“All Predicaments Can Be Traced Back”

An ethnographic study of how the past is present in contemporary Gambia

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Abstract

The transatlantic slave trade and the later colonial era have impacted the world in different ways. This thesis is based on 6 months ethnographical fieldwork in the Gambia, in the villages of Albreda/Juffureh, and later among urban youth in the Banjul Greater area. My focus has been on how the past is present in people’s knowledge and everyday life, by using a broad understanding of memory. Past impacts on the physical environment; ruins of old buildings and memorials, are visible remains of the past in the villages. Alex Haley’s “Roots” story is merged with the physical environment and used as a narrative when presenting the villages as historical sites in the Gambian heritage tourism, which is the focus of chapter 2. Chapter 3 shift to the urban area of Greater Banjul, where the youth seem to display an interest and longing for a future in “the West”, which also seems to convey a lack of knowledge and lack of interest regarding the past. In chapter 4, I focus on the President who is actively presenting a historical narrative that stresses European exploitation, creating a clear moral boundary between the Gambia and “the West”. Several intellectuals I interviewed agree upon the notion that the biggest impact from the past is mental colonization, a complex of interiority that is manifested today in the phenomena of “the backway syndrome” and the locally shaped concept of “Babylon”, which is laid out in chapter 5. I suggest that the past becomes present directly through sayings and thoughts that were shared with me, and indirectly through these phenomena which appear as manifestations of the mentioned inferiority complex. Throughout the theses I will shed light on the experienced situations and observations showing how they can be connected to the past, often containing paradoxical elements, through a wide understanding of memory, and hence understate how “all predicaments can be traced back”.

Key words: the Gambia, the West, Babylon, Roots, Neo-colonialism, Past, Memory, Dependence.
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Philip Rynning Coker

Oslo, May 2016
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Introduction

Context
The Gambia is a small country in West Africa that is surrounded by Senegal, except for a small strip on the west coast. It was colonized by the British Empire in the early 1800’s until it was declared independent in 1965. There are approximately two million (CIA 2015) people living in the Gambia, spread over nine or ten different ethnic groups. Today the Gambia is predominantly Muslim, with 95 % following Islam, while the rest are considered Christians. The biggest ethnic group is Mandinka, with around 33 % (CIA 2015) of the population. It is though thought that the group with the most widespread language and traditions is Wolof, but only around 12 % are considered to belong to this group. English is the official language, but the vast majority speaks Wolof in addition to their ethnic language. The biggest sources of income for the country are tourism and the export of peanuts, and a big part of the population depends on agricultural products like rice, cassava and cattle for their way of living (CIA 2015). Almost 60 % live in urban areas; the biggest area is called Banjul Greater area, which is the region around the capital Banjul (CIA 2015).

The country was actually one of a very few that was colonized with the official aim to stop the transatlantic slave trade within the British Empire. Before the British colonization, the region had been an important place in the slave trade, sending many slaves to both North and South America, like many other countries on the African continent. After independence in 1965, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom was the formal head of state in the Gambia, until Dawda Jawara was elected the country’s first president in 1970. In 1994, Yaya Jammeh took the power in a bloodless coup, and he is still in power. The country has been termed a dictatorship by the international media, and Jammeh himself has not been afraid of speaking publicly1 of things that seem to put him in an opposition to “the West”2. This is a political orientation that often references colonialism, which I will come back to below.

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1 This will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.
2 The notion of “the West” rests upon James Carrier (1995), who sees it as a partial construct that is based on people’s interpretation of the elements from the Western world that reaches them. “The West” is then seen in relation to Occidentalism; identification and representation of Europe and North America, from people and societies outside the mentioned continents and, hence, represents a stylized image of the Western world.
Background and previous research

I have always found the Gambia’s role in the slave and colonial era interesting, and it is within that context I started to be anthropologically interested in the Gambia. A vital reason is the story about Kunta Kinte from the village of Juffureh: a young Gambian who was caught and sold to America during the slave trade. Kunta Kinte became famous in “Roots”, a book written by the African American author, Alex Haley, who claimed he had been able to trace his own ancestry back to the village of Juffureh, where Kunta was living with his family until he was captured in 1767. The novel follows Kunta all the way from his capturing in Juffureh and throughout his life in America. It became very popular all around the world and this narrative is much used by the Gambian Tourism Authority (GTA) when marketing the country as a destination for what is now called “Roots” and heritage tourism. Haley admitted, soon after it was published in 1976, that the story itself was fiction, but that the big structures regarding the slave trade was based on facts. The story has, nonetheless, played, and still does; a vital part on how many Gambians see the past.

Donald Wright (2011), Alice Bellagamba (2009), and Liz Gijanto (2011) have all written about the “Roots” impacts on the country’s history, and also how important that particular narrative has been in shaping the identity of the villagers of Albreda/Juffureh. There are also quite a number of anthropologists who have written about the slave era’s impact on the public memory in African countries like Sierra Leone and Madagascar (Rosalind Shaw, 2002, Ana Araujo, 2010, Jennifer Cole, 2001). Richard Werbner (1998), with others, has written generally about memory within a postcolonial context in Africa. Ann Reed (2013), Rosabelle Boswell and David O’Kane (2011), Alice Bellagamba (2009), and Dallen Timothy together with Stephen Boyd (2003) have all focused on how the past is often made important for people in the African diaspora through roots and heritage tourism. The main theme among these anthropologists is how the past become present through institutionalized practices, such as tourism and the educational system, and through social responses to historical happenings between people.

The question of how the past manifests itself in the present in different ways has been addressed by numerous social scientists, including Maruice Halbwachs (1992), Rijk Van Dijk (1998), Marilyn Strathern (1995) and Joanne Rappaport (1990). The aim has often been to make it clear how the past tends to be used either politically or related to a collective identity. Paul Connerton (1992, 2009) especially focuses on how modernity causes collective
forgetting, for example by showing how memorials, and at times the landscape itself, cause forgetting. I will follow his view of memory as also being a collective and, therefore, a social phenomenon, leading me to see memories as something taking place both between people, between generations and in our minds. This implies that the memory-concept used here is based on a social understanding of the past, which makes remembering an ability that is not dependent upon self-experience. I can remember the slave trade through cultural, societal, and traditional mechanisms, even though I never experienced the slave trade myself. Forgetting is a vital part of memory, and it is often seen in the context of a focus on the future (Ferguson 2006, Piot 2010, Van Dijk 1998). In my field it was, thus, quite clear that young people were more interested in discussing the West, and its relationship to Africa and popular music, than the direct impact of the slave trade and colonial past. As I will argue, memory has to be examined and found in these contemporary social relations and experiences.

**Research question and overview of the chapters**

Sitting at home in Norway reading “Roots”, as well as ethnographies from the region on topics surrounding the slave and colonial past, I was beginning to wonder what Gambians themselves thought and felt about it. This led me to follow the research question: *how is the past present in people’s knowledge and everyday life in present day Gambia?* Through a broad understanding of memory I try to connect situations, sayings, and phenomena I met in the field to the region’s slave and colonial past. I will thereby show how those parts of the history are remembered directly and indirectly by Gambians I spent time with. Following this question I have chosen to divide the thesis in five chapters, in addition to this first part that introduces the reader to the context and background.

Chapter 1, “Method”, discusses the ethical and practical challenges I met field, in addition to presenting the sites I spent time at, how I gathered data, and those who I did participant observation.

Chapter 2, “Entering Albreda/Juffureh”, is about my stay in the villages and how the “Roots” narrative is implemented in the spatial environment and, hence, presented as an integrated part of the factual history. Memory is presented here as an ongoing process, which get reshaped and transmitted at the meeting point with the tourists.

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3 I refer particularly to the two villages of Albreda/Juffureh when I am writing the villages.
Chapter 3, “We are not mentally independent yet…”, is based on participant observation among informants in the urban area of Greater Banjul. It examines how they seem to relate to these parts of the past, as well as what role some of the historical sites play when seeing the past in the present. The urban youth seemed to pay more attention to the West and the future, and hence appeared to not remember too much regarding the slave and colonial past. The past was the more present in their everyday life than in their direct knowledge.

