tension I tell her, "You know when Daniel was full of pustules I took him a can of Cerelac."

Showing a smile halfway between the amused and the cynical, she says "I know, my dear, thank you."

Shortly after returning home I ask Anchu why she is always so pissed off and in a bad mood, why she seems to be angry with the world.

Anchu confesses touching her abdomen with her hand that she was making money selling her pussy then after having Daniel, she went crazy. She took her baby because sometimes she was beating him up.

I tell her that she should learn to love herself and to solve the problems she has with herself first, otherwise she will always be grumpy and irritable towards her neighbors, however the ugliest thing is that she will end up causing those she loves the most, to suffer , like Daniel.

Anchu also agrees with me, then Julie joins us with an air a bit puzzled by the insistent claims of Aisha.





The launch of *Gonga*, truth in Fula, the new magazine published by the PDOIS, The People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism at the Paradise hotel's hall.

A huge, creepy room reminiscent of the seventies with poor materials, fake wood on the walls and a kitsch chandelier hanging from the ceiling made of small pieces of frosted glass and to top it all off, the stage wall and the long conference table covered in meters and meters of red velvet. Chairs wrapped in white fabric, just like the Moroccans do.

The public occupies less than half of the room, lot of chairs remain empty. At the end of the room just in front of the entrance door is an abandoned buffet, three empty fridges, a deserted table and some empty bottles of water left on the floor.

The majority of the audience is composed of men, and a mixture of young people and older ones dressed in traditional clothing. A few women wear Muslim dresses and two of them catch my eye, simply for the modern cut of their dresses, made nonetheless of African wax fabric. I assume without a doubt, that they are part of the diaspora.

I am the only white person in the room, but I feel less the eyes on me here, than in the streets.

We sat in the third row, behind the hostesses whose hair is wrapped in red headscarves, all wearing t-shirts that say, written in red, "A new Gambian for a New Gambia".

The event was supposed to have started at 10 am, but it's 11 am when Sidia Jatta, one of the founders of the PDOIS, starts his brief speech. He looks older than his age, he is 74 years old, nonetheless his voice is clear and sharp and truly emanates humbleness as Alieu whispers to me. He's wearing a simple white long tunic as is his colleague and friend, Halifa Sallah, who's younger than him. He was born in 1953. Nowadays Halifa leads the party and represents the socialist alternative and prominent opponent to President Barrow.

These two men look very different, Halifa seems fond and sure of himself, at times even a bit over confident, while Sidia belongs to that old worldly, almost extinct class of politicians who engaged in politics because of a vocation and true commitment.

I feel closer to Sidia because he seems more sincere and less constructed, and their difference is hi-lighted at the end of the meeting as I find myself comparing the ten minutes speech of Sidia with the more than two hours uninterrupted monologue of Halifa.

Alieu was excited to attend the launch of the magazine. We woke up early in order to be there at 11. He's listening carefully to Halifa's account, which starts from the early days of colonization in Gambia through the independence, the Jammeh Era, the foundation of the party and the latest political events, the coalition 2016 which defeated Jammeh and brought Barrow as the president of a new Gambia - no more a dictatorship but a democracy, respectful of the citizens who voted for him. Things, however have not changed. Halifah's complaints echo the same as the majority of society.

The line purposed by the DOI, as the people call it, is reminiscent of the basic ideas of socialism and communism - self sufficiency, cooperative economy and small units; villages in the Gambian context, as productive base.

A seemingly radical policy veiled, wrapped and decorated by neoliberal leftist language, like governance, civil society, equal accord with IMF and WTO, he never uses the words socialism, communism, neither one of the historical examples in the African context that experimented or tried to move toward a classless society, like the Ujamaa of Nyerere in Tanzania or Burkina Faso as built by Thomas Sankara and the Burkinabe from the ashes of the too much compromised colonial legacy of the Haute Volta.

Even if with some criticism, Alieu seems to have enjoyed the conference. He even asked Halifa a question about the constricting and invasive role of the IMF and the western capitalist economy

in the African context, as a whole. How to get rid of this neocolonial market in which African are more subjects than equal contractors, in this blurry independent nations product of a now dubious wars of liberation which dotted the hopes and the land of the Africans from the independence of Ghana in 1957 up to 1994, the end of the Apartheid in South Africa?

I didn't hear anybody on the floor criticizing the role of the West, the neocolonial market, the exploitation of the natural resources and the accumulation of capital from foreign investors, European and Chinese.

Halifa didn't question the obsession of the former colonizers in their new role of facilitators in the process of democratization in the African States as a subtle way to control and decide who should rule one country and to the benefits and interests of who.

In this sense Bhabha is more than lucid when he defines globalization as the latest tome of a tragedy of omnipotence that began with the scramble of Africa and continued with the colonization. We went there as bad actors pretending to bear "civilization", we are still attached here as glue on the hailing body of a rat caught in a trap pretending to implement and harden the foundation of "democracy". But we don't know that our breath smells of greed, pillage and death and that the people already know our false intentions. They, the young, the returnee, the women, the rapper, are willing to engage themselves to carry on the third wave of the liberation movement and defeat their African leaders, loyal puppets at the cost of a decadent motherland.

So every time he used the term system change, I felt compelled to ask him, "what are you dealing with when you talk of system change?" An entire new society to be built in commonality with the masses, in order to uplift the poor, the women, the children and the sick, all the vulnerable ones in front of the actual capitalist Russian roulette? Or assuming the leadership with another yet unfruitful system of representative election?

Are you going to take the same path as the lefts in Europe, refashioning themselves to appeal to the entrepreneurs, the bourgeoisie, the new riches, and last but not least the technicians at the mercy of that trickery called European Union?

Fighting against tribalism as the lefts in Europe are fighting against the rising of ignorance and hatred as embodied in the various populist parties from the East to the South of Mediterranean, is this the solely role of the left today? To be in a position of defense instead of being the fuse of an avant-garde grounded in the local context and aware of the mistakes of the XX century?

As I see Aliou more and more willing to give a chance to this party and thinking about join it, while reading some line of their Constitution and recognizing through the lines echoes of Amilcar Cabral and Marx, I keep wondering silently how difficult it is to get a voice in the mainstream if you are part of a conscious minority. Either way, you are the buzz of the breaking news when you decide to resort to violence or you are condemned to share your ideas with the underground network of dissenting people blossoming in social media.

At the end of the day, it's still the same ancient tricky seductive play of cultural hegemony that deafens the consciousness and manipulates the mind.



I was trying to get to the beach but I got lost. After walking through the grass for a while, I met Babacar, a man who saw me and told me I took the wrong road in getting to the beach.

"Follow me I'll help you to go to the sea."

Therefore, I started following him and while we walked, we started talking.

He is a gardener from Senegal; he learned the job through a formation held by the Chinese.

He is responsible of the Seaview Hotel and the Seaview Bungalow Beachside Hotel, the new village the same owner is building in traditional African way. He asks me if I want to see it, and I say ok, amused by our exchanging in French. He is 42 years old but looks older, the sun has hardened his face, leaving a trace of its rays.

He picks a wild flower from the ground and gives it to me. I will keep it with me until the end of the afternoon.

He is proud of his job and as he leads the way through the construction site, he tells me everything about the work in progress, especially the trees, the plants and the flower he is planting.

A bunch of bungalow organized in a round space, in the middle an empty pool, on the back another one destined to host tropical fishes.

The roof of the rooms has been built by artisans from Ziguinchor, Casamance, using bamboo canes, he proudly says.

He explains me how his colleagues has filled the ground with shells, one layer of cement and then ranged one by one the shells on the layered fresh concrete.

I promise I will go visit him in the other hotel where he works and I continue my walk towards the beach.

I read a chapter of Basil Davidson *No fist is enough to hide the sky*, his report on the guerilla warfare led by Cabral in Guinea Bissau in order to free his country from the Portuguese.

While I drink white wine, looking at the white tourists in bikini and swimsuits enjoying their vacations, I am struck by a group of people playing beach volley. Then, from my chair, I stare at one of them, with the explicit intention of attracting his attention as an invitation to join them.

A few minutes later I can see him gesticulating with his hand and saying loudly "join us".

He is the same person I saw a few hours earlier in my neighborhood when I was wandering to shoot some pictures. He is the first one who remembers it.

"We met just before, under the tree, you were talking with my friend Alex and his little brother Josef."

"Oh yep, that's you."

He is Senegalese too and he is a good player. His name is Amadou.

I enjoy my time there, spend almost two hours in the field, and I am still a good player even if it's more than ten years since I have quit the volley ball team where I used to play as a setter.

At sunset the shore is full of boys playing football, bare feet and torso, I am filled with a sense of energy and lightness never mind the various bumps I take when falling on the ground trying to save the ball.

My mind is empty from all kind of thoughts, except the willingness to do good.



With a huge sense of vacuum and confusion starting today, realizing that my last days here are about to begin. It makes me feel weird thinking of leaving, returning to the same old routine, the cold winter, the cloudy days, light turned on inside at 4 in the afternoon, my body wrapped in wool clothes, my nose reddish for the rainy days and the stinging winter.

No more sand in the streets, no more walking bare feet, no more lips tasting of *ditakh*, the green fruit that looks like a huge pistachio when you peel off the cracking shell. No more battles with roaches and tiny mice in my room. No more enjoying Alieu while he stares at me getting mad in order to catch these little harmless beasts. No more singing outside in the corridor of the compound, no more Nigerian accents, no more smell of *pepa*, and the spicy hot pepper used to season every meal here.

I will miss all of this but I do not want to think about it as an end.

Attachment to human beings has never being so easy in every other place but here.

Yesterday evening, I was walking through the barely lit Kololi road, reaching Alieu who was sitting at Annemarie's bar.

Some women were walking home, a black hijab covered their head, with the dark night and their hurried pace the black fluctuating fabric acquired a sense of mystery...

I meet Alieu sitting at the table outside with Fams, Ams, his new girlfriend Fatoumata and another girl, Ef.

They are drinking Doppel and smoking Piccadilly. The terrace is small, three tables outside while inside the space is bigger. Hanging on the awning a bare neon lamp, around which silently dance night butterflies.

Annemarie comes back from inside with a glass of white wine for me and poses it on the table.

I lit a cigarette and stretched my legs on Alieu's knees. He has tied his dreadlocks with my red elastic band and with his hair like that, he looked extremely handsome.

They keep talking shifting indistinctly from Wolof to Mandinka, recalling old childhood memories like when they used to spend their days under a big mango tree in Sanyang, smoking weed, drinking and reading while watching a weird laborer trying to build a house and obviously staring at them, suspiciously, angrily.

From the speakers succeed uninterruptedly few tracks by Chronixx after living space for some of the most prominent artists in the actual national scene, ST Brikama boyo and Jizzle.

From time to time, Ams takes Fatu's hand, particularly when she puts her hands on his knees.

She has beautiful eyes, straight black hair and a piercing, a small silver ball, on her left nostril.

She is quiet, not very talkative; maybe she is just a little bit shy, compared to Annemarie, which enjoys teasing Alieu as much as she can.

It is not really that I am lost in thought; I am just trying to focus my eyes on some details of this nocturnal scene, since I cannot really enjoy their conversation.

There is not much people passing through, a part from a group of kids in their teens, some cars, two dogs followed by a cat. Then bikes and a scooter whose headlights momentarily brighten our side of the road.

At the corner shop in front of us, the seller is watching the TV broadcasting a show on food and then music videos.

No customers, except from few people who one after the other ask for bread. Few empties chairs outside, I wonder, for the customers or for his friends.

Next to it, a restaurant owned by a tall woman in her late 40s, she comes back to recuperate the empty bowl where Famara ate fufu earlier. He is shocked when she says the price for the meal, 25 dalasis. Honest, I think, but really too cheap. We all agree.

Alieu and Famara suggest that she increase the price for her own sake and they advise her to sell a portion for not less than 50 dalasis.

Beers and cigarettes follow one another as midnight arrives. The bottles empties, the ashtray full of Piccadillys butts and Bon, the slim American cigarettes I smoke.

At one point of the evening, coming out from his large blue off-road car, Killa Ace.

He is wearing jeans, a t-shirt and a baseball cap, all in blue.

He sits with us, start asking the men if they can help him fix a gig in Sanyang, he looks different from in the pictures and videos. He is not exactly the kind of person you cannot help but notice, as I expected. I mean, he just looks like every other person in the street, which is something that reassures me, in a way. He just looks like what he is.

While he mixes Alomo, a Ghanaian liquor with a bottle of XXL, a local energy drink, I question him about his last concert at the independence stadium, he is satisfied, many people were there, he proudly says. The next date, 14th of December, a place not far from Palma Rima.

We say to him that we will be there.

Then the conversation shifts to his new albums and the old ones.

Alieu tells him “man I think you’re getting too comfortable with yourself”, a way to challenge him and to confess him that he prefers his old school days, when he used to be part of this crew named La Cosa Nostra.

From his part, Ace does not seem too worried, but I perceive a little irritation in him, he tries to ask Alieu what does he mean when he says that he’s getting too much comfortable with himself.

However, Alieu cuts him short, saying that he is just talking about his personal tastes.

After deciding that those would be our last drinks of the evening, we walk home round midnight, passing from the police station, one of the few sources of light in the street, a water melon in my bag bought at the junction for 150 dalasi.

We pass down a dark lane where we find a couple embracing against the wall so I turn off the torch trying to preserve unbroken their intimacy in this windy late Sunday evening in Kololi.

It is around noon when we hear Maria shouting from her apartment. We are both sitting on the couch, drinking coffee, at first, I do not think that there is something wrong going on, naturally, her voice is loud and these last days she is always praying with Monica, her flatmate who is Sierra Leonean as her, for her newborn baby. They sing and shout especially in the night, as members of the Pentecostal church, they believe that singing will help to chase away the evil spirits from the house to protect the baby.

However, this time is different.

Shouting and yelling, these are not just female voices followed by childish echoes, at one point we hear a male voice, followed by Jamal's screams.

Then Alieu jumps up, puts his slippers on, opens the door and reaches Maria's home to find out what is going on.

I hesitate, should I join him or not? I am afraid my presence would make them feel uncomfortable, but it could be also viewed as a sign of cowardice or insensibility, after all, since I am here we established a peaceful link, and I have a lovable relationship with Jamal, he is my kid in a way...so I ended up reaching Alieu.

As I make my way in the hallway, I see Mbacke, who pretends to be the grandson of the landlord of the compound but no one knows if he's lying or not.

My suspicions were right. His voice is screaming at Maria.

Only yesterday, he stopped me at the baobab tree he uses to chill when he is around, "What's the name of this woman?" He asked pointing at Monica who was walking towards home. "Monica", I replied and continued my walk.

There should be some issue with the rent it seems as I can make out, hearing them quarreling, standing next to the window of my room.

He leaves the building with an air of complacency.

Then Elijah precipitates next to the stairs, I ask him what happened, and he mumbles something like "The man called my mom a prostitute".

When I enter the living room, I find Monica sitting on the couch in front of Maria, who occupies the seat as usual. They explain what happened. Mbacke went there as an intermediary of his uncle, the property owner, to kick her, his sons and the newborn baby out of the house.

She says she is in financial trouble, she missed to pay the rent for the last three months, but she was pregnant and arranged to talk and find a compromise with the landlord.

Now after delivering her daughter only two weeks ago, he prefers she leave the house as soon as possible.

She had been living here for eleven years, not once failing to pay the rent, and now these men cannot understand, cannot show solidarity for a mother with three young kids.

Quite the opposite, as she lets me listen to the voice message the man sent her earlier in the morning.

"You are a criminal, Mariam, you are a criminal, you have wasted my time, you are a prostitute and must leave my house as soon as possible, and you don't deserve anything. I do not care about your baby. I just need you to free my house." And other shit like that.

As if that were not enough, Mbacke decided to intimidate her even more, literally showing his worst self by touching Monica's ass, who was furious.

Alieu tells me that when he arrived in the living room he found her pointing a big knife at Mbacke.

I tell her I have figured out the kind of person was - rude and disrespectful in the way he treats women. Even with me, once, I confess to her, he dared touch my ass before leaving my room with

the stupid excuse of checking a problem I had with the drain in my bathroom.

What could I say?

I am so upset, all the while trying to show them my support, I am ashamed of him and his uncle, the way they are treating her family.

How could it be possible that two children of 11 and 4 years old respectively, have to listen to someone call their mom "a prostitute" and repeat it, recounting what they witnessed?

They do not deserve this.

I am so mad about the way my fellow women need to endure and face male patriarchy.

His arrogance, the way he entered the house, the noise he made and the cowardice of his uncle in not making an appointment to discuss the issue of the rent, face to face.