Chapter 4, “Past, President, and politics”, shifts the focus from my informants to how the President seems to use the past as an instrument for his actions today. It was quite clear that President Jammeh was using the unjust past as a boundary marker between the Muslim Gambia and the secular West. I conducted interviews with what I am referring to as intellectuals from the university, the National Center for Arts and Culture, and one national newspaper, to add perspectives on the informants’ view of the past. These are also laid out in this chapter. Memory was presented by the President as a clear historical narrative, which he constantly kept on advocating publicly, different from the intellectuals who remembered a more complex picture of the past.

Chapter 5, “From progress to egress”, is based on two phenomena I met in the field that proved beneficial to my research question. The reggae culture notion of “Babylon” and “the backway syndrome” work as illustrations of the young people’s attitudes to the West, but also draws attention to the ambivalence I met regarding their longing to emigrate whilst at the same time holding a critical view of Western morals. Here, memory is presented through these phenomena as indirect ways of relating to the past.

The thesis will use empirical data and relevant theory to show how the past becomes present among my informants through using a wider sense of memory. Since I experienced a certain lack of knowledge and interest regarding the past, I have gone from a narrow focus on memory in terms of clear narratives and what people directly remember, to a wider sense where present day phenomena are included as connections to the past. In the different chapters I will illustrate which situations I experienced as connected to the past, and hence also make it clear when my informants directly commented about the past, when they did something clearly connected to the past, and when I interpreted the situations as manifestation of historical processes and phenomena. The West will prove to play an important role in this regard, and I will argue that a strong focus and longing for the West can seem to overshadow

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4 Fort Bullen is pictured on the front page.
both my informants’ interest and their memories of parts of the past. This longing is seen here as a translation of the past from time to space; a way of seeing the sense of time now being linked to the sense of space. I encountered paradoxes in my both my informants’ and the President’s sayings and actions, in addition to both direct and indirect ways of relating to the past. As mentioned, this has led me to stress the wider understanding of memory and its contradictory nature.
Chapter 1- Method

Appearance as a factor
Unni Wikan (1992) talks about looking for data beyond words and, hence, seeing how data can be hidden in between the lines. Wikan’s notion of resonance, together with Mark Moberg’s (2008:3) emphasis on reading everything “within a broader sociocultural context”, made me reflect upon what role my appearance played in the meeting with local people. My mother is Norwegian and my father Gambian, so my brown skin color together with my dreadlocks made it seemingly very easy for men, ranging from 18 to 30 to approach me, often yelling “Ras Tafari! Rastaman!”, trying to get my attention. This was especially common at the beach were I went at least a couple of days during the week to stroll and clear my head. This may seem like a nice gesture and welcome to the country, but every time I decided to head over to the guy, or when he ran up to me, it turned out that he wanted to sell me something. After a while it started to make me upset, because I felt that even though I had stayed in the country for a couple of months, and even though my father is Gambian, I was still treated as a tourist. I was somehow constantly reminded that I was not Gambian, and everybody I passed was hence fully aware that I am a “half caste”, a term used on people with one European and one African parent, being half black and half white. I was called “half caste” sometimes and I have no impression that it is negatively rooted; to me it seemed just as a term to describe someone. Whether it would be seen offending in Norway I am not going to discuss here.

Sites
My fieldwork was divided in two sites. I spent the first month in the villages of Albreda/Juffureh, and the last four in the urban area at my father’s house.

The villages of Albreda/Juffureh are used actively in the tourism sector as the place the main character in “Roots”, Kunta Kinte was born. The villages are located in the north bank region about 30 kilometers inland and they were an important part of the Atlantic slave trade, where you still can find standing historical sites from the past that was built by the French and the British. The villages are often referred to as one; it is only a football field that separates them
which make it look like one bigger village. I stayed at Kunta Kinte roots camp\textsuperscript{5} in Albreda. The “Roots” narrative is hence presented to tourists in the physical spatial environment in both of the villages, which gave me the feeling that speaking of them as one village seems more accurate when relating to the tourists. On the welcome sign on the Albreda dock it says “Welcome to Albreda/Juffureh”. After reading “Roots” I decided to start my research in these villages, because I thought they were a good place to start when searching for data on how Gambians related to the past. I was able to gather fruitful data, but felt there were limitations beyond the villagers’ knowledge of the “Roots” story they usually present. This, along with questions raised by the villagers regarding the urban youth’s longing for the West, prompted me to move to the urban area after a month and continue my research there.

For the rest of my stay I lived in my father’s house in the Banjul Greater area. This region stretches from the capital Banjul in north, through Serekunda, to Kotu in south, and to Fajikunda in the east. The whole area has a population of approximately 500,000 (CIA 2015) inhabitants and consists of a couple of tourist areas, in addition to different standard residential areas spread over the whole region. The region borders the Atlantic Ocean in the west, which attracts many tourists and makes some parts of the area a very interesting meeting point between European vacationers and local Gambians. I thought that it would widen my data material if I spent the rest of my fieldwork in the urban area, because there I could meet more local people and more tourists, and also because I somehow thought the urban area would consist of a greater mix of people in terms of, for instance, educational level and place of upbringing.

There were both similarities and differences between researching in the rural and urban areas. The similarities I found most striking was what I interpreted as a lack of knowledge and interest regarding the past, which was seemingly replaced by a strong focus on the West, especially among the rural and urban youth. At both sites, I met people with different occupations and marital statuses, but it seemed to be a general lack of faith in their country which made a lot of the conversations I partook in evolves around the West and what you can expect when going there.

\textsuperscript{5} This was the lodge I lived in during my stay in Albreda/Juffureh.
One of the biggest differences was the role the physical spatial environment plays in these particular villages. Albreda/Juffureh’s physical landscape is itself a tourist attraction, and hence gave me a very stark image of the meeting point between the local people and tourists. The flow of people in the villages was also at times very limited because they depend very much upon tourism, an element that became obvious on days when there were only a couple tourists visiting. In the urban area, I had more space to move within and hence more alternatives when deciding how to spend my day. I could visit the university, the beach, go to a club or restaurant, or just stay home at my father’s house, but I was lacking such choice in the villages because it could take three or four hours from the villages to the urban area. This made me carefully choose which days I needed to take a day trip out of the villages. The urban area also gave me bigger variety when choosing who to talk to; I was, for example, able to visit the university whenever I wanted to, or stop by some of the cafes that many of the students use as hangouts in their breaks. I watched TV at my father’s house every day, and I started paying attention to the news because I after a while felt it was a good source for relevant data.

**Gathering data, participant observation**

I have gathered my empirical data mostly through participant observation, in both the rural and the urban area. As will be presented in the chapters did I partake in guided tours in the villages, I was also often sitting with different groups of men who was drinking attaya\(^6\) tea while waiting for visiting tourists. And in the last two weeks of my stay in the villages I was helping out gardening onion, lettuce and pepper. In the urban area I spent a lot time among people on my own age in a fruit outlet in the Senegambia tourist area. Sitting and chatting was something I did very often in my fieldwork because that is how many Gambians spend their days; either with my family at my father’s house, with informants at my own age in the outlet, or with people working in some of the cafés. There was common for the youth just to hang around a certain shop, on a street corner, or at an outlet. Halfway into my fieldwork I found out that some intellectual or academic thoughts on the general connection to the past could be a nice addition to my data, for example interviews with people affiliated with the University of the Gambia (UTG).

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\(^6\)“Attaya is a kind of green tea, which is prepared and consumed in a time-span of several hours. This tea and the ceremony of drinking might be understood as boundary markers (Barth 1969), because they are introduced to strangers as being typically West African” (Dorch, 2004:110).
Interviews
I conducted nine interviews with eight different people. Three of these were working at the university, one editor of a newspaper, and one historian at the National Center for Arts and Culture (NCAC). They were all men. The last three were not affiliated with academia, but working in the café called Attaya café. Of these, two were female and one male. These three were very welcoming and wanted to help me out, but their answers seemed more as a confirmation on the notion I had regarding lack of knowledge and lack of interest when speaking of these particular parts of the past. I interviewed these three at the café and asked them the same questions I asked the intellectuals.

The interviews I conducted with the intellectuals were done in their offices with only the interview subject and me present. The interviews were semi structured, because I had eight to ten questions with me, but it differed from each interview how strictly the questions were followed. My questions worked more like a framework for some of the interviews that seemed more like conversations. The questions I asked were about the past, and how the past related to the present, for example: Were there any positive sides of being a British colony? Or, in what way can you say that the slave and colonial past have an impact on present day Gambia? The fact that the interviews were all with men did seem like a coincident, but it is likely to be the result of uneven gender balance among the university staff, which made it more likely to interview men.

TV and newspapers
I usually watched the ten o’clock news with my father on the Gambia Radio and Television Services channel (GRTS), which is the only Gambian TV channel. I would call GRTS Government-friendly when thinking of the biased way their news is presented. The President seemed to use TV as a forum for spreading his thoughts about the past, especially the injustice done by the British colonial power. They were often stressing the good and importance of the President, and it became quite clear to me that GRTS and the Daily Observer newspaper are on the same political side. It was mostly through TV that I got the data to write chapter 3.

My father used to bring home two newspapers every day: Daily Observer and Foroyaa. Foroyaa, in contrast to Daily Observer, is highly oppositional and very critical towards the Government. This presented the opportunity to keep up to date with the media and to read the societal actualities from two opposite sides on the political spectrum. The Daily Observer had
quite a similar angle to GRTS, and all the reports were written from the Government’s side of the politics. Foroyaa represents the opposition and writes a lot of articles where they ask the Government and President Jammeh questions, for example regarding the lack of free media, and often shed light on the people detained without trial, which they argue are done by the military on behalf of the Government.

**Informants**

In both the villages and the urban area, I mostly hung around people of my own age, ranging from 20 to 30. I still refer to them as informants because that was how I saw most of them during my stay in the field. I had both female and male informants and the three women I spent most time with were all single mothers, two of them were the same age as me, 26, and the last one was a couple of years older. Even though one of them lived in Albreda/Juffureh was she, as the two in the urban area were, very calm and relaxed. I ate dinner and lunch at these women’s houses every now and then and I was also lucky enough to get to know their sons a bit too. These women seemed somehow more relaxed than a lot of my male informants, who kept on talking about the West and how much they wanted a white woman. This was the biggest different between my male and female informants. The women could also at times ask me questions about the West, complain about their life in the Gambia, or utter that they wanted to go with me to Norway. But compared to the men was it very little.

The vast majority of the males I spent time with kept on talking about me giving them a “tubaab” woman because she could help them going to Europe or the US. Besides talking about this, we often discussed football or love. Topics like history and politics was not too common even though we discussed those kinds of matters sometimes. My brothers, who are 11, 15 and 19, were also good sources for data, and hence enabled me to gather data from even younger people as well. I spoke English with my family and informants; it is the country’s official language, so the general level of English is quite good, especially for people younger than the oldest generation.

**A typical day**

In the villages I ate breakfast at the lodge, and lunch and dinner at the village restaurant. I ate my meals with the people working at lodge and restaurant. Mr. Njie, the lodge-owner, owns

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7 This is a common term for a person of European descent, or for a wealthy person, used in the Gambia and Senegal among others.
both so it was the same group of people working at both places. When I was not eating, I sat and talked to the local people, I participated the guided “Roots” tours, or worked in the vegetable garden. After dinner, which used to be served around eight in the evening, I was either hanging out at Liz’s house, or just relaxing in my room.

When I returned to the urban area I ate breakfast and dinner at home with my family, but I ate lunch wherever I found myself. I, more or less, held this routine until I left the country, some months later, on June 17. This was somehow what a normal day looked like in the field. After breakfast I spent time, for example, at the fruit outlet, before returning home in the late afternoon. I usually spent the rest of the day home with my family, watching TV whilst chatting with them.

**Staying with my family**

I knew early in my stay that living with my own family would have methodologically implications. It may have made it easier for me to get close to the people I stayed with, because I knew them before I entered the field. My family seemed more relaxed after spending more and more time with me, and I became more relaxed within the household. I spent most of the evenings at home with my family, partly because I was more relaxed among them than my general informants since I felt I was just a member of the family, not a carrier of wealth. It was also partly because I thought I got fruitful and relevant empirical data from spending time with them. All the hours I spent with my brothers gave me an insight into how life in the Gambia is experienced when using the West as a reference point for looking at the world. It also felt useful spending time with my family, because my father, who has lived in several parts of the world, at times told us, his sons and wife, about his thoughts and opinions regarding political, traditional or religious topics.

My role as an anthropologist within this sphere felt challenging in the beginning when speaking of practical elements like where to write my field-diary, when to take field notes, when to listen as a brother or a son, and when to ask them questions as the anthropologist. My family became aware early on that I found it fruitful to take notes, either mental or physical, of what they told me or what we at times were talking about. In this way, I felt they understood that spending with them would give me extra insights in situations where I did not expect to find anything. This also made it easier for me to write about them in my thesis, because they knew that I found almost everything we talked about somehow relevant for my
fieldwork, trying look holistically on to my field. I was writing my field notes in a small notepad that I always carried in my back pocket. Whenever I came across something to note, I brought out my pad and jotted down my thoughts, observations, or comments from my informants. Both my family and my informants were aware of me doing fieldwork because I always told new people my story. In this way, I felt comfortable making notes in front of them, and I was also being open in the hope of people feeling comfortable around me.

On the other side, staying with my own family may have prevented me from seeing elements that I would have seen if staying with another family. I may have been more relaxed and, hence, defensive in terms of asking follow-up questions at home when looking for relevant elements for my fieldwork, because I was first a family member, rather than a fieldworker. This most likely made the whole household more relaxed, compared to the scenario where they had a stranger in their house. In this sense, it can be thought that I turned off my anthropological self to a greater extent than I would have done if I was staying in another house. There is also a possibility that a family I did not know beforehand would have treated me more like a guest, and in that way given me an experience that is more representative of the general meeting between Western visitors and local people. This would probably also create a different social environment than what I experienced, and which, again, could have changed the outcome of my fieldwork. This is especially the case regarding my oldest brother, who became one of the people I spent the most time with. The feeling of staying with my own family can be connected to the use of senses as an anthropological tool when partaking in everyday stuff within the household. Judith Okely (2012:121) claims that fieldworkers learn through the senses, something I will agree on when, for example, laying on top of the bed all day with my brother, talking about Europe. I somehow understood, and I felt it myself, the frustration of boredom that he felt when seeing his friends moving abroad while he was still in the Gambia.

It was no doubt challenging staying with my own family and using them as informants. Peirano (1998: 115) argues that anthropology at home has traditionally meant Europe. She also explains the notion of nativist ethnography, which builds on the thought that only natives can understand natives and that this means that they are the only suitable judge of the ethnography. Even though I did parts of my fieldwork among my own family, I was never considered a native. My field has been evolving around the relation and connection between the Gambia and the West, and in one regard I can look like a physical embodiment of my
field. Being born and raised in Norway and having a Gambian father can somehow seem to bring the West to the Gambia when I am staying with my family. A “half caste” staying with his Gambian father is no doubt seen as wealthy, but it is my impression that my skin color and place of birth were more important in constituting my class within a Gambian context than my socio-economic position in Norway.

**Ethics**

My gender is an obvious source for creating a methodological framework within the field. It has probably played a part in the relation with local people in general. On my way home from the university one day, I was walking behind a woman who seemed to be in her late twenties who had almost the same skin color as me. During the 5 minutes I walked behind her, at least 6 or 7 different men she passed yelled at her to try and get her attention. I experienced the same, but to a seemingly much lesser extent. I was told by both my brother and informants, that men approach women and not the other way around. This has most likely had an impact on whom and how I gathered data, even though I spent time with both males and females. I also think that it easier for a male anthropologist to get access in certain groups, especially in the villages, because there are some people who carry a notion of traditional gender roles that link women to the home and do not accept modern women with education and male friends.