I feel Elijah's fears as he touches my hand for the first time since we met, and because he is definitely not an affectionate sort of person. What is he looking for? Comfort, protection, safety? Whatever it may be, I will not forget that moment as deep warmth wrapped my body for the whole length of time our hands were touching. For the first time in my life, I felt like an adult whose duty it was to protect younger ones.

Don't stop smiling Elijah, here's a reminder for you: keep on being the big brother, take care of Jamal (as much as you enjoy teasing him!) and your little sister, but never forget that whenever you feel you can ask for love and protection as soon as you perceive trustful eyes in others, they will take care of you. However, most of all, forget about the voice of the patriarchy and their representatives, all of those you will hear calling women that you care about bitches or prostitutes. Also, do not forget to thank your mom and all the strong women that you will encounter in your young life every day.

Still thinking about the way Kwesi, one of Alieu's friends who is half Jamaican and half British, treats me. He simply ignores me every time I meet him.

Alieu says that I should not give him too much attention; he is simply sensitive about the race issue. He cannot stand white people because of racism and the oppression black people have to endure in England, the place where he grew up.

The first time I met him at Alieu's place I really did not care very much. I simply thought he was not interested in chatting with me, and me, with unknown and reluctant people, I hardly ever take the first step, break the ice and open a conversation.

The next time I met him, it was an evening at Camara's bar. When I arrived at the bar, they were already sitting there since the afternoon, Alieu, him and some other people.

There again, I was completely ignored, not only from him but from Alieu too, who did nothing in order to include me into the conversation.

I felt left out again and started talking to people on Whatsapp. I just left the things as they were, leaving the spot after a glass of wine.

The second time I confronted Alieu and told him about my disappointment, "What's the point of calling me to join you at the bar, if I have to be completely ignored by both of you?"

He mumbled something like "we were so immersed in our conversation about political organizations and activism that I didn't notice you were feeling ignored, and also you looked pretty busy chatting with your friend on your phone." We forgot about everything. Then a few days later, Kwesi returned to England. I knew though, that he would come back soon, and that is exactly what happened three days ago. We were invited to Ef's house that day, a beautiful woman in her 40s, whose short hair emphasizes her face pretty face, especially her small, pointed, v-shaped nose. After lunch, we spent the afternoon chatting on the grass and listening to music then we moved to Annemarie's bar. Towards evening, we were joined by Kwesi and his uncle Seymour.

They both greeted everyone warmly with a Hi, brother, Hi sister, except me. I thought that Kwesi was a shy person who only let go when it comes to talking about activism, black radicalism and politics, but instead I saw him chatting easily with Awa Bling, a young Gambian rapper.

Kwesi asked her which language she sings in. She answered Wolof and English. He commented something like "oh interesting!" and then immediately headed to the counter to get a drink, asking everybody except me if they wanted something to drink.

At that moment, I felt invisible. A ghost. Never before had ever I been treated with so much indifference. I was hurt and furious at the same time, so I decided to stand up and leave. I was upset.

Afterwards, Alieu and I had a long discussion. He had done nothing to explain what kind of person I am, why I am here, had said nothing of the friendship that binds, had not told anybody all the things that make me not just another white woman. Superficial and complacent, yet always hiding a veil of superiority and racism under the smiles and friendly manners with the locals, like a good part of the white people who live here.

"Ridiculous! Your friend is ridiculous because by doing so, he precludes broadening his experience of the world, narrowing his own horizons and does nothing but promote a sectarianism that has its roots in this ideological division between whites and blacks. I am not trying to defend my people. I'm simply trying to make you understand that, despite the sins, crimes and obscenities that we carry with us and that some of us continue to commit undisturbed every single day, there are people who want to change history; there are people who are trying to overcome this sectarian vision that uses the color of your skin as a barrier. And precisely for this

reason there are still people out there who say that there can be no exchange, understanding, fusion or collaboration between blacks and whites.”

“No one has ever treated you like this here, because here the problem of race is something different from the English society where black people have suffered abuse, discrimination and intolerance, since they first started socializing with the whites. I admit that he is biased towards you but you have to understand that he does not behave like this because of you, Giulia, so it is nothing personal. It is something that has always been in him. There are scars and wounds that are difficult to remove. To be treated in a certain way every day for 36 years by the European white class, forges you emotionally and psychologically. Please do not let him bother you. Go your own way and ignore him. Do not let him bother you.”

I think I have learned a lesson in a way because of how unjustly treated and ignored I felt.

Alieu says that this is what happens to so many of his brothers and sisters who live in societies where being white means being born with so many privileges every day.

Privileges that we often take for granted.

Sometimes hitting your head against the wall is like taking a cold shower. To hit my head against the wall has allowed me to experience first-hand, in my own skin, what, until now I had only read about in books. To suffer the indifference and prejudices of someone has made me realize how real the pain is and how discrimination has repercussions, not only in your head but also on your body.





Camarades, je ne voudrais pas être long; je pense que je n'ai pas été long. Parler du peuple suffit à remplir la vie d'un homme, par conséquent parler du peuple, ne serait-ce que dans sa portion qui s'appelle la JEUNESSE, suffit à nous occuper tout le long de notre vie; parce que nous serons toujours jeunes. Jeunes parce que nous allons continuer à dénoncer; jeunes parce que nous allons continuer à combattre; au lieu de ces personnes qui n'ont peut être que 18 ans, mais qui déjà parlent de résignation, parlent de sagesse, parlent de ménager, parlent de compromis; il n'est pas question de compromis.

Thomas Sankara

Conclusions



Both Alieu's life story and my memoir seek to suggest a way to escape from the stereotype and the objectiveness of a distant other, in a quest where key terms are youth, Africa and politics. Highly contested terms that cannot be reduced to a definite or exclusive conceptualization but should be rather employed to valorize the various kinds of young people's engagement in contemporary Africa and their attempts to create spaces for change and autonomy. (Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää 2018)

I believe that Alieu's story and the depiction that it made of him, speak for themselves, also the portraits of the young people in my memoir; nonetheless I want to add some observations, looking comparatively at other researches focused on African and particularly, Gambian youth. To do so, I will discuss some points that have emerged from Alieu's narration - themes in my opinion, that give light to specific features broadly present among young Africans across the continent and thus can help us to understand their aspirations, lifeworlds (Jackson 2012) and habitus.

How do young people such as Alieu and Famara shape their subjectivity and identity and through what devices? How do they reconcile their

aspiration to modernity with a religious system that seems at odds with their ambitions? What meaning do they give to politics and how do they engage in it? To what extent do they react to the restrictions imposed on their freedom of movement? In a context where the threshold between life and death is fading, how do they deal with mortality, loss and memory?

These are some of the questions I found myself pondering, while listening to Alieu, while traveling with Famara and during my time out in the neighborhood beside Souleyman and many others. It would be pretentious to claim to have an answer, given the length of my stay and my age which, despite the obvious differences in gender, class and race, raises the same questions for me. However, together with my friends, the reflections and words they shared with me, I will try to provide some consideration on youth subjectivity and the creation of the self in modern Africa; the role of religion in shaping their identity; their ways of understanding and living politics; freedom of movement; and the modalities of addressing mortality, loss and remembrance.



ALIEU: Since I was a kid I have always enjoyed being surrounded by people much older than myself but I had perfect balance, I would hang out with older people and also hang out with my age mates, cause I would play, I would want to play. I had the perfect balance, it wasn't a problem, they called me *dindinkeba*. *Dindinkeba* in Mandinka means an old soul. I was always called that, an old soul.

When we started to talk about his childhood, the first question I asked Alieu was "do you remember your first day at school?" As emerged from his account, Alieu started constructing his subjectivity the very first day he went to school, and every event that followed in his life, is linked to it and the decision to leave school.

A pupil who quickly turned into a dropout.

"I was just a dropout, reading a lot of books."

An oxymoron shapes the first definition of his self. They were poor but all of his siblings were able to finish school and their parents did not agree with his decision to leave. Alieu didn't leave school because he wanted to work or because his parents needed him to help bring the food home - it was his awareness to push him to embark on a self-crafted education.

School was boring and he did not take much time to discover that the interesting things were elsewhere. He was called a *dindinkeba*, because even before starting school he enjoyed being around older people like Barry, the man he used to listening to the radio with while wondering where the voices came from. Curiosity, a common trait in all kids, mingled with reflexivity and a precocious understanding of the injustices and contradictions inherent in his context, grew into a desire for knowledge.

A redemption that begins with the construction of a network of acquaintances indispensable for his intellectual development and that he will continue to nourish by drawing from teachers, political activists, journalists, religious figures, the internet and public libraries.

A patchwork of children's literature, classics like *Anna Karenina*, political pamphlets, African magazines, guides on journalism downloaded from the web, reggae and rap lyrics, revolutionary writings and sacred texts.

"I jumped from one thing to another, just striving to find something to hold on to, something that made sense." A desire to make sense of why white people can afford fancy houses, while he lived in a room and parlor without electricity; why Black History was not taught in the school curricula; why Gambians cannot support themselves with the resources of their nation; why people die of curable diseases and often opt to visit the marabout instead of the doctor, gradually led him to become part of those who are concerned about their society, and identify in

the development of the West, centuries of plundering of human and natural resources on African soil.

As a large segment of African youth (see Jourdan 2010, Honwana 2012, Janson 2013, Smith 2014, Gaibazzi 2015), Alieu lives an ambiguous relationship with the West and the opportunities, values and lifestyles it embodied. Between condemnation of its policies and acknowledgement of its advancements, Alieu finds his subjectivity, like his peers, shaped by Western values, goods, culture and music. Along with being a Fula, which in his public speeches expresses himself alternately in Wolof or Mandinka, a Tablighi, a Sufi and a panafricanist; he also shows features of western modernity. He has a blog where he writes in English, he is familiar with Western literature and philosophy, wears Nike sneakers and owns an iPhone and a MacBook Pro, binge-watches on Netflix *How I met your mother* and *The Big Bang Theory*, and he could not live without WiFi.



ALIEU: I was already living with Tom and Kumba who was his partner then in this house and we used to talk about politics a lot, but I was in this phase where I was deeply rooted in traditional Islam, not the Wahhabi form, but the usual West African form of Islam and we used to talk about that a lot. During that same period some of his friends came from Austria to visit him and they used to joke that if they were not careful I would convert them to Islam because I was reading all the books and I was talking a lot about it, I was passionate about it.

Although conventionally, secular modernity and religion, particularly Islam, are considered to be irreconcilable visions and practices of the world.

However, more often than not, the two are appropriated and both coexist in the younger generations, sometimes peacefully as in the case of the Pentecostal Church (Smith 2014),

while in other cases frictions, discrepancies and discontinuities are more evident, particularly among the Tablighi Jamaat. (Janson 2013)

Alieu engaged serious religion at the age of fourteen by joining the Tablighi Jamaat. He had recently left school and had already begun political activities in his region which he combined with the writing for the *Young Observer*. Probably driven by the desire to regain a sense of belonging to a group but no longer being part of the microcosm of the class, he decided to enter the Markaz in Serrekunda to ask for a copy of the translation of the Quran and shortly afterwards became an active member of the movement.

During the three years as a Tablighi, like many others young Gambians involved in the group (Janson 2012), he withdrew from certain secular habits such as smoking weed and going to clubs, cut his hair and started wearing the typical white Tablighi tunic.

A similar pattern can be found in Hansen's study (2008) of the young Pentecostals in Zambia, who forge their masculinity not by indulging in drinking, smoking, taking drugs, or pursuing casual sex but by following the discipline, hard work, and faith in God as imparted by pastors. (Hansen 2008)

The missionary work Alieu embraced, was driven by the same willingness he encountered in his early political activity: to do good for his people, awakening their consciousness and faith and saving their souls. "While I was with them I have entered places I never thought I would enter, I have gone to bars and pubs, I have gone to Senegambia, inside Senegambia, preaching for people. I have visited sex workers, I have sat with junkies, calling them into the path."

Alieu himself evoked continuities between the democratic system of the Tablighi Jamaat and the grounding he would become familiar with later, sitting with the outcasts, the junkies and the sex workers in order to listen to them and learn from and with them.

After a short period of distancing from Islam, he experienced a transition from the Tablighi Jamaat into the branch of Sufism called

Faydah Tijāniyyah. Medina Baye, the place where he undertook his Tarbiya. His training into the Sufi order is a moment of high spiritual fulfillment and reconsideration of his identity; enlightened by a new way of looking at the world, close to God and surrounded by influential Muqqadams, Alieu found himself in a liminal state pondering "all these images I had of myself I am this, I am Immortal X, I am the school kid, I am a rapper or I am this...all of this would vanish."

All these convictions would crumble at once and then reappear later, transformed and reconsidered by the overlapping of new experiences and contingencies. In this, the move to Kololi plays an emblematic role. One more turn and the cards shuffle again: little by little, the new environment, the exposure to anarchism brought by his Austrian flatmate Tom, the underground cultural bursting of Kololi, his column at the Standard Newspaper and Sheriff Bojang, its director, who advised him to purge his prose of references to Islam, the first dazzles of mobilization among the Gambians to break free from Jammeh, all this turmoil turned the young pious Sufi into a strenuous and popular activist at the forefront of the struggle. The threats grew in proportion to his visibility in the media, along with his determination to hold on and continue to support the change.

As when he explained me the meaning of *flop*, a common slang term used among the youth which means chipping in for a taxi or chipping in to buy something.

Alieu pooled together his selfhood through the contribution of various people, and even when he insists on the importance of books and the internet for his becoming, he never forgets that there has always been someone who granted him access to these. "Whatever we achieved, we achieved it in a communal sense. That for anything we had today, it's because the masses did something. And you could be a genius or all you want but you cannot get anywhere without exposure to concrete material stuff that can further your enlightenment."

And it is precisely this sense of solidarity, this value of communality that today pushes him to mentor his younger brother and the many boys and girls around him.

It therefore becomes clear that, although the youth is often portrayed as a category opposed to both adulthood and elder hood, sometimes, as we have seen, the two can converge, to the benefit of each other, reconstructing the chain of transmission of skills and knowledge that is often described as threatened, when not hijacked by the advent of globalization and the creeping into African society of the generation gap, a concept of Western origin.

One such case is Gogo Breeze (2018), a retired teacher who runs a radio show in Zambia and summons young males and females, adults and teenagers who all seek his advice on a myriad of topics: employment, love, economic disputes, politics and education. In his commitment to serve his people, Gogo Breeze, during an interview "urged that girls had to resist boys' advances even if their breasts had started to grow" and pointing to a young female donor representative who appeared as a guest, he "asked rhetorically if she had no breasts, and when the audience affirmed with a roar, he remarked that she had been able to get far by focusing on her studies instead of playing with boys." (Englund 2018, p.56)

Englund shows us a progressive elder whose humor and authority go hand in hand and give him a pivotal role in the transmission of values in today's Zambian society, he often addresses gender issues, advocating for the women from a self-crafted paternal feminism. In response to a young male listener who had called complaining for the lascivious way girls dress, Gogo Breeze counterclaimed caustically: "You talked about the way girls dress. What about the ways you boys dress? You keep your belt on your buttocks instead of on your hips. What is it that brings these things, because if you tie your belt on your buttocks, girls will also lust for your buttocks? Who are the bad ones here?" (Englund 2018,

p.179)

Coming to reflect a bit on the generational relationship between the young and their families, I can say that there is too much generalization on the topic. Acknowledging that both Alieu and his closest friends like Famara, whenever the opportunity presented itself, would not hesitate to appreciate the open-mindedness of Roi, Alieu's mom, I distance myself from the idea that all dreadlocked people are viewed as junkies and outcasts by their family. (Lemaison-Boltanski 2020) And I do not think that Roi is just an exception if she does not mind that his son has dreadlocks and some of his friends smoke weed.

And as far as responsibilities to the family are concerned, depending on the circumstances, the obligations are more or less felt. At times I saw Alieu striving to find money for his mom and stepdad's drugs but I never heard him complaining about it or considering it as a duty that should not concern him. And he is not the only one as you can read in my memoir, Famara and Anchu too take care of their parents without questioning it.

Reciprocity and respect are not just formal greetings and saying *As-salāmu 'alaykum* to honor the elders in the neighborhood because as far as I have seen and been told in urban Gambia, the aged persons are not just strenuous conservatives, obsequious of traditions. Many of them are able to question themselves and review their positions on tribalism and practices such as infibulation. Although with a different bias, we find the same findings elsewhere when it is highlighted that despite some reticence the younger generations continue to show respect and feel tributary towards their relatives. (Latour 2001, Lemaison-Boltanski 2020)

Despite the frictions, there is a general tendency among the youth to seek moral authority and guidance from elders who may be spiritual like sheikhs or shepherds, political or public, both current and past. We will see later on the importance that figures like Thomas Sankara, Amilcar Cabral and

Kwame Nkrumah have in the life of Alieu and many other young people.