My age probably also made an impact on who was I able to spend time with. Being in my mid-twenties seemed to lead me to meet people of my own age. I am using pseudonyms for my informants as anonymization to protect their personal life. The intellectuals I interviewed agreed to be named because most of them are public figures and told me their names was already known to local media and political discourses.

The reciprocal dimension in any connection is important when doing fieldwork, and there is one that I want to highlight as ethically challenging. Sey, a woman introduced in chapter 2, and I became quite close friends after knowing each other for some time. She told me early on that she was married to a man living in Europe. I did not think about spending time with a married woman before we started going to the beach a couple of afternoons during the week, only me and her. She quite openly told me about her relationship, and her expectations regarding the future. Her husband was clearly able to help her out economically, so I did not feel she wanted anything from me in that sense, and that may be what seemed so hard to wrap my head around. I was not used to anyone showing an interest in me based on my personal characteristics. I did at times wonder if it was problematic to spend time alone with a married
woman, and I have concluded it should be problematized, but not wrong. Our connection did not contain factors that I anticipated could challenge neither her marriage, nor my position as an anthropologist regarding my moral compass. I got no reactions from either my family, or my informants, regarding spending time with a married woman.

Reciprocity could at times feel hard to obtain when the person I hung out with and I had different expectations of what the relationship would bring. Sometimes it was obvious because I was asked directly if I could help buying a bag of rice or pay for lunch. At other times was it more difficult to know how to act because they uttered a wish that was way over my head to fulfill. An example of such a case was when I and Omoro, a man who used to hang out around the village restaurant, had quite a lot of conversations about different topics. He gave me what I wanted in terms of his thoughts around different topics, and I bought him cigarettes every now and then. What I found difficult was the times he asked if I could bring him a European woman, or if he asked if I could bring him a new cell phone. Even though I bought him cigarettes every now and then, I felt that I was not able to meet his expectations and hence did not complete the reciprocity. A vital reason for this is the thought that, even though I find my informants’ wishes hard to meet, is it their wish, which means that my reciprocal actions have to bear those wishes in mind. It is important to stress that I felt everyone I got to know saw me as an agent because of the Western connotations I seemingly carried, often approaching me because they saw me as a tourist carrying money and wealth.

**Being biased**

There was, and still is, no doubt that my cultural bias had an impact on my fieldwork and what kind of empirical data I was looking for. The history of the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial era has always interested me, and I have always tended to think about this particular history within an exploiter-exploited-framework. When remembering these parts of the past I usually think of it simple terms as the Europeans took advantage of the African continent and its people. I think this has impacted my interpretations of certain situations in the field in a way that has highlighted certain parts of the situation that I could connect to the past. Some situations have been clearer than others, and the people I met may have emphasized the link between the past and the present themselves. But there have been times during the analysis of my gathered data that I have asked myself whether my interpretation is too obvious to me because of what I am looking for. I may have applied explanations based on the past on to certain situations to an extent that it does not seem to be rooted in the actual
empirical data. This illustrates how I have used my previous knowledge as a framework for creating a macro perspective when entering the field, and hence a pointer to how thoughts on the macro level impacts how I have defined data on the micro level.
Figure 1. Map of the villages of Albreda/Juffureh.
Chapter 2- Entering Albreda/Juffureh

I arrived in Albreda/Juffureh on an early afternoon in January. The semester before I conducted my fieldwork I had read anthropological literature from the region, especially on subjects like heritage and roots tourism, colonial impacts and collective memory. I came to the villages with an expectation that the people knew and cared a lot about these parts of the past because these two villages are a key element in the “Roots” narrative, and because the country was a vital part of both the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial era. I did not need to spend too much time in the villages before I understood that the local people’s historical knowledge and interest did not match my expectations.

My original question was grounded upon the thought that all Gambians knew quite a lot about the transatlantic slave trade and the colonial era. Firstly, this was because the official language is a direct effect of the British imperialism, which I thought somehow, forced people to reflect upon their view of the Gambia. Secondly, this was because the transatlantic slave trade is such an infamous historical institution, something that has been an important factor in shaping the whole country’s past. I thought people in general had some kind of interest in these historical periods because they have affected the country in different ways. When, after a while, I understood that it was hard to find out how people directly related to the past, and that I saw this as a lack of knowledge especially regarding the colonial era, I rephrased my question. The lack of knowledge and lack of interest made me focus more on how the past is present in people’s knowledge and everyday life, and hence open for how that lack of knowledge can play a vital part in my understanding.

People’s memories lie inside the mental and material spaces of the group, and the spatial environment that surrounds us makes us rediscover the past in the present because of the illusion that the environment is not changing (Connerton, 1992:37). “It is to our social spaces-those which we occupy, which we frequently retrace our steps, where we always have access, which at each moment we are capable of mentally reconstructing- that we must turn our attention, if our memories are to appear” (Connerton, 1992:37).

This is what I will try to illustrate in this chapter; how people made the past relevant in the present-day villages of Albreda/Juffureh through interaction with tourists and in interaction with their own physical spatial environment. One way I will do this is by making it clear how
the local people incorporate the “Roots” narrative into the broader factual history regarding the transatlantic slave trade. This narrative is incorporated and interpreted in many different ways, and one of the few things that can be said in general terms is that there seems to be a blurred line between facts and fiction when speaking of historical narratives in the villages, which also seems to display the emergence of paradoxes in some villagers’ relation to the past.

This became clear when I attended the guided “Roots” tours, where the guides kept on merging the life of Kunta Kinte into the spatial landscape. This was a tour for tourists arranged by guides hired at the NCAC to show how Albreda/Juffureh played an important role for the slave traders and for the life of Kunta Kinte. At these tours, I shifted between paying attention to the guides, and asking the visiting tourist questions regarding their reasons for coming here and their experience of the villages. I tried to ask both tourists and locals questions that could bring the conversation towards my field of interest, but I found it challenging to ask what I felt was the right questions at the right times because I did not want to intervene or disturb the dynamics of the different groups. I could have asked directly “what do you know about the Gambia as a British colony?”, “What are your memories of the slave trade?”, or “how has the history of slavery and colonialism affected the Gambia today?” But these questions did not prove to be very fruitful for finding the answers to them. I would rather say that they are the foundation for what I have termed ‘lack of interest’ and ‘lack of knowledge’, because I usually got answers that showed me that they did give such questions much attention.

**Gendered knowledge**

There is a broad phenomenon that memories between the genders differ because of differences in education and occupation (Connerton, 1992:28). This was very evident for the villages. All the roles that are for tourism are filled by men, and the tour guides are an especially good source for data and information. This means that it is usually men that are interacting with the tourists, either as guides, as restaurant workers, or as boat-drivers etc. The women were preoccupied with garden work, cooking, cleaning and watching their children. The tourists who come to visit Albreda/Juffureh are coming for so-called “Roots” tourism. “Roots” tourism here means tourism that is based on African roots and heritage, but also tourism that is connected to Haley’s “Roots” story. People are coming to see how their African forefathers lived, how they were treated by the slave traders, and also how the still
standing constructions of the villages were relevant in the slave- and colonial era. Besides the factual history, they incorporate another historical narrative in all these components. This narrative is arguably the most important reason for why Albreda/Juffureh is so essential when speaking of “Roots” tourism in the Gambia.