The label "African Youth", as Oinas Onodera and Suurpää note, gained growing interest among researchers and scholars as Africa constitutes the youngest continent in the world where 70% of its population is under the age of 30 and 'burning' issues like development, immigration and youth empowerment needed to be addressed. (2018) Also, the raise of upheavals such as the Arab Springs and popular revolts in Algeria and South Sudan have contributed to a closer analysis of the socio-economic impasses characteristic of many post-colonial African States.

The collapse of the State, increasing corruption coupled with a pervasive gerontocracy that have led to the disempowerment, unemployment and migration to Babylon —the emic term for the Global North — of the new generation, are phenomena well documented in recent works. For example, Paolo Gaibazzi's enquiry in the livelihood of the young Soninke in Gambia, struck in what he calls "involuntary immobility" (Gaibazzi 2015) or Marloes Janson's account of how a transnational islamic movement, the Tablighi Jamaat, whose principle lies in the missionary praxis, helps refashioning the subjectivity and the identity of the young Gambian whose lives are confronted with a socio-economic system that does not offer existential and professional opportunities. (Janson 2013)

Departing from the same failures and indebtedness of the post-colonial Kenyan State, James H. Smith, through the personal narrative of Ngeti, shows how young Africans are trying to find their place in a global world, grappling with stimuli coming from the internet, American bootlegs and, in the specific case of Ngeti, by means of a self-crafted education picked from books, newspapers and the Oxford English Dictionary. Ngeti, just like Alieu, represents a possibility among the voices of a whole generation of youth in the Global South, who are trying to find a way to better their conditions by using

the conceptual and cultural resources available to them, from places both near and far away. (Smith 2014)

In this sense, I consider the enacting of what Levi-Strauss termed 'cultural bricolage' as something that has always existed in every human society, before the advent of the colonization and the globalization.

Everywhere we have always been in contact with something unfamiliar, be the rituals of a nearby group of hunters-gatherers such as the Bambuti, the spices that the Romans imported from the East or the blossoming of Chinese restaurants in any European town and city.

Modernity in Africa, especially among the urban youth, appears therefore as a creative conjunction of localist lifestyles and cosmopolitan styles (Udelsman Rodrigues 2010), where name giving ceremonies and rites of passage coexist together with youth groups and associations dealing with immigration, tribalism and gender.

It would be an insult for the whole human kind to think that the globalization has just homogenized the multiple cultural landscapes, threatening to collapse the specificity of every society, especially the ones we have always considered somehow more uncontaminated than us.

That's why I think that what distinguishes more the modality of living especially for the young people in the Global South — and North — is neither the idea of cultural appropriation nor the ability to think global and act local, but rather, as Smith puts it simply looking at Ngeti, a sense of belonging nowhere and everywhere, of not being rooted in any territory. (Smith 2014)

It is a cosmopolitanism and it must be so, notwithstanding the privileges some of us enjoy, the inequalities that hump others and the different nuances of structural violence we experience daily.

And it is precisely this uprootedness that makes the communication possible among the youth dispersed in every corner of the world.

This balancing from secular to sacred things

and from the rural to the center is something that I have witnessed in Alieu's bouncing from the Tablighi Jamaat to Notorious BIG, from Sufism to Anarchism, from Marxism to John Coltrane and then back again to the source of Islam knowledge as my leaving approached. This chess game is something that Gaibazzi, Janson and Smith clearly show in their works: the young men moving from the fields of Sabi to the hustling in Serrekunda (Gaibazzi 2015), a lot of Tablighis returning back to the ghetto life and vice versa (Janson 2013), and Ngeti surfing porn websites, epistemology and the Pentecostal church. (Smith 2014)

Ulf Hannerz's concept of habitat of meaning (1996) is useful here to make some order into the messy yet marvelous contradictions we are all constituted by.

The notion suggests that the agency of any individual should be combined with a flexible sense of habitat, where the agency and the habitat work as forces in constant tension and at times the agency is free to expand itself in the habitat, other times it is the habitat that determines the possibilities of the agency. Habitats can expand and contract, can overlaps totally, partially or not at all, habitats can be shared with individuals or collectivities. (Hannerz 1996) To put it plainly, we inhabit a global culture whose specific components intersect with our subjectivities, some touch or bias us while others fly over or never meet us leaving us ignorant, indifferent or insensitive.

The exposure to the internet has been crucial both for Alieu and Ngeti by allowing them to expand and connect with more distant people and to get in touch with influences coming from abroad. Exchanging with African Americans enabled Alieu to obtain books from them that linked him to the legacy of Frantz Fanon, Thomas Sankara and the AAPRP, in a similar fashion, Ngeti is able to get books that range from UFO's to Internet programming. (Smith 2014)

This mode of acquiring knowledge and self-making recalls the everyday hustling of a

huge part of young Africans, a moving back and forth looking for menial jobs, borrowing, and petty trades throughout a city whose amorphousness and fluidity echoes their very identities, as Danny Hoffman observes referring to the way the youth in Monrovia survives daily. (Hoffman 2017)

Survival is a matter of tactics deployed unevenly, always keeping track of the flow of circumstances, and in that, I'm reconnecting with the famous dialectic between strategies and tactics developed by De Certeau (1980), whose adaptability in this context has been already proven by Paolo Gaibazzi describing how "West African livelihoods follow non-linear trajectories punctuated by discontinuities, complex circulations and auspicious breakthroughs, as well as by dead ends." (Gaibazzi 2015, p. 105) As I witnessed firsthand, the fall of the purchasing value of the Dalasi with the consequent inflation and an economy of reciprocity where the young are expected to take care of their elders and younger relatives, all structured around the daily survival of the youth.

As Marloes Janson vividly captures, reporting the answer given to her questioning about how a group of youths were doing : "We're managing" (Janson 2013), that is, waiting for a call or an opportunity to hustle, temporarily sitting in a ghetto, a local spot where the young males gather to smoke, chat and listen to reggae, afrobeats and hip hop as opposed to the *bantaba* — which in Mandinka means "where to meet" — the place where the elders meet to discuss.

But managing takes multiple forms, it can mean editing papers, doing research, judging for the National Poetry Slam contest or take loans from acquaintances as Alieu does; it can entail running a bar in your home village in Sanyang while at the same time take care of the orphanage your sister, expatriate in Britain, built in Serrekunda, as Famara, Alieu's closest friend does. It can lead to selling a bunch of clothes that arrived in a container from the West like Julie, — see the *Mukherista* in Honwana (2012) — selling

breakfast, oranges and okra like Fanta, or used phones on the black market in Serrekunda in order to try to make ends meet. In one way or another, all these people are conscious of the reasons why they're living like this, that is, neoliberalism, inequities, unemployment, selling and pillage of their national resources to international investors. Among them, some are more politicized or radicalized like Alieu, those less committed are likely to be viewed as a lumpen youth, a term with a Marxist matrix employed by Rashid in the context of the Sierra Leonian youth engaged in the civil war, to represent those strata of the society that cannot fully employ or sell their labour power because of capitalist transformation, restructuring or retrenchment. (Rashid 2004)

I often heard Alieu mention one of the most powerful sentences delivered by Kwame Ture, "it is the job of the conscious to make the unconscious conscious", he takes it as a severe discipline, a method that he puts to practice whenever possible, thanks to the sense of community typical of West African cultures, and particularly in the Gambian context in what Gaibazzi defines an ethos of solidarity. (2015) Alieu would stop at a ghetto to discuss political and social issues with unknown boys, but this grounding with the people and the willingness to learn their daily hardships also happens in bars, at the beach and with his neighbors.

This is a pattern of action that links, as I already mentioned above, with the ortho-praxis of the Tablighi Jamaat (Janson 2013), and as a former member of the missionary movement, Alieu is well aware of it as he openly overlapped their religious proselytizing with a model of political grounding he acquired reading Walter Rodney (1969) and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970).

As opposed to the Salafi and the Wahhabi, the members of the Tablighi Jamaat do not condemn the lifestyle of the people, they sit with them and do not bother if someone is smoking or playing music, their gentle manners attract young people (Janson 2013)

because as Alieu explained, they don't condemn or criminalize the youth but they persuade you to enter another path, a path that gradually gives to the converted, a sense and a purpose in life.

I remember his exact words: "you wake up every day and you know what you have to do, you're doing the work of the Prophet and this heightens the value of your being on this earth."

Being a member of the Tablighi Jamaat is a way to escape socio-economic wrongs, to feel part of something bigger and most of all, to overcome the endless liminal state or waithood (Honwana 2012) the young are trapped in.

In her stunning work *The time of Youth*, Honwana takes a clear stand:

young people in waithood are not really inactively "waiting" for their situation to change. Despite the challenges, youth in waithood are dynamic and using their creativity to invent new forms of being and interacting with society. Waithood accounts for a multiplicity of young people's experiences, ranging from daily survival strategies such as street vending and cross-border trade to involvement in gangs and criminal activities. (2012, p.4)

Young people improvise solutions to address and build a sense of self despite socio-economic pressures that hinder their chances in life; therefore the concept of waithood should not assign passive roles to an entire generation, but emphasize resilience and the ability to experiment and innovate. (Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää 2018)

This does not imply that everyone has the freedom to choose his or her own path. Especially when trying to overturn and renew the system, gerontocratic political structures and patronage undermine the political inclusion of young people, (Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää 2018) except in the case of facade reformist projects sponsored by some foreign NGO or the EU.

Acknowledging that this endless waiting is a global phenomenon that strikes both the youth in the South and in the North, it is important to underline that the waithood takes particular forms, according to specific contexts.

The African youth bears the burden of the consequences of a toxic policy which resulted from the neoliberal economic maneuvers promoted by the WTO and the IFM during the early years of the post-colonial era. The structural adjustments were the trap in the gifts of democracy and self-sovereignty, as they favored the market and the private sector

These reforms enhanced underemployment and unemployment and barred the way for investments in social infrastructure, education and healthcare. (Honwana 2012)

Dispossessed from the right of a good affordable higher education and also by the increasing usefulness of diplomas, no more *a laissez passer* for the job market, people eager to cultivate themselves, like Alieu or Ngeti, turn to self-designed learning or strive to pursue their education, which is entrusted with a very high value and which, despite the difficulties, remains the most sought-after choice. (Udelmann Rodrigues 2010)

While some like the young Angolans in Udelmann Rodrigues's study (2010) join the informal economy, washing cars, doing hairdressing, giving private course others, like the ones whose narratives are reported by Honwana, enter the illegal markets of prostitution and smuggling, and somebody else takes a spiritual path, becoming a member of the Tablighi Jamaat or the Pentecostal church.



ALIEU: For me Occupy Westfield meant more than just a protest because as an activist it was the first time that I faced direct death threats, assassination threats and insults. I had already faced a lot of things before but this time it was on a new

level. People sent me death threats, somebody who I knew personally called me and said he would look for me, use a machete and cut me down. And people who knew where I live called me and said "we know where you live, we'll come there and kill you."

Occupy Westfield, like other recent protest movements which appear everywhere on the continent, for example in Mozambique, Tunisia or Senegal with Y'en a marre, are creations by young people born out of accumulated frustration caused by political marginalization and the socio-economic situation in which they live. (Honwana 2013)

As demonstrated by Alieu's desire to form an autonomous micro-community, thereby moving from mobilization to organization, so Honwana (2013) recognizes that from dispersed and unstructured acts of protest young people are building more structured groupings.

However, Occupy Westfield constitutes a fundamental moment in Alieu's public activism. As we have seen, he launched the initiative to protest against the cuts in electricity and water in November 2017, however thereafter soon became a target of the government and its supporters.

In addition to receiving death threats from what he calls "vigilante justice groups", he learned from some friends who had contacts with official sources, that a case was filed against him denouncing him as a threat to national security, even though he never supported the use of violence and the gathering that occurred in Westfield took place peacefully.

Tensions and mutual distrust between the State and the youth are highly redundant and pervasive in the overall continent; whereas the governments enforce laws, limiting and controlling the space and the activities of the young people marked as outsiders, police and municipal officers harass and chase vendors off the streets. (Honwana 2012)

However, those who have dreadlocks and an

outfit associated with hip hop or Rastafarianism and join the informal sector or don't have a fixed job, are more susceptible to be criminalized and labeled junkies by the society and the institutions, a stigmatization that Alieu felt while moving to Kololi, reported as well in a recent study among Burnkinabe rappers and Rastafarians. (Lemaison-Boltanski 2020)

Alieu and his friends have not infrequently been the target of unstoppable police persecutions for having publicly denounced the mismanagement of politicians through their songs and their speeches; and it is worth remembering that the repression of young people by the State is not limited to the Jammeh era.

For example, I remember last July 2019 the detention of Killa Ace, conscious rapper and critical voice among young people, following the arrest and several charges for participating in a demonstration of solidarity with a Sierra Leonean vendor who died a few days after being tortured in prison on suspicion of having sold a stolen TV. During their one-month stay in prison, Killa Ace and the other protesters were forced to have their dreads cut off.

Between participation in formal politics and engagement in spurious forms of intervention aimed at critiquing and redressing the status quo, there's a big difference and it must be stressed.

For this reason, the concept of engagement is more appropriate than participation, as it indicates any kind of involvement in implementing the change that materializes and is felt in everyday life. (Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää 2018)

The kind of these forms of action can range from protests and riots, debates and live shows on social media and radio, lyrics and freestyle. Indeed, as suggested by Honwana: "If we pay careful attention to the lyrics of their songs, the verses of their poems, the scripts of their plays, and the discourses propagating in their Facebook pages, blogs, tweets, and SMSs we uncover a strong critique of the status quo." (2013, p.6)

Dissent towards the formal political apparatus and its representatives manifests from unconventional and ever-renewing structures that are inherently fluid and non-static. Mobilizations and collectives are formed and then dissolved, as in the case of Occupy Westfield, hip hop musicians can merge in groups and then split, while on the other hand, individual voices can raise their complaints through Facebook and public events. Again here, the concept of tactics is useful to underline the line of divide between engaged youth and the establishment. Young people often distance themselves from given identities and political affiliations because they no longer trust corrupt politicians interested only in getting rich and are reluctant to participate in revolutionary upheavals or protest marches when these are organized by opposition parties (Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää 2018). Because of the failures of neoliberalism linked with corruption and bad politics, young people in Africa like Aliou, do not take part in the traditional political process, but engage in alternative forms of activism. (Honwana 2012) A critical voice since his early teens, he has almost always acted as an individual activist, rarely assuming any kind of affiliation — apart from the AAPRP and the Occupy Westfield experiment — mostly for his reluctance to human rights ‘ambassadors’ and foreign funded civil society organizations with reformist agendas. And as far as political parties are concerned, while partially agreeing with the line of the PDOIS, the Socialist Party founded in 1986 by Sidia Jatta and Halifa Sallah, he cannot embrace the liberal revisionism - a trend in vogue among the Left at a global level - of its leaders who promote bilateral agreements with China and

Europe, speak of good governance and youth empowerment. Nonetheless, his opinion, when he does not autonomously intervene on Facebook or by other channels, it’s always questioned by the newspapers, radio and private TVs. But most important, his stance does not prevent him to show solidarity and act together with other Gambian activists. And this is where the dichotomy individualism vs collectivism loses all its historical and epistemological value, as Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää show in their collective volume *What politics?* “individualism versus a more collective mode of existence is a false problematic.” (2018, p.9)

In African studies, following a long tradition that starts from the famous essay written in 1938 by Marcel Mauss, *Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne celle de "moi"*, anthropologists tend to stress the collective values and principles upon where the society is built as opposed to the cult of individualism typical of Western Enlightenment and thought. Absorbed in the collectivity, sometimes perceived an incomplete subject, determined by the social and cultural patterns of the group, the African man and woman and his and her agency have disappeared under the assumptions of the Eurocentric perception of the self. Since our mind is imbued with capitalist competition, with a conception of the Fordist worker as an autonomous unit on an assembly line and with the Christian tradition that wants man alone before God, we are unable to resolve the apparent contradiction between individual and collective. Where, instead, it is clear that it is a complementary relationship, subjectivity is achieved in a collectivity that can exist only by virtue of each individual part of the group, at least ideally*. (see Remotti 2009)

* “These two dimensions - social ties and agency - are two essential coordinates, and therefore "relationality" (value of social ties) on the one hand and "individualism" (value of agency) on the other, are also irrepressible elements. What is no longer present is the separation between the two concepts, replaced by connection and mutual implication. Are social ties without agency and is an agency without social ties conceivable? In this framework, it will be inevitable to build a person both with the values corresponding to social ties (the values of rationality) and with the values that refer to agency (those of individualism). They are relative values not only in the sense that they refer to a certain dimension, but also in the sense that, since the two dimensions are mutually implicit, their

This manifests clearly in Alieu's own words: "the story of a generation is the story of the human being's becoming in the world. [...] Our story is not merely said or narrated in a vacuum, it comes from a society, it comes from the people and the recording of my story is the recording of the story of my people because I'm no different from my people. I am one with them."

But it can also be detected in his everyday life; I remember, for example, the solidarity and the support showed when Killa Ace and 36 other men were arrested this July*, Alieu took to the streets with other young people, marching to the police station where they were temporarily kept in order to claim their release, participated in a social media campaign to raise the awareness of the citizens and went to visit them and take them food while they were in detention. Or earlier, in 2019, he spoke truth to power, expressing contempt for Barrow's government when he joined a spontaneous gathering where people were protesting against the deportation of Gambians from Germany, presumably after a secret agreement between the two countries.

In the case of Killa Ace, we can properly speak of engaged friendship, as it is analyzed in Onodera's study of young Egyptian activists, by speaking of a tacit deal among them in the case of anyone getting arrested, friendship relations provide experience of trust, loyalty and belonging. (2018)

At the same time, being a young activist is not only about the high moments of the struggle. It involves hanging out with friends in places,

sharing moments where protest narratives are circulated, experiences told and recounted and political friendship and subjectivity build each other up through criticism, self-criticism and confrontation. (Onodera 2018)

And this reminds me of the afternoons at Jerreh's house discussing politics and music or the many evenings at Annemarie's bar drinking wine and Julbrew, often someone like Killa Ace would join us late and we would talk about the news, about his upcoming live show and he would ask the boys advice to organize a concert for the young people of the village.

It is important to understand that all these choices and different trajectories experimented with by the youth are not exclusive, most of the time they overlap or alternate. It's a juggling job. One day you apply at a residence funded by a network of activists, the other you may find yourself selling weed, the next you will take a chance on the black market trying to sell a couple of secondhand smartphones.

Contrary to the mistrust nurtured for the actual governments, respect, admiration and esteem are wide-spread among the youth, especially towards their intellectual and revolutionary ancestors, as among young rappers and Rastafarians in Burkina Faso whose loyalty to Sankara's visionary politics is still intact. (Lemaison-Boltanski 2020) These unbroken circles and unfinished legacies are the very ones that give the title to this work, precisely because I have seen and heard Alieu following, diffusing and putting into practice

respective values cannot be absolute. However much a society pushes towards the value of individuality (as Western societies seem to do), it can never completely abolish the opposite value, that of relationality, and vice versa, of course. The mutual implication allows the dichotomy to be broken, on an important aspect, that of the separation of the two categories, denying their mutual autonomy. Even from a theoretical or speculative point of view, no society - despite all its ideology - can ever be completely individualistic or completely relationalist.

Perhaps its ideology can be completely individualist or completely relationalist, but at the level of social praxis, it will be individualist and relationalist, very individualist and very little relationalist, or very relationalist and barely individualist: however, it will occupy some position, made up of + and -, in a continuum whose two extremes, by virtue of their mutual implication, will never give themselves in their absoluteness and exclusivity." (Remotti 2009. pp.325-326) *My translation.*

* <https://gainako.com/kill-a-ce-muhammed-darboe-and-dozens-arrested-by-anti-crime-unit-for-july-protest/>

with constancy, the many teachings of Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure. La Lucha in Congo and Y'en a marre in Senegal (Honwana 2012) (Kandé Senghor 2015) are other valuable examples of this entrenched feeling the African youth shows towards these men and women that spent their lives to free themselves and their people from colonial rule.

Consequently, what is important in this celebration of their past is that these young men and women are no more wearing a white mask over their black skin, as opposed to what Fanon justly observed at his time. (1952) Freed from the conviction of being inferior, ready to fight against dehumanization and racism, the perception of themselves is increasingly reconciled with their culture, their history and their languages.

As Lemaison-Boltanski testifies, Ouagadougou's youth today is an attentive critique of Africa's socio-economic situation in all its aspects, in a context where voices are multiple and heterogeneous and no longer carry self-hatred. (2020) And this is a fact as I heard more and more people condemning, for exemple, the bleaching of the skin through harmful lotions and beauty products, celebrating local musicians such as Youssou N'dour, Ifang Bondi and Guelewar, or reconnecting with African poetry and literature.



ALIEU: Freedom of movement cannot be stopped. It is really a force of nature, and as such it cannot be demonized, because migration will always happen and of course there is nothing like irregular migration. There's a regularized migration where some people decide what is regular and what is irregular. Who are they to decide what is regular and what is not? Why would we even have a prefix for migration? Migration is migration.

Aliéu's stand point on freedom of movement and the back-way, the emic term for 'irregular migration' preaches the elimination of the

borders, focusing on the historical connectedness of humankind. In his account, as well in many interviews and during the TV shows on Fatu Network, he stressed the impact of movement on human knowledge, "movement is part of the human condition, and it is through movement that we got to where we got to. All of the scientific discoveries, all of technology, all of scientific knowledge rests upon movement." His view recalls a concept that Mbembe (2017) borrows from Eduard Glissant, the *tout monde*, to explain that there is only one world, composed by the totality of a thousands parts, and the conditions to restore humanity lay on a thinking of circulation, a thinking of crossings. (2017) We all belong to a single world, and we are all its inheritors notwithstanding the plurality of cultures and ways of being.

It is indisputable then to recognize that our origins lie precisely on a continuous flow of mixing and interlacing cultures, peoples and nations. (Mbembe 2017)

Whether regional, national, continental or global, these mechanisms of displacement, encounter and fusion, confrontation and reconciliation are irreversible.

According to Mbembe, capitalism is at the core of this brutal racial machine of rejection. The migrants, "the new wretched of the heart, are those to whom the right to have rights is refused, those who are told not to move, those who are condemned to live within structures of confinement. [...] They are those who are turned away, deported, expelled; the clandestine, the undocumented." (Mbembe 2017, p.177) We barely see them as human beings, because the process of criminalization is a plan designed to rob us of empathy and recognition of the other as our equal.

Criminals, victims or outcasts, the only three labels that allow the migrant to acquire subjectivity in the mainstream discourse. Often they follow, coexist or oppose each other.

Criminals when they are caught crossing a fence, the desert or the sea; victims when they enter in the reception system and outcasts when they are deported in their countries.

As Alieu remarks, reflecting on the rhetoric of language, "There's a regularized migration where some people decide what is regular and what is irregular. Who are they to decide what is regular and what is not regular? Why would we even have a prefix for migration?" the success of this demonization and the emphasis on the risk depend also on the instrumentalization of the words.

Jason De Leon, (2015) in his ethnography on the border crossing between Mexico and US, analyzes the linguistic devices employed by the PDT, the plan designed by US forces to deter Latin-American migration, to stress its capacity to build mythologies and gain consensus. Debunking the vocabulary used by the institutions to describe its policy on illegal immigration, he highlights all the incongruity, gaps, the occultation of reality, thus disclosing its true character as a pure signifier left to the arbitrariness of any meaning.

The US government draws a lexicon full of euphemisms and abstractions to define migrants - Aliens, different from Mexicans -: the sterility of this language is a strategic choice, the linguistic void is functional to hide the violence and the human cost of the anti-immigration policy: "it has no graphic reality behind the words, it is a semantic cloak that hides all the blood, sweat and tears from the public's sight. As I said, it looks good on a Power Point slide." (De León 2015, pp.38-39)

It is therefore a language that attests to the monopoly of the industrial mode of production, i.e. capitalism, skillful in obstructing all alternative modes of perception and understanding, and which makes extensive use of plastic words, amoeba words, as Ivan Illich (1971) defined them to unmask the semantic traps of contemporaneity.

Words are also a matter of reflection for Andersson (2015); in his study of the industry of immigration, he focuses on the linguistic production of migrants, which differs according to the parties involved. Subjects of anathema by local and international police who label them criminals, either victims, heroes or revolutionaries for radical intellectuals,

humanitarian actors, journalists and activists. The irregular migrant writes Andersson, has become "a symbol of cosmopolitan citizenship, a rebellious burner of borders, or a repository of the dream of free worldwide movement." (2015, p.278)

Alieu embraces the same idea as the group of activists Andersson follows in his study, considering his fellows who took the back-way as potential activists, "The anarchist explanation of the issue made sense and then I started conceptualizing myself, perhaps these people who go through the back-way, they're like activists, involuntarily of course." For him, the transgression of the European border represents the affirmation of the freedom of movement and an act of rebellion against fascism, capitalism and, imperialism. However, as Andersson remarks, the various marches, caravans, speeches and rallies organized by activists, sympathizers and migrants almost always fail to evoke a reaction from their target, the transitional anti-immigration apparatus of European and African leaderships. This "invisible enemy" (Andersson 2015, p. 297) does not appear however conjured up.

Together with Mbembe and De Leon, Andersson (2015) agrees that, although the European anti-immigration policy develops and reviews its strategies to hinder the movement, migrants will always elaborate new tactics and counter tactics to get around the blockade.

Just like the absurdity that holds up the whole industry's system of strengthening borders, the 'illegal' migrant is an impossible and absurd presence, condemned to be at the same time present and absent, present as a danger and absent of humanity.

However dreadful the current management of human lives is, there must be hope, as Alieu claims, to build new revolutionary and joyous worlds that resist a system that wants to rob us of our souls, so that perhaps, in the future, we will realize how senseless the money and time spent on patrolling movement has been. How ridiculous were the labels we used, how shameful was the exploitation of 'irregular

migrants' in political campaigns, TV shows and NGO leaflets. But as a premise of all this, "the illegality industry first needs to be dismantled and the product on which it works seen for what it is: nothing more, and nothing less, than people on the move." (Andersson 2015, p.315)

As I argue in my ethnographic memoir, commenting about the story of Souleyman's elder brother who managed to move to California thanks to his engagement with a white woman, nothing will prevent Souleyman of joining his brother in California or to relocate elsewhere. Souleyman's desire is driven by the determination to better his condition and experiment a lifestyle that has become a fetish on the one hand, and on the other hand represents the only staple granted to help the family to maintain a dignified life. You can call it *el dolor de dólares*, - the pain of dollars - as De Leon's interlocutors define it, to refer to the feelings of loss of migrants' children's and their relatives' efforts to alleviate the pain with American money and gifts. (2015)

It is a useful expression that can be expanded to include the desire of younger migrants to access a field, a habitus, and a capital (Bourdieu 1977), a tripartite system governed by power and class relationships, that promise redemption and well-being.

In a recent article, De Leon (2018) dwells on some reflections about his photo-ethnography practice, describing it as a moment of mutual recognition. It is important, in order to overcome the widespread victimization, to show the real faces of the migrants, instead of presenting them as anonymous subjects of our researches. "We act as if the people we photograph, who live major portions of their lives on the internet just like the rest of us, do not understand the global circulation of images (including their own)." (De Leon 2018, p.120) Images can help foster those who look at the migrant's face to engage in political action and moral support, especially when the clichés do not show us tortured or decomposed bodies, women and men that are alive and well, normal human beings just like us.

Acknowledging that lack of employment and livelihood are often the drives pushing young people to embark into dubious journeys across the desert and the sea, Honwana, rightly notes that, "their quest is not merely for survival but also about dignity, because *liggey* (work in Wolof) makes one a respected person, capable of taking care of oneself as well as others." (2012, p. 84)

They fight for a better life, for a better job and a fair share of well-being. A reality that they imagine possible in the West and because it is visible on TV, on the internet and on social media, because it is told to them by those who made it. Aware of their material deprivation, they want to share the "good life" and have access to modern consumer goods. (Honwana 2012)

The kind of posh lifestyle often mentioned in Afrobeats lyrics, a popular genre in Nigeria and abroad, whose major representatives, such as WizKid or Burna Boy, self-presenting themselves as entrepreneurs, exhibiting exorbitantly expensive cars, watches and consumer goods, influence and reflect the aspirations of today's adolescents and young people, thus ending up paying homage to the most unbridled consumerism. (For example Tekno sings in *On You: Ferrari look good on you/ Bugatti look good on you/ Gucci Gucci look good on you/ Louis Louis look good on you.*)

Afrobeats, thus represents, a growing music industry that is successful not only in Africa but also in Europe, especially in Great Britain, where most of the Ghanaian and Nigerian diasporas are concentrated, and in the United States. Even though they declare themselves heirs of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat, rarely in the texts of these artists we can find the political vein, the revolutionary impetus, the explicitly polemical intent against the neo-independent African states on the one hand, and the imperialistic power on the other.

(In *Coffin for Head of State*, for example, Fela denounces: *I go many places/ I go business places/ I see all the bad bad bad things / Them dey do/ Call corruption/ Them dey call nepotism/ Inside the promotions/ And inside all business/[...]It is a known fact that for many thousand years/ We*

Africans we had our own traditions/ these moneymaking organizations/ they come put us Africans in total confusion).

In short, there is a lack of that shamelessness that has made Fela Kuti the symbol of an angry and inflamed generation, but above all proud and fierce to rediscover and claim the value of African history, its cultures and its languages.

We can approach Fela Kuti's Afrobeat with reggae, identifying between the two musical genres affinities or family resemblances, taking up a concept elaborated by Wittgenstein (1953) and subsequently used in the field of popular music studies by Jocelyne Guilbault (2017), especially in the political content of the texts, and oppose this with the praise of the superfluous of the burgeoning Afrobeats.

Moreover, the way in which a musical genre whose roots lie on the other side of the Atlantic, has been transplanted in West Africa reminds us of Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic* (1993), whose past, if it is undoubtedly marked by the brutality of the slave trade, can nevertheless be positively reevaluated as a forge in which disparate cultural currents have met, have given rise to eclectic and syncretic creations and have spread globally, becoming wonderful examples of cosmopolitanism and trans-culturalism. This is evident especially in the musical field, and it is Gilroy (1993) himself who supports it: Jazz, blues and we add, in our case, reggae have traveled and with the spread of the media, records, cassettes, CDs, mp3s and streaming have acquired many countries of adoption and assumed the most varied declinations adapting to specific local contexts. This brings us closer to Appadurai (1986) and to the unpredictability of the social and material life of things, which are impossible to control: music, like all cultural phenomena, has its own materiality, it detaches itself from its land of origin and from its respective creators to move independently.

~The success of reggae music in the Gambia, as witnessed by Alieu's affection for artists such as Sizzla and Luciano, who first exposed him to Marcus Garvey, Panafricanism and

Black History, is linked with the denunciation of the transatlantic route and the slavery, a recurrent leitmotif in the corpus of the reggae texts, and also with James Island, the site of a fortress whose remains are still visible today, places of transit and imprisonment for thousands of slaves waiting to be deported to the new continent. Since 2003, registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the island was renamed Kuntah Kinteh Island in 2011, in honor of Kuntah Kinte, legendary slave with a rebellious temperament, one of the characters of *Roots* (1976), a novel by Alex Haley, with which the author alludes to one of his ancestors, born in 1750 in Gambia and sold as a slave in America.

Reggae and Afrobeats are the genres that compete in the current Gambian music scene, in promoting and spreading two opposing ethical and aesthetic philosophies, they play a social role in shaping the lifestyles, values, images and ambitions of the audience. It is therefore fair to assume that both shape the subjectivity of young people, contributing to the anthropopoiesis (Remotti 2009) of the individual and informing specific habitus. As Alieu himself claims "My Pan-Africanism started with music...Reggae music talks about Marcus Garvey, about Africa for Africans, so I had that deep sense of black history. And also *I am black and I am proud* and all of these things in the music", on the one hand, Reggae awakens the consciousness of young people, preaching against Babylon and its lifestyle, while on the other hand, Afrobeats makes people dream about luxury brands and expensive cars, embodying consumerism.