It was clear that historical knowledge in Albreda/Juffureh was very much gendered. Of all the women I asked questions regarding my research subject, I only got a few sentences about Kunta Kinte. Some women could tell me that white Europeans came to the land, captured Africans and then took them to Europe. When I asked or tried to start a conversation about the colonial era, there was no response. Asking the men was more informative, even though not all of them could tell me much about the colonial era. Amadou, a single 29 year old man from Serekunda who has worked on the lodge cooking, cleaning, painting, and gardening for a couple of years told me that “independence is good, and then you have your rights…No independence, no freedom”, when I asked him about the colonial era. He said the French did better things in Senegal than what the British did in the Gambia. Badou is the same age as Amadou and works at the restaurant in Albreda, living by himself in Juffureh. He said the same as Amadou, that independence is good, but that certain things were also fine under British rule without being able to point at specific elements. Not getting to deep answers made me ask several different people about this topic. I asked two of the local guides about it and one of them immediately admitted that he did not know too much about this part of the past. The guide who sat beside him answered that “It had negative consequences for the country; the British took natural resources from the Gambia to Europe. The French built Dakar before they left, the British did not”. A short conversation I had with 19 year old Maddi in Juffureh about the colonial era illustrates the answer all the women gave me. She was sitting in the village bantaba when I sat down next to her and asked her if she could tell me something about the Gambia as a British colony. She replied: “British what?” I said: “the Gambia as a British colony; C O L O N Y”. After I had spelled the word she just looked at me while she repeated the word “colony” several times for herself, like she tried to remember what she associated with it. She could not tell me anything so after a while I thanked her for her time and headed down to Albreda again.

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8 The central meeting place of the village. This is where they hold meetings and discussions at certain times of the day (Kingsland 1977).
The “Roots”

In 1976, the American publishing company Doubleday published the novel “Roots”, written by the African-American writer Alex Haley. Haley had for several years been longing to find out where in Africa he had his heritage. And in 1967, Haley went to the village of Juffureh where he conducted research on his family history. Haley made several trips to the Gambia. During one of these, he visited Juffureh and had the experience that enabled him to tie family stories from his American relatives to an oral tradition of an actual African ancestor, Kunta Kinte, an adolescent kidnapped into slavery and shipped to America (Wright, 2011:302). One day in 1767, Kunta Kinte was going out to cut some wood to make a drum for his younger brother when he was caught by several men. He was brought to Annapolis, Maryland, in America as a slave and was never able to return to his home in Africa (Haley, 1976). The book was an instant hit and became very popular among people all around the world, especially among African Americans. “Roots” was also made into a TV mini-series and was seen by millions people worldwide (Wright, 2011). The “Roots” narrative was about to make a vital impact on how African Americans saw their own relationship with Africa, and how the people of the Gambia interpreted their local history (Wright, 2011).

After the colonial era, the Gambia’s economy had been dependent upon exporting groundnuts to the international market, but people were also seeing a growing market for tourism. This resulted in the NCAC looking at both Haley’s experience and the research of the Oral History and Antiquities Division (OHAD), on the different historical sites associated with the slave trade, in order to start initiatives that could have a boosting effect on the country’s tourism, especially on the tourist market of the African diaspora (Bellagamba, 2009:457). The government and the cultural-historical institutions saw the potential in parts of the land to promote it as an attractive tourist destination. According to Liz Gijanto (2011), it is obvious when coming to the villages of Albreda/Juffureh today how the local people are using and reshaping the past for commercial ends (Merriman, 1991:8 referred in Gijanto, 2011:229).

Just a few years after the publication, Haley admitted that he had taken the start of his novel from a book called “the African” and that his own story was fictional. The “Roots” narrative’s fundamental structures, regarding the slavery both in Africa and America, are said to be true. But the details that can be said to make “Roots” into the special story which gave the slave trade a human face are not based on historical facts (Wright, 2011). The truth value of the
local people’s dissemination of the history was very interesting to reflect upon when participating in the guided “Roots” tours in the villages.

The guided “Roots” tour

During my stay in the villages, at least a couple of tourists came every day. On Mondays and Thursdays, big tourist groups came from Banjul by boat, usually through local tour operators. The tourists coming to Albreda/Juffureh are almost without exception visiting because of the historical sites that are to be found there. The guided tours always start with the guides meeting the group of tourists at the dock and telling them some welcoming words about the villages’ historical significance. Several times did the different guides also mention that the tour we are about to take part in is based upon a very dark and unpleasant part of the past, but that “we are not here to point fingers to the Europeans, but learn from our forefathers mistakes”. After the introduction, the tour group is taken to the slave trade museum in Albreda, where you can read and find pictures about different segments of the transatlantic slave trade. The museum has corners where they focus on Gambian- Americans who are seen as important for political or ideological reasons. It also has a corner for Alex Haley and Kunta Kinte. From the museum, the tour goes from Albreda, across the football field, and into the village of Juffureh.

The first stop in Juffureh was always at the village bantaba, where we met the alkalo, the village chief, who is an old woman speaking the local language Mandinka so that the guide translate the few words she says. She always welcomes the tourists by showing her appreciation for them leaving the hotel and spending the day visiting this historical village. Spending roughly ten minutes at the Juffureh bantaba, we left for what the guides constantly referred to as the highlight of the tour, visiting the compound⁹ of the Kinte family.

During the two minutes’ walk up to the Kinte- compound, the women of the village gathered around the tour group as we were walking, trying to sell us different homemade things. Arriving at the Kinte compound, it was perfectly normal that women come up to the compound asking if the tourists want to hold their newborns in exchange for money. At the compound, the guides usually present Kunta Kinte’s oldest living relative, which is the woman Jamariama Fofana, the 8th generation since Kunta Kinte. They also pass around some

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⁹ This is the Gambian term on a house where the whole family lives.
different pictures: one with Binta Kinte, who was the 7th generation Kinte; one of Levar Burton, which portrays a young Kunta Kinte in the “Roots” miniseries; and one of Alex Haley with several of his relatives in Juffureh.

The last stop of the tour was a visit to James Island, or Kunta Kinte Island as the President renamed it in 2011. From participating on several tours, I learned from the guides that the island, throughout its history, has been used by several different groups of people, both the Portuguese and now Latvia has used the island. But it was the English, who captured the island from the Dutch in 1661, that named the island after James, the Duke of York. It was the island’s strategic position that made it so attractive. It is located about 3 km from the dock in Albreda in the mouth of the river Gambia. The British made the island a place where they kept the strongest and most aggressive slaves before they were taken to America. According to the guides, the slaves were told that anyone who managed to escape and swim from the island to the main land of Albreda and touch the freedom flag would be freed. But the strong current of the river and the local African’s poor swimming skills meant that not one single slave made it back to Albreda by swimming.

Whilst walking through the island’s ruins, the tourists were shown what the different places of the island were used for. One of the parts that used to touch and upset people was the small dungeon where the islands most aggressive slaves were kept for many days and only given enough food and water so that they would not die. The dungeon is about 4 square meters and has a small opening so fresh air could enter. There are also two marks at the same height on two of the walls opposite of each other, where handcuffs were attached, so the slaves easier could be controlled. The guides also used to mention that this is where they kept Kunta Kinte, because he was a very strong headed and stubborn boy.

On one of the guided tours, I spoke with a white British man whilst sitting in the Kinte compound and listening to the guide presenting the family and the 8th and 9th generation Kintes. Shortly after the guide said that Alex Haley had been searching for his roots and found them in the village of Juffureh, the British man told me that “Haley was searching for many years, but he failed. Today we know that the Kinte family are most likely not Mr. Haley’s relatives”. I replied by saying that I agree that there is no clear evidence of Haley’s roots, but since both himself, the Kinte family and the people in Juffureh believe that he found them here, it really does not matter. He agreed with me and smiled as he continued to enjoy the
compound visit. His comment can, however, be a hint of the fusion of the “Roots” narrative into history, and the unclear line between factual and fictional history.