Among the tactics enacted in order to cope with life, a specific habitus is increasingly touching the attention of the researchers in Africa, which can be seen as a sort of corollary or byproduct of migration as both are linked to the desire for Western lifestyles. Informally known as chanters or bumsters in Gambia (Nyanzi 2005, Ceesay 2016), these are men in their 20s-30s that engage in sexual and affective relationships with older female *toubabs* (white), coming for holiday from

from Sweden, Germany and England. Lemaison-Boltanski observes a similar pattern in Burkina Faso where young rappers and Rastafarians entertain with the *nassara*, the local word for older white women. (2020)

There is a huge debate in Gambia concerning the bumsters, they are bearers of the stigma of both ordinary people and the institutions. But if we linger on analyzing these relationships with an emic lens as I had the opportunity to discuss several times with Alieu, I think we would be able to detach ourselves from judging them superficially or condemning them, and instead of simplifying, we will see a great diversity and complexity in the exchanges and obligations of partners. (Honwana 2012)

And this is what I tried to do reflecting and writing in my memoir about the many times I encountered an older white European woman and a younger man with dreadlocks, filling my words with uncomfortableness and ambiguous feelings. Sharing these words and thoughts with Alieu and my neighbors, helped me to frame these relationships better and I came to the conclusion that they can't be blamed. How many people engage in sexual relationships in the Western world just for profit? How many truly love each other? How many have mixed feelings? And this regardless of the complexion, class and economic status because everywhere people are involved in relationships, some may be more or less commodified, others disinterested. Certainly not a insignificant percentage of these people experience these relationships as hustling, and yet, again, both sides benefit from it, women in their fifties can finally taste some pleasure while the boys get some more economic stability. But it doesn't take long to realize that if they had another horizon ahead of them, there would not be as much noise about bumsters as there is about prostitution or escorts.

*<https://www.freedomnewspaper.com/2018/08/27/gambia-breaking-news-pardoned-norwegian-pedophile-remanded-in-jail-as-gambian-immigration-officials-handed-svein-agesandakar-to-prison-authorities/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0EZpDmkSog&t=31s>

I think we simply have to shift the perspective and look at the phenomenon with the lens of materialist analysis, i.e. if there is demand there is supply. It is not a matter of harassing tourists as the Gambian Ggovernment's website warns visitors, if you do not want to mingle, *you don't*, if you do, you decide the form and bond of the relationship, just like I did. You *don't* become a drug addict because a dealer manipulates you. You *choose*, or your weaknesses or your lust for pleasure choose. As long as a Norwegian man who had sexual intercourse with a Gambian girl can be pardoned by the President*, whereas an ordinary Gambian citizen would be sentenced to life imprisonment for the same act, and so long as the morality of the double standard continues to be used, no one can raise the next to victim or perpetrator, at least not in our anthropological analysis.



ALIEU: Today we honor those who died in the Neocolonial regime, in the heat of the Neocolonial State by calling for a profound structural change and systemic change and we honor those who die in the high waters of the Mediterranean trying to enter Europe by calling for a world of no borders. And we honor those who die in the hospitals without equipment and drugs for proper health care, those who died in bad roads for proper roads. But we know that is not the end of the problem, the end of the problem is the destruction of a system that claims the disillusionment of the very soul of the human being: capitalism.

The last topic I am going to discuss focuses on mortality, loss and remembrance.

Burning issues in the West African context that interlock with failures in the healthcare and

infrastructural system, migration, Neocolonialism and of course, capitalism.

While living with Alieu, I have witnessed that death is omnipresent in Gambia. You literally do not know whether tomorrow will be your turn.

During the three months I stayed in Kololi, at least twice, three times a month, we woke awake to the news of someone's death. Peers who died from lack of proper care, men in their 60s with syndromes that in the West world would have been easily monitored, women in their 30-40s dying of childbirth complications, friends who perished at sea or in the desert, policemen trained by Jammeh and still on duty today, killing or torturing suspected thieves or Ganjamen, while others, like Sise, a young female activist engaged in fighting FGM, lost their lives in a car accident while returning from university because of the bad roads.

Death has been a companion of route for Alieu since his childhood, his dad died for high blood pressure when he was still in primary school, but given his age he was unable to deal with his grief. It took time for him to elaborate the meaning of this loss, mostly through the filter of sub-sequential deaths that started dotting his life during his teens. As I have written in my memoir, "death is a chain reaction, each ring as constitutive of a loss ties with the others, provoking the re-emergence of all the lost ones."

During the night we were told that Sise died in a car accident. Alieu, who had worked with her for years at the Standard Newspaper, took his phone, went on Facebook and started reading the long exchanges they had over the years. She asked him to help her edit an interview, he gave her tips, she wrote them, he checked them, she asked how he was doing, and she planned to meet him somewhere in Kololi. He wanted her to be with him. Then, suddenly he resumed the memory he had of the day his father died, we have already covered the section related to his childhood where he mentioned his premature loss briefly. That night, off-record, he vividly

detailed everything he remembered; his father being taken to the hospital while he was at school; his disbelief at the news, his mother's tears; the compound crowded with neighbors.

I have called Alieu's father's death Alieu's pivotal death. It is a reference death that we all meet at some point in our lives and every time we are faced with a new loss, we revoke it.

Along with his story, I decided to share mine with him - my grandmother's death. When I lost her, I was about the same age as Alieu when his father passed away. But why did I decide to tell him about my loss? It was my pivotal death and thought I would be able to attune to him.

The partial, incomplete understanding of Alieu's pain led to emotional work, and required me to look into the void of our mortality and embrace the uncertainty of human existence.

Rosaldo (1989) could adjust to the mourning of the Ilingot through the death of his companion Michelle and in his understanding empathy and closeness were fundamental, but being close and emphatic does not mean becoming the other, trying to put yourself in other people's shoes, it is not a work of imagination.

Contesting the view of a neutral, objective researcher, Rosaldo stresses the value of social analysis as a form of relational understanding, a humanism involving the perceptions of both analyst and its collaborators. (1989)

It results then, that the anthropologist in the field should not pretend to be "a blank slate", but must learn how to approach the perceptions of the subjects of his research along with his own seriously. (Rosaldo 1989)

In other words, empathy requires active listening, an ability to hear and feel the other, in balance with one's vulnerability and emotional baggage, which can be shared either tacitly, approaching the emotions of the other accompanied by the echoes of our own, or explicitly, as I did with Alieu.

Having said that, it remains obvious that the

ways in which the individual experiences loss and pain cannot be taken up in a pattern, there will always be something unspoken, something we cannot rationally explain even within ourselves, because death lives in our bodies and its emotional impact on us "derives less from an abstract brute fact than from a particular intimate relation's permanent rupture. It refers to the kinds of feelings one experiences on learning, for example, that the child just run over by a car is one's own and not a stranger's." (Rosaldo 1989, p.2)

The irreducibility of a loss, in the Gambian context clash with structural violence, making the political component of death emerge clearly.

When proper infrastructure and health care system are lacking, when you cannot afford the cost of treatment in a clinic or the drugs the doctor has prescribed are too expensive, death is no more only a spiritual matter, but becomes political, "a very political matter" as Alieu recognizes.

But if death is political, then, grieving too has a political dimension. How can a person who does not know if he will have food for himself and his family in the evening mourn, wonders Alieu, "When you have to go and struggle in the plantation to feed yourself and your family, you don't have time to sit and deal with a sense of loss."

The impossible process of grieving unfolds mostly unfolds as a daily burden on your shoulders, but you have to quarantine it because you have to take care of your own survival and that of your loved ones.

This obstruction to mourning, a negotiation of the sense of the life and death of the deceased, can lead to what De Leon calls — in the context of the disappearance of a migrant of which all trace is lost or of whose corpse cannot be found — ambiguous loss, an uncertain, blurred loss. (De Leon 2015)

According to the author, the life stories of the bereaved relatives who lost their sons, mothers and partners in the Sonoran Desert, show that "not knowing where your loved

one is, if he or she is dead or alive, is traumatizing and long-lasting. This ambiguity freezes the grief process and renders closure impossible. It is a form of necroviolence that is seemingly without end." (De Leon 2015, p.71)

This conjunction of ambiguity and loss constantly accompanies Alieu whenever he learns of a friend who died in Spain, another in the back-way, whenever he remembers the death of his father, and becomes tangible every time he strives to elaborate the mourning through his writings that pay homage to those lost or looks at the photo of Haile Selassie in order to evoke the face of his father.

Necroviolence is a form of violence enacted by what Mbembe has defined necropolitics, referring to "the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die." (Mbembe 2003, p. 11) Multiple actors are at stake behind this expression of bio-power that historically saw its first apparition in the structure of the plantation system where the slaves lived in a state of exception (Agamben 2005), that process that allows sovereign authorities to deprive certain individuals of human rights by legitimizing the exercise of violence on those who are excluded. This state of exception is linked to specific places, such as the Nazi extermination camps, border territories and as we have seen, the plantation system in the slavery era.

In the actual global reality, the exercise of necropower is no longer confined to the States. Multiple entities work, mingling and superimposing one another. Contemporary Africa is exemplary in this sense, especially countries like Nigeria and DRC where the monopoly of the right to kill is confusingly partitioned between the state, armed militias, urban gangs and rebel movements. (Mbembe 2003)

In Gambia, a country that has not yet seen the emergence of stable non-state militias, necropolitics remains an exercise of state authorities paired with structural violence, which can act behind the scenes or, in the case

of lower ranks, exercise their authority directly over ordinary citizens.

Unable to deal directly with this ever-present potential onslaught whose foundation lies in neoliberalism and its ideology of the dominance of an economy driven by competition, (Farmer 2003) an important part of the Gambians recur to jujus and talismans to protect themselves either from disease and violence. As Hultin (2017) show in his study of the perception of small arms in the Gambia, people often mitigate the sense of insecurity by wearing these artifacts made by special marabouts around their waist.

While using indigenous methods, these people share the same sense of insecurity as Alieu, who, as we have seen, has questioned their effectiveness since childhood, reconnecting this sense of precariousness with precise material conditions derived from economic inequalities.

Thus, along with Alieu, we recognize that structural violence is an ethical problem, how could it not be so when, as Farmer remarks, “in the coming year an estimated six million people will die of tuberculosis, malaria, and AIDS—three treatable diseases that reap their grim harvest almost exclusively among populations without access to modern medical care.” (Farmer 2003, p.22)

But if understanding the suffering of the people close to us is already a difficult task, then when we look at the distant ones, living millions of kilometers from our privileged world and we act as if they do not exist or we put the blame on their governments, forgetting that our wellbeing rests upon their wretchedness.

This is why narratives and biographies of the sufferance in the Global South can help us understand the human behind the number more than statistics and graphs can (Farmer 2003), and lead us to recognize the intricate abuse on the lives of millions of people of whom we are, more or less, silent witnesses and ignorant accomplices.

And maybe begin moving towards a more egalitarian global society, starting precisely

from paying attention to young people and their stories.

This is why it is fundamental for us to let the youth speak, because the mainstream arena will always find a pretext to silence them or to exploit their way of life by easily finding a scapegoat. Our task is to overcome the monolithic interpretation in which young Africans are carved by deconstructing it, and listening to their multiple voices, without ever forgetting to contextualize their life narratives. It is imperative to take the stories of the present seriously, recognizing that the perspective of young people on what matters is valid and important in itself. (Oinas, Onodera and Suurpää 2018)

Obviously this sensitivity is more acute when we are working with our peers as Champy highlights, considering that the majority of ethnographies focused on the youth are made by young researches. (2020) However, if we take Bourdieu's statement literally “*la jeunesse n'est qu'un mot*”, then we can adjust our biological barometer and attune with the youth or even roam within ourselves to win back the young in us as Tadeusz Kantor encouraged his actors to do in *The Dead Class*.

Personally, I did not have to look for my childish self, for Alieu and I were both born in 1992, but apart from the connections we share, I was overwhelmed by how much he has accomplished in his 27 years, considering the poor background where he comes from and the fact that he dropped out of school at the age of fourteen. Thanks to his ability to expand the networks of his acquaintances, he easily found senior political mentors, spiritual guides, a job as an editor in one of the principal newspaper in Gambia, a weekly show on the Fatu Network focused on social issues and opportunities to travel across the continent as a guest of activists residences, and as a speaker at universities and panels.

But that does not make him a privileged. He still has to struggle daily, sometimes to secure a meal for the evening, to pay his bills and face the financial obligations towards his parents, his brothers and sisters.

As he once ironically said, whilst we were walking past the Kololi mosque, he finds himself as broke as Marx, except that Marx could count on the financial support of his middle-class English friend Engels.

However, it is hard to overlook the precarious and symptomatic picture, where some embark to Europe through the back-way risking their lives, others recur to big mamas and papas and somebody else resigns to surviving on a daily basis as best they can. But when you have to eat, you have to take care of your family's medicaments, pay the school fees of your siblings, you need to have money for rent and cash for power. Yet how many would dare to engage in revolutionary organizing? Few would, and Alieu is among them. He is not romanticizing when he says, while discussing Panafricanism, "it's the masses who will win freedom and liberation for themselves, it is not one single man or a single woman. It will take a nation to liberate a nation; it will take a continent to liberate a continent and it will take the working classes of the global South to lead the global socialist revolution to its logical conclusion."

But the 'democratic' apparatus and its lackeys prevent us from imagining and building new worlds, strategically keeping one part of humanity tied to the economic crisis of the North and the other to the wretchedness of the South, while simultaneously encompassing in their reformist agenda civil society organizations, liberal activists and non-state actors who increasingly take on the guise of entrepreneurs rather than human beings concerned and committed to overthrowing the system.

These are key issues of concern to many, such as Honwana, who, reflecting on this new youth on the move, wonders whether civil society associations will be sufficient to help drive significant political change and whether the new generation will succeed in creating a new way of doing politics. (2013)

Where can we find a space that is a laboratory for freedom, for the eradication of corruption, gerontocracy, oppression and resignation?

Where are we going to build our liberated territories?

When the time comes, and it is coming, because we all saw what happened in Chiapas, and more recently in the Arab Springs, in South Sudan, Algeria, Chile and Guinée, undoubtedly in the Third World.

And as a token and a reminder of this approaching watershed, let me recall the anger, angst and hunger for radical change as embodied by the Zapatistas:

IN OUR DREAMS we have seen another world, an honest world, a world decidedly more fair than the one in which we now live. We saw that in this world there was no need for armies; peace, justice and liberty were so common that no one talked about them as far-off concepts, but as things such as bread, birds, air, water, like book and voice. This is how the good things were named in this world. And in this world there was reason and good will in the government, and the leaders were clear-thinking people; they ruled by obeying. This world was not a dream from the past, it was not something that came to us from our ancestors. It came from ahead, from the next step we were going to take. And so we started to move forward to attain this dream, make it come and sit down at our tables, light our homes, grow in our cornfields, fill the hearts of our children, wipe our sweat, heal our history. And it was for all. This is what we want. Nothing more, nothing less. (Marcos 2002, p.67)

And this is what us as writers, researchers and anthropologists should witness. If we considered ourselves concerned human beings, we must be at the forefront and work with all the young revolutionaries of the world committing class suicide — to remind Amilcar Cabral's urging — because apart from our national affiliation we are all members of a global society.

A figure that amazingly embodies this social,

political and revolutionary commitment already exists and since long ago has been the stance of the organic intellectual as defined by Gramsci. For Gramsci one couldn't separate the homo faber from the homo sapiens – this distinction is one of the many distortions brought about by capitalism. He therefore proposed the idea of a widespread intellectuality and of an intellectual of a new type, not separated by his or her profession and class from the rest of society, but coming from it and linked to the working class by the task of actively building its emancipation.

Our role exists only in the recognition we obtain from others. We can only communicate and be understood if we humbly approach a specific context and try to account for it from a precise point of view, one that should always be local, trans-local and global, and of course, simultaneously rooted in the community in which we find ourselves. But our voice must never be singular, rather we must let our singularity be invaded by the voices, bodies, lives, dreams and fears of each one and all of us.

Acknowledgments



So, here I am, about to fill the last page of my work. I won't be long because I don't want to see it as an end.

I think of it as the beginning of something new, a brand-new challenge in order to pursue my intellectual path.

To my mother, my father and my sister:

Without your love, your support and your trust I would never have had the opportunity to study and cultivate myself traveling the world. Your open-mindedness laid the foundation for my curious soul.

To my sister Elda, in particular:

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Through it, we give light to our lives.

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All the time I spent with you when I was a child, inspired the young woman I am today.

You infused me with a love for people, for human beings, especially the underprivileged ones. You taught me to be humble, but the most precious gift you gave me was that you encouraged me to write. I can still remember the first poems and stories I ever wrote. I was 6 or 7 and I used to write these short illustrated stories of animals while sitting in your living room.

Years later you showed me an old manuscript that you wrote about the women in our family. You confirmed to me, as I had long suspected, that you are a feminist and a sensitive writer.

As a tribute to you, I continue your legacy.

To Giulia:

My companion and "soulmate" in this anthropological journey we have been on together, sharing wine, tobacco, books, ideas, and of course, anxieties and victories. For the midday breaks at the bar below our house and for your sensitivity in patiently listening to my many problems, doubts and criticisms both in Venice and in Southern Italy, Morocco and Gambia.

You give me strength, energy and motivation.

I truly admire your gentle soul.

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For all the people I have met in Gambia and especially for those who live in Kololi:

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To Tertia Fourie:

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To Alieu:

I want to express my most luminous feelings for Alieu. Without you this work would not have been possible. I hope that all these pages have somehow been able to give the reader a glimpse of the overwhelming person you are. And for the 99% struggling on this earth:

You are not alone.

Power to those who read bell hooks, power to those who sell books
Power to those who know how the inside of a cell looks
All those feeling helpless, forgotten and discarded
Power to the strange fruit you thought was rotten in the garden
Power to those sitting alone, seeking solace in the calmness
Power to those feeling stained, know your tomorrow isn't tarnished
Power to those that sweep the streets with more knowledge than PhD's
Power to those that keep their keys, return this promise, please believe
Power to those that suffer in silence, those it hurts to hear
Power to those that hold their ground, power to those that persevere
Power to those that love humanity more than they love style
Power to immigrants probably raising Donald Trump's child
Power to the blind who can't imagine what sight is
Those staring at the moon and all those working night-shifts
Power to the readers, the writers, the illiterate
Power to those that struggle to decolonize their syllabus
Power to the shy ones, always struggle to make friends
And the half of humanity worth less than eight men
Power to those that risked their life to dig the coltan from the ground
For the mic I'm spitting on and the phone you're holding now
Power to those that build the stadium they're playing in
Power to those that mowed the grass and stitched the ball that they're playing with
Power to every rapper that doesn't rap about killing
Power to the builders who built buildings that outlived them...

— Lowkey, Letter to the 1%.

Appendices



Here is a selection of some of the texts written over the last three years by Alieu Bah.

Appendix A

Gambia has decided: T-shirts, Billboards and the long road to the inauguration

On the 2nd December last year the political landscape of Gambia as we know it change forever. The defeat of the 22 years leadership of Jammeh became real and the masses surged on the streets of urban and rural Gambia to celebrate the end of what was known far and wide as the reign of terror and fearful silence. It was a glorious one week of hugs, tears of joy and a thousand many things that manifested what freedom looks like. Then it was over, the festive moods turned into something of fear and dread when the incumbent president decided to reject the results of the elections.

From that announcement onwards, Gambians have faced a plethora of wild and scary possibilities: from a coup speculation to the re installment of Jammeh without regard for due process. At least one of those speculations came to live with the arrests of people wearing the #GambiaHasDecided shirts. Ordinary, everyday people going about their normal businesses picked up and ushered into unknown locations.

As an activist who's being part of the struggle against tyranny and oppression in this country, #GambiaHasDecided as a slogan, movement and campaign came in handy. As we all needed a mass, popular movement to effect the change of regime in trying times like this.

The movement which started as a hashtag on social media quickly evolved into a movement on the ground with billboards, conferences and t-shirts.

It's build up came in just when the fire of organized activity was dying out after the elections.

But what we are witnessing in these crackdowns on innocent people is the last straw of a man who have no regard for human expression whatsoever. He has been scared of efforts on the parts of ordinary citizens speaking out against him. Democracy is a nightmare for him insomuch as it is a conception he now wants to use against the will of the people. In all places and climes oppressors have always been fearful of the day when the oppressed wake up to the call of freedom. the day they cease to be sheep led to the slaughter and are taking charge of their own destiny; Jammeh is seeing that happen right in front of him and it irks him and he will do anything to return Gambians to being that sheep he so well tamed and made docile.

The unlawful arrests of two people wearing the shirts and the breaking of billboards with the message of the Gambian people is the ultimate show of cowardice that Jammeh as exhibited and rightly shows his colors and as to why Gambians voted him out. The utter disregard for the lives, blood, tears and honor of Gambians has been going on too long for it to become a loved reality all over again.

It's going to be a long way to the inauguration with these events happening but as always the will of the people is the true face of power and their will have been asserted and there is no going back. no foully constituted supreme court, no barrage of bullets, no tearing down of the peoples innocence will stop democracy from being established– and a popular one at that.

The #GambiaHasDecided activists are now sitting at the borderline of freedom, on the very edge of life. Simply put: these are really volatile times because the darkest part of

night comes just before dawn, the climax of all phenomena comes right before the end, likewise oppression is most tense right at the crumbling point. we are witnessing the remnants of the oppressive regime. It's gonna be wild; stay safe out there. hold one another tight. Be a brother's keeper and a sister's comforter. Cuz it's all love in the end.

Appendix B

#GambiaHasDecided: a love letter from the frontlines

Defying the defiance in the major scale oppressive environ of the Jammeh regime was bounded first in rage then in the love of all that's possible before God and man for the nation that stands forth ready for the ever yielding promise of freedom. we fought from whispers in washrooms into the collective virtual world that's social media; expanding, contracting but forever pushing forth. it was a glorious yet frightening moment when we suffered the sweetness of adrenaline rushes when we know of a threat or a pickup of an activist destined for an unknown location.

But we did it for the love. for the yearnings and longings that are primal to the human conscious: the longing for freedom. it was based more on a shared desire than a common critique; more on a yearning than on an ideology; primarily a positioning of our plight than a centering of our idiosyncratic wishes.

We centered ourselves in the pursuit of this time, a time marked more by freedom than by anything else in the dictionary of revolutions. and then we won! we made it to the finish line. but wait, we thought it was the finish line till someone took the line away and declared it an open space for all that's not representative of the shared desire. yet we know where the line has been. it was at the defeat of the quadrangle trivia. that was it. we knew it and then we lived for it.

We will continue to keep on. to fight ever on. for the common destiny of the Gambian spirit; the totality of the finish line: an unbounded democracy rooted in the wishes of the masses of the people.

January 7th 2017

Appendix C

Reflections from the borderline: on the spirit of struggle, selflessness and service

“A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found.” — the Psalms

There comes a time when presence and the illumination thereof gives birth to painful and numbing memories which refuse to be transmuted by the power of the new. these are the times when slogans like “never again” find themselves used again and again as the vocal intuition of those very memories. ours as Gambians find itself rooted in the ending of the Jammeh era. finding ourselves at the threshold of a new time and by that virtue new possibilities for the destiny of the spirit that inhabits and drive that being that’s Gambian.

The spirituality of struggle against oppression gives birth to illumined beings who should become a people given to selfless sacrifice and are willing to give the last drop of blood in the birth of a new man. ours is a struggle borne out of love for the oppressed and marginalized of humanity. this love is at the core of the creation of New Gambia. it’s to infuse the old but living bones of the Gambian political spectrum the life giving force that’s the fire of love and revolutionary struggle.

The Psalms quoted above reminds us of the short lived nature of wicked activity. that the longevity of any phenomenon is predicated upon its good nature and binding interest in the progress of man. we are faced with the constructed evils of structures of domination that have usurped the life of oppressed humanity on the margins of history. as a nation that have just stepped out of two decades of oppression we are called upon as witnesses to righteousness and the goodness of all nations and to work hard in becoming home to freedom and all that’s just.

Here is the challenge for us all: to struggle selflessly in the pursuit of the highest goodness whiles being inviting of all people in this good. to trump the evils of xenophobia, imperialism, white supremacy et al. we are on the winning side and the winning side is a dangerous side if it’s not governed by the spirit of love and inner goodness.

May it be a time for the blossoming of the human spirit! asè.

January 21st, 2017

Fuck academic de-colonial philosophy

“The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.” —Karl Marx.

Who cares about the high winded, bourgeois language of scholars and academics in the ivory towers of Babylon? Caught in the very center that they decry and critique. How do they fail to realize that we aren't waiting? The masses of their imagined geographies, call it the global south, the periphery, the third world, have long decided to move on with a certain fastidious, fatalistic certitude that you only find in the have nots and forcefully hidden of the world. Our disobedience to empire and late modernity wasn't because we read a Mignolo or a Quijano. Our disobedient suffering bodies seeing through the lies and facade of a dying coloniality wasn't because we sat in the posh classes offered by the universities of babel. It was something entirely different and unbecoming of the measured coffee sipping ontology of a non threatening rebellious academic exercise.

Philosophical questioning, though important, wasn't what got us to these valid, angry, righteous conclusions that empire and her tentacles must be cut off forever. No, what got us there was the snapping out, the longing and yearning for better days. Without going into a theorizing we got here because we know where the pain comes from — by knowing where it comes from, we reversely know what we had to do for them better days to come thru. We became experts in oppressive structures. We learnt the hard way that the west is out to get us. To use, abuse and the discard us. Our de-colonial praxis is fiercely reality based. Not a metaphysical bullshitting or playing tough to understand with the language of the enemy.

It amazes me how Fanon who by all means and intent was from us and spoke for us was stripped of his sense of urgency into this docile, whitewashed, academic deadbeat idiot. A revolutionary through and through, who expounded a theoretics that he embodied by being on the frontlines of the resistance —an embodied theoretical praxis if you will. Fanon was a G. He spoke in very real terms as to what decolonization means for the damned of the earth. That it means all those boujee, well fed, posh motherfuckers who whether they be from the colonial class or their handlers within the colonized have to give it all up and take the backseat for the masses of our people to take their rightful place in history. A grandiose rising to the fore of humans who have been dehumanized and left to rot in the medinas and slums of the world. He wasn't playing games or busy being a philosopher reclining on a plush couch in New York or London.

Yet here today we are faced with a corpus of work that posthumously inaugurated a clawless, toothless, caged lioned-fanon. To them he can be angry but he just thinks and that's it. His disobedience is more epistemic than it is actual. He's a body in motion raked with self doubts about blackness but he can't be a bloodied fucking revolutionary that was busy destroying the material conditions of white supremacy. These academics work overtime with grants from the enemy to turn this man into a saintly, contemplative ass theoretician of decolonization. He must be rolling in his grave. Fanon is prolly out there reading things written on and about him that he has no clue as to what it all means. Fanon was poetic man. He took language from its all highness and made a symphony, music and poetry out of it in all its simplicity and beauty. The man wasn't trying to compete with others on who understand the oppressor's language better. He was above that. He had already told us to leave this west behind and create a new man. So y'all academics can suck it up. To be Fanonian is to be resolute, unwavering, angry and yet simple for the masses

of our people whiles being on the frontlines. And what in the world is postcolonialism? I know some decolonial scholars have distanced themselves from that term and its interlocutors but all y'all the same to me. Excuse me if I don't digress into a nuanced discourse of the term. I don't belong to that world, that academe of false universals. In fact I wanna destroy it and its false objectivity. But lets say for the sake of dragging the conversation. What's the postcolonial? Beyond the obviously loaded academic jargons y'all got going? Where does our present memory write itself into this thesis and by that I mean the continuous painful remembrance of our pain? What's post about the colonial? I'll be out here waiting for a simple rendition of all this so perhaps we can enter into the inevitable conversation that await the colonized scholar and the rank and file of the masses of our people. Whiles most of these scholars and intellectuals are busy with the particulars of the ontological the oppressed are busy figuring out the land that's stolen from under their feet and the next meal they have to put on the table. For it must be maintained that the decolonial thesis rests upon very concrete material conditions. That its foremost about food, clothes and shelter. Colonized man who still exists doesn't care about the details of an intellectual masturbation, for that's the boon of the well fed. She cares about satiation and security of land. And as empire continues to strangle communities thru the flight of capital and the enforcement of the masses as profit making tools in the sweatshops of Asia and the coco fields of Africa, it doesn't matter for the colonized who has the last say in the cartography of the universe. This is not to say that a philosophical inquiry into the nature of things isn't important. Its not to say we aren't a thinking people. Its not to say we aren't concern with the many worldviews forced on us. We are saying we are taking another approach. We are gonna locate our struggle against the beast in the material conditions that inform our beings. We are gonna speak in a language unknown to the enemy. We discard and shit on the postmodernist discourse. Who cares about a canon that comes out of the center of our pain. Eventually we wanna take philosophy back to the love of wisdom not to be stuck forever in the Eurocentric Kantian, Cartesian rational gymnastics. Consider this a love note to our sisters and brothers given sophisticated words to argue with each other whiles we die out here in the heat of the neocolonial proxy states of the global south. We just want them to wake up to the games and get back to the ground zero of the resistance. To be immersed within the masses and forget their petty differences. To honor the memory of the likes of Fanon by standing forthright and speaking the languages of our struggles. Don't waste time in the center any longer making us your anthropological guinea pigs cuz we aren't listening. Come back home to the many voices, angers, cries and conversations around the camp fires of the rest.

September 7th 2018

An official statement from the #OccupyWestfield Collective

On the 26th of October, the #OccupyWestfield Team issued The Declaration of the Occupation of Westfield. A statement that spoke of the urgent need for a stability in the current water and electricity situation in urban Gambia. It then called on the public to converge with the team at Westfield to vent their frustrations through the medium of a peaceful protest. This was to be the official birth of #OccupyWestfield as a team.

After that call, the response has been immense. It trended on social media and across the streets. We then realized the need to get police clearance and permit for the occasion.

We applied for a permit which was submitted at the police headquarters. We were called in the following day for screening from the intelligence office. Again we were the called to meet with the IGP and co. We had discussions on security details. But at the days end, our permit has been denied. Relentless in our call, knowing full well that ours is a right guaranteed by the constitution. We continued pushing for #OccupyWestfield even as the odds stacked against us.

The day after meeting the Police chief, we were again ushered into another meeting. This time with the then Interior Minister, Mai Fatty. A long negotiation ensued for the postponement of the protest. Cited again was security reasons. We conceded and postponed; acting as responsible and mature citizens of the land.

The following week we again met the minister but was cut short because he got called to an emergency meeting. We then rushed to the police headquarters where we had earlier in the day submitted a letter requesting security protection for our protest slated for this Sunday, the 12th.

We again went through the screening process but this time around a clearance plus security protection was afforded for our protest. It was a joyous occasion for us all for we felt the constitution have been honored. Which is what New Gambia should be about. It was a triumph and the news traveled fast. On Saturday whiles we were busy preparing the logistics for the protest, a call came in from the office of the IGP. Again we have been summoned to a meeting. We got to the meeting only to be given excuses of counter demonstrations, the beach boys said they too are protesting at the beach in solidarity with us. It was a shifting argument of excuses from the Security heads. A constant invention of boogeymen. Our clearance was then revoked. The revocation happened within 24 hours of its reception of the clearance. The excuses neither genuine nor firm were held on by the police in the denial of our constitutional rights.

We remain firm and resolute in our resolve to exercise our right to assemble peacefully as guaranteed by section 25 of the constitution. The police continue to invoke Section 5 of the Public Order Act which itself is unconstitutional and has been challenged in the supreme court of the Gambia. We won't cower down at the eleventh hour and let draconian laws win over the constitution. We stand in solidarity with the supreme law of the land and most of all our human right to gather in peace and protest.

All power to the people!

Let's get free: a love letter to the Third World

"We have a beautiful history, and we shall create another in the future that will astonish the world."

— Marcus Garvey

Silent sorrows, like open wounds, are a marker of the damned and the casted-out of all ages in their unconscious state. They sing through the pain and misery on the pages that have been written on the flesh of dominated, tortured souls; not because they hurt the body precisely, but because they beg for acquiescence rather than dissent and pleads-to-submission rather than rebellion. However there comes a time when history is turned upside down in the great showdown of the struggle between challenge and response —the conversion of the unconscious to the conscious. When machetes are wielded and the gauntlet is thrown in the final and decisive battle between oppressor and oppressed. This then becomes silence and sorrows, transformed into blood and sweat, to begin a new humanhood that is loud, courageous and beautiful. Defiantly and proudly blooming without permission on pavements and dirt roads that were once told not to bloom or trace themselves as roads – the joys and pathos of revolutionary nationalism. This is how the story of the third world begins; hope built on blood and mass graves, self-determination on the tethers of a threatening nuclear annihilation. A project of liberation that covered the horizons of the most brutalized of all of humanity throughout our short stint on the good earth. But this was to be a project of boundless possibilities, one that defies the ever-strong pull of the cynical. It “looked neither east nor west but forward” in its long march to a peoples history of no class struggle precisely because it is the one true hope of humanity’s long exodus from the depths of a dominant barbarism in the form of capitalist-imperialism to the just world, the logical conclusion of humankind at its best, communism. Since the working mass of the west abdicated its responsibility as the most advanced in its material conditions to lead the revolution in the heart land of the empire because it was too busy benefiting from the spoils of the colonial metropole, it became the Herculean task, as it always has, of the recently freed to advance the cause of world revolution to its last conclusive phase, yet again black and brown bodies to the rescue.