“It is as if Haley created a fiction about the slave trade, then that fiction became the accepted truth, and memory of the fiction itself blurred over time, taking our understanding of history further from the mark” (Wright, 2011:304). An interesting element that can point to the fusion between fact and fiction is the use of Kunta Kinte when presenting the landscape of James Island. The novel, “Roots”, says nothing about an Island in the river mouth. When reading about the capturing of Kunta Kinte, Haley does not mention anything about James Island. It says that he did not leave the boat until he disembarked in Annapolis, Maryland in America. According to the book, he was going to cut some wood to make a drum for his younger brother, Lamin. When he found a stump of tree he wanted to use as drum wood, he was approached by several men. Kunta understood quickly that something was not right. Instead of running out of fear he tried to fight them, but four men were too much for a young Kunta Kinte (Haley, 1976).

“Roots” heritage trail
What is interesting about this part of the story is that in the woods close to Juffureh I found something called the “Roots” heritage trail. It is located about 50 meters east of Juffureh, and its start is marked by a big white “gate” built out of stone with “ROOTS heritage trail” written in red. On my way to the trail for the first time I met a young man named Jo (18) who said he could guide me through the trail and explain the story behind it as we were walking. Jo told me that this track was set up along the trail where Kunta Kinte ran when he tried to escape his own capture. The trail is formed out of stones on both sides and stretches for about 200 meters, across the old ruins of the Portuguese chapel of San Domingo, to the waterfront down by the river where a small stump of tree is supposed to mark where Kunta Kinte was captured. On our way back from the waterfront Jo told me that Kunta did not want to run from the Europeans. He said that Kunta himself tried to fight them while his friends ran away. Jo could also tell me that Kunta had five children with a white woman when he came to Europe. The book says, however, that after living as a slave in America for some time, he met an enslaved woman named, Fanta Toure, or Bell as her master called her. Bell was an African woman who gave birth to Kunta’s only child Kizzy Kinte (Haley, 1976).
Jo’s remarks indicate a sort of creative retelling, which might appear as a paradox, a paradox that kept on popping up throughout my fieldwork. When saying that Kunta Kinte had children with a European woman, he is somehow turning Kunta into a modern Gambian. To marry a European is a dream of many Gambians today because it is seen as a means to getting to the West, which again is seen as equal to an improved life. Marrying a white European will then, among many Gambians today, appear a story of success. James Ferguson (2013) illustrates this when referring to how the 1820’s Ngoni band of southern Africa made people subordinate themselves and be voluntarily captured in order to becoming a part of Ngoni social system, which would improve their lives. Kunta’s original reputation is based on his stubbornness and pride in being African and Muslim. Seeing James’ comments in the light of the present day, the Gambia makes Kunta appear as both stubborn and proud, but also as a modern Gambian who somehow wants to be captivated because it will improve his life. In this way, Kunta is still a symbol of the longing for an early African autonomy. At the same time, he represents the modern Gambian man who is able to use the visiting European women as means of improving his life. This would make him a success story today, but also a perfect illustration of a “bumster”, who reached the highest level of “bumsing” by getting to Europe on a permanent basis (Nyanzi, Rosenberg-Jallow and Bah, 2005:563).

Jo’s comment about Kunta’s refusal to run is correct according to the book, but the whole heritage trail is constructed on a narrative that includes his effort to escape. It is built on something that does not fit with the original story. He also told me that Kunta went to the woods with his friends, but the book says that Kunta went with a dog. The interesting twist regarding the trail is that it fits, to an extent, with the TV miniseries’ plot. In the miniseries he runs quite a portion of the hunt at the beach, while in reality the main part of the trail is located in the woods. This can tell us that Haley’s story is getting transmitted based on both the book’s and the miniseries’ narrative. The previously mentioned San Domingo chapel was, according to Gijanto (2011), never a Portuguese chapel, but a Juffureh factory. This can illustrate the point that “the physical vestiges of the Atlantic world are either ignored or consumed into this narrative, and the various features, structures, and ruins are, in turn, given new identities and meanings”(Gijanto, 2011:235).

A big portion of what Jo told me does not fit with the original “Roots” narrative Alex Haley created, but it fits with the miniseries. This illustrates how the local people integrate and re-shape the “Roots” narrative to make it fit to the surrounding landscape. Jo is adding some
parts to the story about Kunta Kinte so it fits the trail he walked me through, the same way as the guides do on James Island, even though neither Haley’s book nor the TV miniseries ever mention Kunta being taken to any island.

The changing of the island’s name from James to Kunta Kinte Island was to give the island a Gambian name and to honor the man who has become a national symbol of Gambian and African pride. The local guides wear blue t-shirts with the writings “Save Kunta Kinte Island” above a drawing of the Island. The island is getting smaller every year because of erosion from the water. The villagers often complained about the government’s lack of action regarding saving the island’s original size. This can also be said to understate the significance and importance of Kunta Kinte; a UNESCO world heritage site is named after a folk figure. Seeing the guides wearing the shirts gives an impression that there is no question about his role in the past, and hence in the present. Gijanto (2011:234) claims that these ruins are in direct opposition to the landscape that is created by Haley and is constantly reinvented within the process of memory transmission between guides and tourists.

Jo’s way of retelling this part of the past stresses the point I am trying to make about the past being interpreted based on different elements and is, hence, presented as one singular narrative. This can be a narrative, or elements of narratives, shared by a local community, like Kunta Kinte being taken to James Island, which there was no question about when asking the people of Albreda/Juffureh. Or it can be narratives on an individual level, like James’ own interpretations of Kunta Kinte having several children with a white woman in Europe.

**Present day situations as continuation of the past**

Through participant observation on the guided tours, spending hours on the local restaurant, and talking to local people, I gathered data that made me feel I was able to make my own interpretation of the meeting point between some of the tourists and the local people.

Maybe the most striking phenomena that were evident to me during my stay in the villages were the constant focus and interest on Europe and the tourists, especially among the male inhabitants. The majority of men in the villages work in something related to tourism, which means that whenever there are tourists in the villages they have the opportunity to make money. On days when there are few visiting tourists, many men are just sitting drinking attaya, waiting for visitors. The big majority of the visiting tourists are white Europeans from
England and the Netherlands. To me this created an interesting picture, because it somehow looks like history is repeating itself. There are Gambian men sitting around the whole day waiting for tourists to come to their village. The Gambians are dependent on people visiting their village in order to be able to make money. These particular villages were, according to the local people and the guides, a very central place for the British and the French in parts of the Atlantic slave trade. Europeans came here to enslave the local people and take them to America and Europe for labor, today we see the local people warmly welcoming the Europeans. We could say that the past is paradoxically shaping the present because the European tourists are visiting these villages because of what early Europeans did. That the past can seem to shape or be manifested in the present was also commented upon by a young British woman I met at one of the guided “Roots” tours.

At one of these tours I started talking to two British women of African origin in their mid-twenties, who were visiting the Gambia for one week. Towards the end of the tour, sitting on James Island waiting to embark the boat, I asked them how they felt emotionally after seeing the ruins of the slave trade on the island. Fatima said she felt bizarre walking around on the Island when she knew what had been going on there. Another point I found interesting was a comment she made about the black-white relation on the boat from the dock in Albreda to the Island. The tourists get their lunch and drinks on the boat, and it was the image that Gambians were serving a group of white tourists that reminded her of the social differences that have been acted out between black and white people. “I feel like this shows us that there is still some sort of hierarchy” she told me. She was pointing to the fact that the past asymmetrical relations between Africans and Europeans still can seem to be acted out in certain situations to day. This is not to say that the boat situation actually represents anything more than one human being serving lunch to another. But what can be said is that Fatima’s remark is a good example of how the past gets manifested in the present on an individual level. When she saw this situation as a continuation of the early constructed hierarchal differences between Africans and Europeans, there were glimpses of the past she saw in this situation.