But it's not the intention of this essay to regurgitate old but remembered truths. It's only here to remind the vanguard, i.e. the peoples of the Third World, of their historic responsibility in the face of great need. Humankind haven't ever needed a red torch as urgently as this time. These days of anguish and burning Amazons. Days filled with the innocent dying cries of babies burning from napalm and little groans of enslaved children in cocoa fields and coltan mines. Nights dark and thirsty for the blood of young black lives and the souls of folks caught in the burning houses of failed nations with gatekeepers who love to send troops in the name of democracy and human rights. This midnight of the tattering of the human condition as it is alienated further is the dawn of "socialism or barbarism", not as a pithy phrase, but as a legit call of "this far and no further."

So to the beautiful children of the Third World:

Don't forget all you ever achieved was from the lives, deaths and afterlives of the masses of our people who had to give it all up for us to draw a breath. We stand not on the shoulders of giants but on the graves of warriors. Our task today is to run with that baton that must be carried forth into the future for the redemption of the planet and not to get stranded in a burning house.

When those who came before us said they looked neither east nor west but forward, it seems to me they saw what will become of us; for today we are caught in the debates and fights of both east and west. We clamor over Trotsky and Stalin as if it will save the next baby being burnt with depleted uranium. Do you remember Fanon when he said 'let's leave this Europe'? He meant this – and some more. These little juvenile battles over dead comrades is just good ole privilege that we can't afford. Our ancestors fought with all they got so we can serve as their continuity. But instead of stoking the fire this time, we are busy rubbing the ashes on our faces while the world laughs at us. We are called on to hasten the process because we do most of the dying anyways. We do most of the hunger, starvation, prison time and diseases anyways. Our people are still here clamoring to grab a bite. We have been reduced to a statistic of less than a dollar a day, while the east and west grows fatter by the second off our misery.

May you never then forget how the privilege for your endless debates and whimsical caprices are built upon the bloody struggles of yesterday. May you never forget that in the urgency of our call depends the lives of the very planet today.

Don't forget to study. The enemy knows our class consciousness is the death of his class and world. Don't forget to take the knowledge back to the people who fought so you can sit and hold a book. Learn from the brother Walter Rodney who learnt to ground with the masses of our people. For ours is a revolution born from a deep love that stretches back to slave ships and insurrections against the invader. While you study, don't be too caught in subjectivism that you forget that knowledge and truth is derived from the objective material conditions, the everyday, the production and reproduction of life as we live it. As you study remember what terrible things our ancestors had to endure, and to live in great dignity as they fought to be a self-determined people – so don't ever forget to tell their story right and to decolonize the historical account of our triumph and greater glory.

Remember to study, too, the contradictions of those who came before us so you can move beyond them; remember, we make gods and deities of no humans, even as we honor them as witnesses before us. So don't fall into idealism and simple-mindedness. Be materialist, scientific and compassionate in this march towards the progress and happiness of all of humankind. Don't forget to organize. To rally the billions of the masses of our people into an organized, prepared and ready peoples army; theory in one hand and the practice in another.

Don't lead our people into spontaneous adventurism which only ends in more of our blood with no gains to show for it. Let's now move from mobilization to organization, moment to movement, idealism to materialism, impulse to strategy believing in the long-suffering of the organized wait to action than the haste that wastes life, blood, spirit and sweat. To organize is to be eternal; to mobilize is to tarry but for a little while. But don't forget why we organize. We organize today and until victory for a revolutionary takeover of the means of production. We organize for socialism even as it transitions into communism. We should be very clear about what we want and what we don't want. Never confuse the people. Be clear always that ours is not charitable reform but a nationalist revolution for our conditions to be bettered permanently.

Today we organize not the classical working class alone, but the peasants and most of all the lumpenized masses of our people. The lumpenized masses today are some of the most portent of our people since they are the many and have agitated on the streets and highways of the global south every wretched day. Those who have been forcefully turned into a reserve army for labour – bargaining a morsel here and a little shack for shelter there. Their class consciousness like the 666 mark on them, like their own cross or ankh to bear through these raging and troubled blue waters. Don't agonize, organize them!

Don't forget to study the enemy. If we don't know who the enemy is and how the system is

created to keep our people down crawling, groaning, and moaning, then we can't win this protracted struggle. If the enemy isn't exposed, then our people will fight each other over a thousand other things since there is no clarity as to who their oppressor is. Superstition, tribalism, sectarianism, colorism, xenophobia, etc. are some of the ugly things that have festered among the people today, for the ruling class wants them to turn towards each other in blame and violence – because the day the masses wake up to the enemy and the ploys taken to keep them unconscious, then, that day, there shall be a global revolution. So never forget to expose the enemy and the contradictions that abound their existence.

The enemy today is imperialism, capitalism, neocolonialism, patriarchy and white supremacy and its interlocutors. They are the cold-blooded enemies of the people everywhere and they must be destroyed. To the learned of our people: at this late hour of our material history, you cannot abdicate your duty to our people. You have been trained in the bourgeois academy to become a tour de force in our oppression, but like many learned ones of our revolutionary ancestors before you, you must now shed the complex and join the masses to demand for nothing less than land, bread and water. Your training has turned you into parrots of bourgeois individualism, forever rattling in the chains of liberal-speak and losing sight of the agony of the masses.

If you haven't yet subjected your brilliance to the great will of the people in their quest for liberation than your whole being and educational edifice crumbles into nothingness, since it's the people who make history, and you will be relegated to its antechambers when the time comes to recount the tales of the inevitable victory of our people — word to Fanon. In the end we must never forget it's the masses, in their class-conscious state, who are the makers of joyful history. For through the many struggles they have proven the great man and woman of history complex to be nothing but bourgeois nonsense. No charismatic leader will lead us to the promised land. No Moses or messiah will be there to beg for our people to go. The people will sever their chains and with a strong firm grasp on the earth walk righteously into history and it shall be a glorious history for us and for all of humankind because we are the vast vanguard of the billions suffering righteous.

Onwards then! We have a world to win!

August 28th, 2019

Returning to the Source: Remembering and Grounding with Amilcar Cabral

No revolutionary leader has exerted as much influence on my thinking as a young and upcoming African than Amilcar Cabral. A giant of a man who strategized, organized, and mobilized the righteous forces of his land in the fight for independence and self determination from the fascist Portuguese colonialist. He was dialectical through and through in his analysis, but with a keen and sharp edge of understanding that extends far beyond the materialism that has dogmatically plagued the Western Left. He moved away from the dominant Marxist approach of deterministic historical narrative to an objective analysis of the tracking of the downward flow of history in his land. In this he surpassed many of his contemporaries and gave young Africans and Third World revolutionaries and activists a clear theoretical grounding, and his life became a way of being that, 'til kingdom come, will be a source of emulation and a lesson to aspire to.

Here is a man educated as an agronomist in Portugal and meant to be from the petty bourgeois of his land in assisting the colonialist in oppressing his people, but went ahead and defied that to create a strong revolutionary organization that would eventually overthrow the colonial regime. Abandoned and deemed mad for such an undertaking by many of his friends, he didn't falter nor did he throw it all away. Instead, he, with six people who saw and believed in his dream, started the Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) after a scientific analysis of the colonial situation. This party was to become the great force against Portuguese colonialism, not only in Guinea-Bissau, but all Portuguese-dominated countries. Studying and understanding the life and struggle of Cabral is important for realizing a few central things that made him who he was in the context of his time and how he became a bearer of timeless truths, 'til the defeat of capitalism-imperialism.

First, Cabral wasn't a haphazard, hasty man. He was very much grounded in reality — a friend of gravity. When he came back from his studies in Lisbon, he became part of only 14 people in his land to ever receive higher education. But he didn't use this to become an oppressor nor to scale the ranks within the comprador class; instead he used it to deeply understand his land, and then organize for resistance.

In a study today known as "Man and his Land", he conducted a whole agricultural study of Guinea, getting a topical feel and first hand knowledge of the land, farming, soil, and the peasantry and their conditions. For a man who will come to launch a People's War with his comrades, this was to become indispensable knowledge. So he knew very well what it was he was dealing with through these studies, and for the rest of his life as a revolutionary, this sense of mastering the objective reality informed his theory and practice. He was precise and acute in observation of the material conditions, which is why a cursory reading of his talks to his comrades will reveal keen observations he made, even in the most mundane of things.

Today we see how the Left continues to be defeated even with the abundance of means, even with the multitudes who are now waking up to the wreckage of capital. Cabral, as a practical and visionary man, had little means to his disposal but still rallied a nation. He built a force that became the highest point of reference for anti colonial war in West Africa. And as you read of all these great feats, remember that he rallied a nation that was 99% illiterate. A nation that had less than 15 hospitals. A nation whose majority are peasants in far-flung villages with no access to any of life's basic amenities in an age of technology and scientific advancement. But with eyes to the future and mind to the ground, Cabral and his comrades built an advanced scientific party that

eventually won. Learn from a brother like Cabral, who knew and wasn't afraid.

Second lesson: comrade Amilcar Cabral understood the importance of showing the people that liberation means the advancement of their material conditions. Under his leadership and guidance, the PAIGC would build schools and clinics in every liberated territory. Every area that was liberated from the colonizer was to see the material benefits of liberation. He and his comrades didn't go around selling dreams to the masses of the people. They showed them what was possible when they fought for their self determination and liberation.

Of course, they weren't the most advanced schools or clinics, but for a people who have never had a doctor or a nurse attend to them their whole lives, nor were ever able to read or write, this was a great glory and victory. That's what must be done today. We must be with the masses materially. Building means where there are no means. We spend thousands on conferences and meetings and base-building, but the people in the communities don't have proper healthcare nor education.

We read Marx and Rodney amongst ourselves, but don't even dedicate time to teach the children their tens and units. We must today win the masses by building the world we want to see in the future, with them, in small but steadfast and consistent steps. Each comrade operating from the Third World must be able to tutor the kids for free by dedicating time. The doctors and nurses amongst us must be able to give free time to the hospitals that have little to no doctors or nurses. We must, in the spirit of Cabral and the Black Panthers, feed the neighborhood. We can't be all talk and no practice. The masses know already, but then what? Are we gonna be like the bourgeois politicians who come and promise our people heaven and earth just for votes and never do nothing? We must show the possibility of new worlds through our very lives.

Thirdly, Cabral believed in solidarity. He spoke, lived, and acted as an African patriot. He constantly reminded his comrades that Africa's liberation is an intergalactic part of their struggle in the remote corners of Guinea and Cape Verde. He was instrumental in creating a United front for the struggle of Mozambique that ended up in the creation of Frelimo. He again, under the pretext of going to do agronomist work in Angola, went there and rallied the people – and that became instrumental in the formation of the MPLA, which headed the anti-colonial struggle of Angola. Again, he worked hard for the establishment and continuity of a confederation of the organizations struggling against Portuguese colonialism in Africa.

But Cabral didn't stop there. He built with all of the Third World, and we see the result of that in that great talk he gave in Cuba at the Tricontinental Summit Against Imperialism called "The Weapon of Theory." But his solidarity was fiercely reality-based. It wasn't a romanticization of others, but one that honors, reflects, and extends struggle. That should be our struggle for solidarity today. An internationalism that isn't rooted in colonial stereotypes nor the worship of might. For today we see much of the Western left in solidarity with China, when China continues to wreak havoc in these African lands of ours. No, we stand in solidarity with those who recognize our humanity and our right to a life of dignity amongst the Chinese masses, but not their government that has shown no remorse to the long-suffering masses of Africa.

This was the reason why Cabral kept reminding his comrades that their fight isn't against the people of Portugal, but against the colonialist, an important distinction that is hard to understand without ideological clarity.

Cabral was like an inexhaustible well in the realm of theory and practice. It would be well beyond the working of this essay to try to extract lessons from this righteous son of Africa. But one last thing before we pull the curtains is the leadership style of this brother. 'Til the end of his days, he kept reminding his comrades that this struggle was never about him, but about the people. That they must forever do the struggle for the happiness of the masses and their progress,

and by extension, the progress and happiness of all of humankind. He never claimed a special position within the realm of things, but this didn't make him a docile leader. He was righteous and highly-disciplined, never claiming easy victories nor lying to his people. In the end, here is a man who by all means and intents could have lived a smooth and quiet life, but instead plunged himself in the great struggle for the liberation of his people, and for this, he paid with his life on one January evening of 1973. 'Til victory he will be remembered as one of us who loved the people – and they loved him back – and with that he achieved immortality and elevated himself, in righteous mention and elderhood, atop the peak of the African Nation that will be, and the Third World that will be liberated.

Long live the everlasting defiant and fighting spirit of Amilcar Cabral!

October 5th, 2019

Memento Mori: The Presence of Death and Hastening the Revolution

I have known loss. I have known grief. Immense loss that makes you forget how to grieve because the sadness and helplessness in the face of so much death turns into cold anger at the many forces that created the conditions for the death of your beloved sisters and brothers. Because death in the Third World, in the heat of the neocolonial state, isn't the doing of a god who sits over the destiny of man, but the works of a conglomerate of states and corporations who extract, destroy and destabilize on a continual basis. The Neocolonial state is not a state in the classical definition of that term, but a subsidiary of Capital and Imperial interest. Caught in this hustle, death takes on a political meaning and a revolutionary fervor abounds the soul of the child of the Neocolony.

Remembrance of death quickly leaves the realms of a religious pietist calling to having a sense of urgency before forces more powerful than you.

I am not a spokesperson of any revolutionary process, I am just one who has known pain and grief in such a way that I have to become scientific about it and to forever live knowing that we die, not because a god decides so, but because the very basics of life that sustain human cells are being depleted in my part of the world to feed the greed of another collective of humanity. Whether we will just complain to a god or confront the material wickedness in high places is something for the terrified, beautiful people of the Third World to decide — and they're deciding everyday, far from the gaze of the neocolonizer and under the nose of the comprador agent of imperialism. We today are invoking another order of ancestors who already created an ethic of being and a program of action that will create a sovereign people who will live long and prosper when the final bullet leaves the smoking gun. But the focus of this essay is to be a reminder, an offering to my people to remember death and how it will continue till we rise up and seize ours and create a newness that won't look like a cafe for blues men but a brightly lit, afrobeats, sensational black folk joy type of setting.

Memento Mori (remember you will die) is a concept the ancients employed to make themselves better. To have a sense of urgency before the time comes to become an ancestor for your descendants. When a human being is confronted with her mortality, she is at once a serious being and a disciplined force against the tirades of a lazy life. How do we employ this today progressively to create the mass organization that will understand the sense of urgency in revolutionary practice and to save millions from the death that comes with a nonchalant attitude to material overthrow of the reactionary forces in our lands? It's not hard for people of the Third World to contemplate death, cuz like I said, it's all around us. Loss is just another cousin, another brother and a best friend. It dances its way in our life on a good summer day and a gloomy rainy evening. Its presence is that of a guest that overstays his welcome. Today then we must use the omnipresence of impermanence to hasten the process of revolution. To organize, knowing death is on our heels and the heels of many of our beloved folks.

Recently I was confronted with one such loss. It sent me into the depths of confusion. I lost clarity for a bit, but like all epiphanies that visits the mind that wanders, I was jolted into clarity once again. I set forth to use that loss as a catalyst for revolutionary organizing. Knowing that visitor might soon knock on my door and forever to be bounded to the dust of all origins. The work of the revolutionary in relatively non-revolutionary times is to create conditions that will qualitatively sharpen and deepen the contradictions of oppression by organizing quantitatively the masses of our people.

In such times, everything, from the morbid to the moribund, must serve as an inspiration and an impetus, not a catalyst for paralysis. Righteous indignation must be a weapon we yield in such times. We must be angry at what forces created poor healthcare, bad education, bad roads, malnutrition and the likes of those issues that kill our people. But anger isn't enough, we ain't no liberals. That anger must be turned into contemplation of what must be done. It must lead to questions whose answers will be material, not abstract.

We don't have the luxury to just grieve. We must recognize that we are losing that very human privilege to the commercialization and commodification of everything deemed sacrosanct to the human being. Capitalism doesn't recognize our humanity because it's busy reveling in our dehumanization. And the tides won't turn by moralizing, but through creative action that's pinned in a theory and ideology for the liberation of the people. We must avenge our deaths. We who have died for everything and everyone. We who can't grieve too long cuz we are slaves in wage plantations. We who are the expendable, the discardable, the pushed out and hated by power.

We are the ones who must light the fire, catch the lightning and run with it to the fullness of our salvation. Remembering we will die and that we're gonna leave generations of our descendants here, we must refuse the annihilation of the human. In our refusal must be an unequivocal clear manifestation of our rages, dreams, aspirations and wishes in the form of an organizing force that will destroy parasitic capitalism and its minions. Our revolution must be hastened and urgent. It must have no place for petty quibbles and useless rhetoric. It must center the death of us and the life that's possible for us in a classless world.

As we reflect and self criticize may we learn the art of dying by becoming selfless and to discover our lives, deaths and afterlives in the liberation and freedom of the billions of our people. And to remember their beauty, tenacity, righteousness, brilliance – and may this be where we draw our inspiration and guidance from in the form of a mass line. When we win, we all live to see better days, and when we lose, we will still go on living, building and learning. Knowing we must and will eventually triumph, heralding forth the great shining glory of what it means to be human in the age of the dehumanized. Let's advance forthwith then, comrades, factoring that time is not on our side – but we can seize it.

Carpe diem!

October 7th, 2019

Human Rights is a Farce: A dispatch from the Neocolonial state

It's late evening in the 1st of November in the age of the Neocolonial state. The heat unbearable and as sea levels rise, we wonder what will become of Banjul, the small isle capital of my country, amidst the melting caps of the oceans. The birds don't chirp that much anymore and my neighborhood, which used to host one of the greenest reserve parks, is filled with runaway monkeys whose home have been destroyed to build a monstrous conference center for a one-off Islamic conference. The roads are eroding and getting smaller, through which we see the proliferation of road accidents that claim lives ever so frequently (rest in peace, comrade Sise). Through it all the uncertainty of social mobility has forced my friends and others unknown to brave the high waters of the Mediterranean in an effort to escape, seeking flight through little boats to fascist, racist Europe. Many drowned and we mourned them, many missing we wonder what became of them, and others caught as slaves in Libya, we are doing what little we can do by way of rants, tweets, and status updates to fight for them to be free.

This is not a diagnosis of the Neocolonial state but a reminder of the pain and confusion that beset it. Independence came in 1965 (others maintain 1970, what does it matter?). We have a national anthem, we have a flag, we have a government and several seats in international bodies. But in the words of the Kenyan historian Maina Wa Kinyatta, "...my country is still a neocolonial state – a client state of imperialism." The European Union gives my country 550,000 Euros yearly for fishing our waters whiles they make millions. The land of the farmer, ancestral land, communal land has now been up for grabs between different real estate companies. Our government, which is just a subsidiary of Capital and worst an investment, has sold the dreams of our people for a better life by signing dubious deals with the World Bank and IMF which are coming back to haunt us in many more ways than one. Forget China, that's a whole 'nother blues we will get to another day in how it cements oppression and the trodding of our people in the mud.

The electricity and water supply comes and goes at will – ever as erratic as the state itself. The child who grew under the shadows of the neocolonial state only knows one-third darkness and dehydrated taps. She goes to schools that can't teach her to be any better and when he gets sick he goes to die in the public hospital where there are little to no drugs. Whiles all this is happening my people are kept busy with elections and chanting "we want democracy! We want human rights!" These hymns composed by another order of being are to be sung in the eternal bitterness that hangs over the poor neighborhood. Voting is a sacred act, a ritual of the neocolonial state. Its gatekeepers from the outside are ever vigilant that the "rule of law" be upheld – as if they care if we live or we die. But they triumph every time because rituals are things our people love as a therapeutic act in the service of their god.

Activists clamor for it, this democracy within the neocolony. They protest and die for it. They end up in jails for these sacred rituals of the neocolonial state. They are told and preached to by the high priests of this order that democracy and human rights are the most important thing any nation can have. They are more important than everything you can imagine.

The justification for these grandiose pronouncements are of course made even more valid by the longstanding dictatorships and tyrannical rulers of the land. As if the antidote to tyranny is more rights and more voting and more speeches and more marches. As if rights matter if you can't realize them. As if the right to health means anything if there are no doctors or drugs in the hospitals. But this class of activists in the neocolonial state are pontificated to and they keep

marching – “onwards to more rights!” Once in a while the masters gather them and train them on non-violent organizing. The good cop; soft imperialism. While they teach them how to be peaceful and creative in their nonviolence, they are building military bases all around them. But they are not permitted to question these things, and once in a while, if one of them does, the masters tell them nicely that they have nothing to do with those things. Even though they admit their funding comes from the same place, they say with all meekness that they’re only peacemakers – and blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of god. I used to be one of these activists. But I am a rebellious slave. More insidious is the political class. This class of mostly men. Mostly the educated. Mostly the urbanites or the runaway rural dweller. This class does whatever it takes to get the votes. They will swear to the god they serve that they love our people more they love themselves. They will spend days and nights with the masses. They will come with their trunks of believers in the clamor and squalor of it all with their drums and microphones. In prophetic tones they will preach the need to deliver the people from the poverty and misery. The people, ever the believers, will clap and dance with them. They will many times use tribal sentiments, ever so subtly, to entice. They will use religion and mythologies with a vast glimpse as to its great potential in the land of the superstitious. This petty bourgeois class, ever the slick ones, will muddle, confuse, distort and divide the masses just to gain that throne in the remote capital. The day they win and they are declared king in the land of the intentionally blinded, they remove their mask and go on to unleash terror in the land. They sell what little gains the people have made. Everything becomes a commodity and everyone becomes a target for their dark capricious whims.

At once they will set out to develop their ancestral villages and turn them into shiny little capitals while sending their kids to private schools in cold wintry Babylon. They disappear from the masses they once danced and cried with (albeit with fake tears). Their tones change. You can detect the scorn and the threats. The cold laughter in their hearts coming forth in all its glory as they sign new deals with the gods of Capital and Empire. They fattened their offshore accounts by usurping those very deals and loans. Mission accomplished!

They now busy themselves with democracy and human rights and how “we are in constant dialogue with the youth and women through the civil society organizations.” Civil society organizations? Those are ominous words strung together to mean organizations filled with those activists who are branded with love of the constitution and neoliberal morality. The political class has won the day, and the cycle begins yet again as the unbearable heat intensifies, and the birds stop chirping, frightened by homeless monkeys in my gentrified neighborhood.

November 1st, 2019

Liberation in our lifetime: Towards an African Socialist Anti-Manifesto

The haunting specter of communism doesn't hold the world at ransom any longer. The unholy alliance has all but gone global. We now stand at the juncture between a failing core and a slowly awakening revolutionary periphery. This is the beast that haunts the earth – the beast of the Third World. The call that was made at the dawn of decolonization, renewed and re-centered, towards a finalization of the unfinished, the leftover, the discarded project, namely accelerating the unification of the African continent under scientific socialism. What is to be done is known, how is to be done remains the fundamental task of these beautiful children of Africa. Towards these ends, a presentation of the facts of historical science and dropping, along the way, the weight of history.

A recognition of the productive forces as the makers of history and the usurpers of production as the destroyers of that historical trajectory in its transition to its logical conclusion of a fully developed productive base and force. That no history is possible without the material base of the people being conquered by the people for their own benefit. That for this to be a possibility, this onward advance of the people to sovereign wealth, it must be known who stunts this growth, who benefits from this stunting and who sleeps in a king-size bed while the surplus is stored far from the masses of our people. A class analysis reveals layers upon layers of betrayal of our people by their own and by the others — the old masters of our misery.

We know from scientific analysis that the comprador class is both interlocutor and beneficiary in this scheme to control the productive base of Africa so as to pick crumbs on the masters table after the old lady sings the last note. The enemy established so we know who to take out of the way to continue the progress of our people into eternity. That it is a constant in the ever-changing dynamic of mechanics of our oppression that there is a fabricated class of politicians, managers, intellectuals, religious leaders who make it their duty to rob and steal from our people. The advantage we have over them today is that they're constantly warring amongst themselves. They have no loyalties towards each other but to only capital and big financial institutions. They must be exposed and destroyed.

That to destroy this parasitic class, we must become skilled at exposing the indoctrination with which they hold us captive to. All over the continent today we are told our biggest failure is the lack of democracy and human rights. We go along echoing these sentiments in an almost fatalistic style. We don't dare question this thought-hegemony lest we are called enablers of dictators and tyrannical systems. But we failed to notice or to understand that every society, scientifically, is a dictatorship. But who's dictatorship? Who's the one who controls the medium of ideas and ideologies? Who controls the national wealth? Which class in our society runs the show? An example: today in most of our villages we have a primitive feudal lordship over land. We are told and convinced by the feudal class that since their great grandfathers founded the village, they have been given the divine right to rule and administer the land and all that's in it. With this, many families have been dispossessed of their lands, but instead of raising up their voices and muscles in protest, they submit dutifully because this is the way it has been ordained. They fell victim to the dictatorship of ideas and hegemonies of the feudal lordship.

The control of ideas and the class rule of the elite and colonized intellectuals is a battlefield that must be won with a vigorous political education to expose their dictatorship and institute a new and vibrant dictatorship of the masses as a whole which is the only true democracy. The adventurism of this class of oppressors must also be exposed.

How they use our people in protests and uprisings only so they can take over state power and continue to rob us. We have seen the hijacking of this sort all over Africa and the Third World, from Egypt to South Africa. The struggle must go back to the material needs of our people. Land, bread and water must occupy the front seat of this struggle and abstract bourgeois ideas about civility, morality and nonexistent rights thrown to the bin of history. These new ideas must be derived and rooted in the material, social, cultural, intellectual conditions that we find ourselves in today. It must also be an active combat against superstitions, magic and all such ideas that have impeded our growth in the era of scientific and technological advancement of the world.

We know we can only win this war with organization. With mass organizing of our people under the banner of a revolutionary democracy that is disciplined and urgent. Our organizing must be built upon consistent truth-telling and fact collection. We cannot act like the comprador class that only mobilizes for temporary gains. We must organize, show and prove the correctness of our line by building in real-life what society we want to see through discipline and distribution of collective resources in a cooperative model. We must constantly educate ourselves and apply that education in mass work. We must build schools that counter the indoctrination coming from the bourgeoisie. Study circles must be everywhere. We must also always be on the frontlines in winning immediate material benefits with the people, in the form of asking the neocolonial state to offer services that are needed everyday. But we must be careful not to be adventurist or lead our people into bloodbaths in the forms of riots or protests without a clear analysis and social investigation. Create no heroes or cults, organize eternally.

We affirm before the world that our friends are those who show solidarity with our struggle without trying to superimpose their ideas and theories upon us. That we don't consider it solidarity if you're more interested in telling us how to struggle and what ideas are more correct. That we consider that to be disrespect for our history and our final becoming. We declare the white working class today to be the foremost friends of capital, hence our enemy. We recognize in all of this the impotence of the Western Left in the great onslaught of imperialism in our lands. That they cannot orchestrate a revolution without the defeat of the neocolonial state and imperialism down in the global south. The White Western left, instead of asking what must be done with the comrades who are in the Third World, are more interested in little petty squabbles over the theories of dead philosophers, so they remain a sidekick of capitalism-imperialism — in their distraction and uselessness for the coming struggle. In sight of this, our solidarity doesn't lie with them but with the colonized masses caught in the core of western capital. The so-called 'minorities' who are the only portent revolutionary class there today.

We honor those who came before us. Those who took the correct line in the struggle for the liberation of our people. We promise to finish that project by doing a careful study of the works they left behind and to pick what fits our time on a materialist dialectical understanding of those works. We pledge allegiance to no-one but the masses of our people and the righteous ancestors thereof. Our freedom will come in our unity and constant struggle for correct ideas and methods and our ever-righteous fight to defeat our enemies both home and abroad. To usher in the total unification of the African continent under scientific socialism giving birth to the African Nation that must be.

November 14th, 2019

Build Organization: A love letter to 'leaderless' movements

I have been there as an activist. The romantics of non-hierarchical, leaderless, autonomous movements. The arguments for it amazingly sound. Imagining a reality where everyone knows what is to be done and they set forth doing it with the right practice and discipline.

Tried and tested, what are the lab results? Failed everywhere. There is no durability to it. Why? Because so long as the class struggle exists, and it does, there will never be a seamless movement of autonomous movements that will have a membership of equals according to the material conditions under capitalism. Our class positions, different educational advantages, etc. will have their say, and when they do, it's not as pretty as the posters and creative direct action campaigns.

When young college students rallied around Anarchism as more of an adventure than a will to change the system, we knew from analysis it was gonna be one or two weeks camping out and chanting slogans and then heading home to the suburbs or to a network of couches with like-minded rich kid friends. Revolution overturned on its head by ultra-leftism and liberal reform in a world turned inside out by corporate greed and a relentless class struggle. Through it all was the human mics, the shared community of mostly so-called white radicals in a fancy little park maintained by black and brown workers. After the dust settles, everyone goes home and the think-pieces start coming out as to how the Left has generated a newness in leaderless movements, organizers of these events become the mouthpieces of the progressive masses and onwards the credits roll to nothing achieved. Eventually it triggers a line of movements across the world couched in social media branding and hashtags. A generation lost to the sauce. As Che Guevara's face resurfaces once again and the market rejoices in this most opportune time – the relentless commodification of everything by neoliberalism.

We are urged constantly to hold onto the new trend because it will save the Left from its current rot. Its powerlessness, it is said, is in the centralization of power in vanguard style. That analysis usually doesn't go any further. Sometimes, of course, it's said the constant need for an ideology for struggle is the problem that indeed we have passed the stage of ideologies. That all that is needed is a list of demands and a restructuring of society based on the ethos that are within movements; herein then the action of movement, not usually derived from a sound analysis, becomes ideology. The chant becomes "we are the 99 percent". This chant, and many like it, becomes the mass line of a lost generation. Any other mention of revolution that doesn't fit the aesthetic of this new norm is booted out by a cancel culture that cancels both humans and ideologies. These movements, it is said, are our triumph, our road to greater glory.

But why don't they win? Why have they given birth to new monsters wherever they have risen? Tahrir Square, Ferguson, Occupy Wall Street, etc. what went wrong? Oh, I will try telling you.

It is because mobilization isn't organization; the former temporal, and the latter eternal, because human mics don't denote equality, because hashtags and algorithms aren't the measure of a people's popular revolution. Because discipline is born out of struggle in an organized fashion; that we can't win through spontaneous movements of muscle, blood and sweat. Revolution is not a high tech branding outfit by rebellious John Lennon-wannabe techies. Revolution is the destruction of one order of being for another. But those words and what they embody are too strong, too deterministic, not nuanced enough, too black and white for the liking of university students and academics masturbating to Foucault or Derrida. Because without the everyday masses, the workers and peasants, the ghetto dwellers and the productive forces of the real world at the forefront demanding power and an end to bourgeois usurpation, reform will be mistaken for revolution by a seamless movement of students and burnt-out radicals waking up to visions

of Marx.

If you're leaderless, you will have someone come takeover the leadership and hijack the little gains made – word to a post-Tahrir Egypt under the despot, El-Sisi. If you don't have discipline in an organization when the crumbling begins there is no accountability and no criticism or self criticism to resolve contradiction amongst the people so they can keep moving progressively. No ideological unity, so as one fights for water, another fights for freedom of expression, and they converge eventually in the heart of the class struggle when, at long last, the naked nature of inequality amongst radicals is exposed and the center falls apart. Realizing the fight was, all along, different from each quarter. Then, a new fight emerges amongst the movements themselves, and the cycle of reaction reaches a new dramatic crescendo.

Movement must lead somewhere. We must not consciously move without reaching a conclusive point. The tipping point is here for us to either keep marching and protesting as the enemy wins or build the revolutionary party fortified by scientific analysis and discipline. We must organize, study, hold unto to an ideological core, unite with the masses, painstakingly understand the root of the problem is always material. Understand that no revolution is possible without an unpoetic destruction by the all consuming violence between oppressor and oppressed. Understand that there is determinism as the contradictions sharpen in and around capitalism-imperialism even as it is not mechanical. That direct action that is spontaneous has mostly been an adventure that leads to nothing but disorder without much gains. Organize for revolution. Because it won't jump out of social media or hashtags. Go back to the 99 percent. They will teach you things you'll never learn from the copious texts of the postmodernist prophets. Knowing that true knowledge comes from social practice and experience, not from the wellsprings of academia.

This was by way of a love letter and a reminder that other worlds are still possible in the promise of time. Knowing that the arc of the moral universe doesn't bend towards justice obediently, but must be forced there through struggle. It must bend through the replacement of one order for another that's progressive and classless, where the final say will be from the most oppressed in their fullness as a humanity restored by revolution.

November 16th, 2019

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