As Fatima experienced, I also saw a situation I interpreted as continued hierarchical differences between the local Gambians and European tourists. I often felt a neocolonial

10 “The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside” (Nkrumah, 1965:1).
feeling whilst sitting in the restaurant waiting for visitors, or meals. It is the only restaurant in
the villages and is located about 80 meters from the dock; very early in my stay I got the
feeling that this is the village central point. The big tour groups that come twice a week do not
use the restaurant because they eat their lunch on the boat that takes them back and forth to
James Island. But at least a couple of tourists come by car every day. These visitors do not
travel with a tour operator, but privately, and very often, with a young Gambian they met at or
outside the hotel. He or she works as something between a guide and a friend. One morning
after eating breakfast, I sat outside the restaurant doing some jotting when a taxi with two
Gambian men and two female tourists arrived. After stepping out of the taxi one of the men
took off his headscarf and started to wipe one of the women’s face. I heard the man sitting next
to me with a low voice commenting: “bumster”, and told me that you can tell this man is a
“bumster” because he is acting weird. Treating the woman with excessive care and
tenderness, to a degree that it seems unnatural, is a characteristic you only see in certain
relationships in the Gambia.

Sitting day in and day out, meeting different “bumsters” coming to the restaurant with
tourists, gave me the impression that there are clearly elements in present-day Gambia that
one can argue are rooted in the big global differences that the slave and colonial past created.
These Gambians are organizing the tourist’s day trip to Albreda/Juffureh and are seen by the
local people as “bumsters”. “Bumsters” are young men or women who initiate relationships
with tourists based on economic reclamation. The relationship can be based on sex,
friendship, guiding, transporting etc., but it is usually an economic incentive driving the
relation from the Gambian’s side. “The 'Babylon syndrome', in which young men daydream
of, fantasize about, discuss, spend long evenings wishfully planning, and aspire towards
travelling to Europe or North America in order to escape the misery encapsulated in Gambian
existence, is an open ambition among “bumsters” ”(Nyanzi et al.2005:563). This can be
connected to what historian Hassoum Ceesay at the NCAC told me about the past affecting
the Gambian society today and hence that:

All predicaments can be traced back. The inferior mentality goes back to the slave trade, and today
people crave to migrate, look at “the backway syndrome”\(^\text{11}\). People have lost confidence in their own
ability, now it’s all about Western ideas and Western education.

\(^{11}\) “The backway”/”backway syndrome” is an emic concept of the unofficial route many Gambians travel to
Europe by boat, crossing the Mediterranean Sea. This phenomenon emerged because of challenges many
Gambians meet when applying for visa to be able to leave the African continent.
Ceesay can seem to emphasize what I felt as a feeling of neocolonialism. Even though this is not representative for all the people I met or observed in the field, it is an indication of a trend I saw. When talking to intellectuals, it was the mental manifestation of past hierarchal differences that was stressed as the most important way that the past becomes present in the Gambia. The bumster-tourist relation is an example of how young Gambian men see the female tourist as a means for going to Europe. With no faith in their own national system in providing a decent life, the female tourist has become their “white ticket” to Babylon (Nyanzi et al. 2005). The phenomenon of “bumsing" is a complex one, but I am here try to make clear how we can look at it in the light of the past. With the quotes in mind, it looks like bumsing can illustrate how the slave and colonial era indirectly affects the present first and foremost through local people’s lack of faith in themselves, which seems to put them in a somehow subordinated position in relation to the tourists from Europe. It is interesting though paradoxically, as Ferguson (2013) claims, that people at certain times have seen dependency as means to freedom.

The bumsters I met in the field can seem to “aspire to dependence” (Ferguson, 2013:231) when clearly subordinating themselves to serve the European tourists in which they are affiliated with. “Those rendered ‘independent’ of the wage labor system, then, do not remain happily independent, but rather seek (with more or less success) to build up new dependencies” (Ferguson, 2013:231). In other words, there is a certain need to be dependent on others. Many Gambians aspire to migrate using European visitors as agents so that they can participate in the wage labor system, because of lack of jobs within the national economy and because the longing for the Western labor markets can be fulfilled by engaging with people who already are a part of it (Andersson, 2014).

“Leave the white people alone”

My own impression of the relation between the local people and the tourists may have been rooted in a situation I experienced at my first “Roots” tour. The tour group left the freedom flag pole for the museum and I was just starting to talk to some of the tourists about their impression of the villages so far, and the reasons behind their visit. I was in the front part of the group when a young man from Albreda tapped me on my shoulder and pointed me to a soldier who was walking at the tail of the group. The soldier, who is there for the tourist’s

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12 This is how academics refer to what “bumsters” do. It is the verb version of the “bumster” concept.
safety, asked me what I was doing. I told him who I was, why I was talking to the tourists and that I had a research permit from the NCAC that he could see. He did not seem interested in neither my reason for talking to the tourists nor my research permit when he told me to “leave the white people alone”. This phrase upset a lot and made very angry.

Ever since I arrived in the villages I had been considered a tubaab. When this soldier then told me to leave the white people alone it was obvious that this man did not see me as the same as he saw the rest of the tourist group. This made me confused because the majority of the people in Albreda/Juffureh saw me as a tubaab. This soldier had the authority to stop my research because I was bothering the white people with my questions; I interpreted it as a product of neocolonial attitudes and inferior ways of thinking. Distinguishing me from the rest of the group based on skin color made me think that he mentally puts them on a pedestal I cannot reach, even though it is true that the tourists are important in terms of spending money in the villages.

I talked to some informants in the villages about this situation. Badou shared his view on this particular subject; ”Slavery is not abolished, white people can do what they want because black people worship them” was his first reply when I told him why I got upset. He said that he thinks that black people should be proud of who they are and stop looking at white people as something better than themselves. Aminata is a Belgian woman in her late fifties who used to spend several months of the year in the Gambia, first and foremost in Albreda/Juffureh. She always stays at the lodge contributing by cleaning and serving the other guests. Aminata and I had many conversations, with topics ranging from African politics to European history. Her many visits to these villages made her a fruitful source of data, and a good friend. She could tell me that at least one person from each compound lives in Europe and sends money, and that this keeps reproducing the local image that white people equals money. She said it makes the circle: “The villagers are also in constant contact with tourists which make them aware of all the material things they themselves do not possess”. Aminata was under the impression that the local people of the villages are maybe in too much contact with European tourists because the luxury and opportunities they inhabit becomes so evident and that this also affects how the local people look at themselves. “Only discussion for 18 years has been Europe” can work as a representative statement from Aminata about what interests the local people and how the tourism affects them. She thinks that some of the local people suffer from a complex of inferiority where they see that white Europeans are superior to themselves. A point that can
be linked back to the solider who in my view protected the tourists because of their importance for the villages. The situation can be an example of how the local people may seem to “aspire to dependency” (Ferguson, 2013).

**Would Kunta Kinte like the image of Juffureh today?**

Another interesting observation was the difference between the local people’s presentation of Kunta Kinte and the way they themselves acted in the meeting point with the tourists. At the guided tours, when the local people presented Kunta Kinte, they emphasized his strength, pride, and stubbornness. As the book says, Kunta Kinte was very proud of his African descent. He refused to accept his American name, Toby Waller, because he was too proud to undermine his African roots in the same way he was proud of his Islamic worldview and birthplace Juffureh: ”And the main thing he wanted him to understand was why he refused to surrender his heritage, and why he would rather die a free man on the run than live out his life as a slave” (Haley, 1976:256).

In this context, there was a visible difference between the two villages. The people of Albreda presented themselves more relaxed and were, in my experience, less pushy and eager when meeting the tourist groups. When the tourist groups were embarking at the dock, most of the women of Albreda were already busy cooking or working in the garden, while the men either helped the local guides or just stayed sitting, drinking attaya while watching the newly arrived tourists’ first meeting with the guides. The setting changed a bit after crossing the football field on our way to Juffureh.

As previously mentioned, it was obvious that the people of Albreda/Juffureh saw the tourists as possible carriers of money. What struck me was the way the people of Juffureh presented Kunta Kinte to the tourists, compared to the way they appeared themselves. To me it seemed like a paradox that the whole “Roots” tour is based on a character that became famous and important because of his proudness about his African roots and Islamic faith, and that the local people seemingly do not stress their pride when offering their babies to tourists and stalking the tour group in chase of money. I started wondering what Kunta Kinte would have thought if he came back today and saw the interaction between the local inhabitants and the tourists.
My definition of proudness may differ from the villagers’, and they do not have to see it as a paradox the way I do. But I cannot help having Mr. Ceesay’s words about “all predicaments can be traced back” in mind when reflecting upon the mechanisms in charge in this type of interaction between European tourists and the local villagers. We have to bear in mind how many of the villagers see the tourists as a crucial element in the struggle to make ends meet. Aminata told me that “some of the families keep the kids home at days they know the tourists are coming, they are almost raised to think that all westerners got money”, maybe simply because children can generate more money from the tourists when they stand on the side of the road singing “Welcome! Welcome!” I asked Lamin, one of the first guides I met in the villages, what he thought about the children singing the tourists welcome: “Slavery is still around in another form”, was his comment while he pointed towards a group of children dancing in the streets in front of a group of tourists. Djbril did not agree with Lamin and claimed that “the focus on tourists is unproblematic because the tourists help a lot of people in the village”. Another guide named Lamin was, however, very clear on his opinion regarding the singing children: “I don’t like that the kids are standing singing “welcome”. Their parents don’t think about the future. I want my kids to go to school and don’t focus on the tourists. This is slavery; some of the parents even sell their children!”

I asked myself; what would Kunta Kinte think if he came back today? Would he have like the local villagers’ behavior towards the tourists? I asked a couple of people this question and they all answered “no, he wouldn’t have like it”. My question seemed angled so there is a chance they answered what they thought I wanted to hear. But it was, nonetheless, interesting seeing the discrepancy between themselves and the characteristics of Kunta Kinte. Maybe this is a reasonable effect when the villagers of Juffureh are shaping their identity around the “Roots” narrative at the same time as they create a tourist landscape to foster this narrative (Gijanto, 2011)? It looks like another example of paradoxes that I met during my fieldwork.

The “Roots” narrative’s incorporation into the villagers’ memory and identity is, in important ways, done at the meeting point with tourists. The relevance of Kunta Kinte and the surrounding landscape became very important when meeting the visiting people. Seeing then how the visitors were seen as carriers of wealth, money and artefacts, can make us understand that the local’s important task was to present Kunta Kinte and the “Roots” narrative, as an integrated part of the slave history. Because they, as local people, present what the tourists want to see and experience, they have no obligation to act in a manner that would make Kunta
Kinte proud. Said in other words; why should they not be eager trying to make money from the visitors when they already have made the “Roots” tour authentic for the same visitors?

Lamin’s view of the children seems to emphasize the thoughts regarding neocolonialism and local mental inferiority. Claiming that slavery is not abolished sounds like an alternative way of seeing neocolonial elements in the present day society. Djibril, though, may look like a free human who is liberated from the critical mindset concerning African-European relations in the Gambia. Or he may seem like a man who is “aspiring to dependency” by depending on the visitors. His way of seeing it reflects my point about interpretational differences between one individual and another. Lamin saw slavery and uneducated parents, Djibril saw smart people taking advantage of a tourist industry that have become important for large parts of the villages.

The local people’s way of remembering the past look like a story rooted in historical facts with a lot of elements from a fictional story (Haley, 1976). The combination of the factual history and a constructed narrative presented at the meeting point between tourists and locals by using the surrounding landscape, looks like an extension of the notion that memories are lying in the mental and material spaces of the group, and that our vison of the spatial environment as static makes us able to see the past in the present (Connerton, 1992). These villages are good illustrations of how just how the spatial environment is actively used when presenting a historical narrative, and hence continually making the past present.
Figure 2. Fort Louvel in Banjul.
Source: Author
Chapter 3- “We are not mentally independent yet…”

In the second chapter I have focused on my stay in the villages of Albreda/Juffureh and how the local people remember the past by combining different narratives. Even though their knowledge and interest for especially the colonial era do not appear very significant, I would say that the local people of these two villages know parts of the past regarding the transatlantic slave trade and the “Roots” narrative. In this chapter I will turn my focus to the urban part, the Banjul Greater area, which is the central urban region of the Gambia.

I will continue on the question of how the past is present in people’s knowledge and everyday life, but here focus will be on the lives of people in the urban area. I will start this chapter by giving a short introduction on how I conducted my fieldwork among the urban youth and how I found some interesting elements in ways I thought I would not find anything. As in the villages, the lack of findings can be said to have shaped the rest of my fieldwork in the urban area.

My urban fieldwork

After spending time in the villages, I thought it would be easier to have conversations directly on my topic of interest in the urban area. This was because I associated the city with educated people, the university, and the national TV and newspapers. I thought people knew more about certain parts of the past and, at least, showed more interest because of the big variation of educated people, together with urban people working in the formal economy. But in a similar way as what happened in the villages, I felt a bit disappointed when I after about a month understood that historical happenings and impacts were not the topics that young urban Gambians offered most thoughts on. Two of the locations where I thought I would find people who could discuss my topic where at the Managerial Development Institute (MDI), which is a part of the university, and on Attaya Café which is placed right across the street of West African International University (AIU). It has a lot of international students who use to come to the café in their breaks. Even though I met a few students, they did not show any particular interest regarding the past. The answers I usually got were that she or he did not know about what I asked, and what was an even more common reaction was that the person had never given my question a thought.
At my first visit to MDI, I walked around on campus trying to see if there was anyone to approach. On a bench, not too far from the teachers’ office, I sat down in lack of courage to approach anyone. After jotting some observations, a young man sat down next to me. The man introduced himself as Pa and told me he was 20 years old and studied business. We started talking about life in the Gambia and how it is to be a student here. Pa said that he did not like the student life in the country because everybody is focusing on Europe to such a great extent. After a while I started telling him about the reasons for me being here and what I was focusing on. I told him that I had spent some time in the villages and that I felt there was a kind of disinterest when speaking of the country’s slave and colonial past. Pa told me that “people in the Gambia doesn’t want to look backwards, they rather want to direct themselves towards Europe and the West. People are done with the slavery and colonial era, and want to focus on a positive new life rather being stuck in the unpleasant past”. The anthropologist Rijk van Dijk (1998) argues that the ideological rejection of the ´pasts´ is an important part of nostalgia. He is saying that a yearning for a past, an evocation of a collective memory, can arise within the culturally specific image of the future. Claiming that nostalgia seems like a dialogue between a yearning for a past and a longing for a perceived future, a utopia. The selection of memories may depend on representations of the future (van Dijk, 1998:157). This can be interesting when looking at Pa’s claim about future oriented students focusing on Europe and the West. It can make us able to look at the question from an opposite angle; the future is shaping the past. The representations of the future for Pa’s student friends seems to be based on a fusion of time and space where the concept of Europe contains the ideals for a spatial and a temporal longing. There is a focus on individual spatial mobility, which is replacing the focus on temporal dynamics of societal progress (Ferguson, 2006:91), an orientation towards a future in the West as a result of lost patience regarding their own society. If this, in van Dijk’s terms, is affecting what and how you remember, then it seems to cause forgetting and selective memories: forgetting in terms of a general disinterest and lack of knowledge, and selective in terms of a simplified (though correct to a certain extent) picture of the past, for example simplified memories regarding the colonial era as was shown in the villages.

At Attaya Café I spoke with Mansour, a man in his late twenties. Mansour works at the café, and I started talking to him while sitting in the bar drinking a cup of tea. I made it clear to him, too, that I was surprised that the interest and knowledge regarding the slave and colonial past was not more evident among the people I had spoken to so far. “Gambians lose their
history because so many people don’t know the history and don’t have any interest in it either”, was his reply to my comment. Pa’s opinion can be clarified by my attempts to discuss this topic with the other women working in the café. The women working in the café had very similar response to my questions regarding the past as the women in the villages; they had not offered this much thought or interest. I spent some time on the beach walking around trying to see if there were any local or European people I could talk to. I had at least two or three long conversations with some Gambian women, but very often we ended up talking about their love life and how their ex-boyfriends had betrayed them by going to Europe in search for opportunities. At that time it felt irrelevant what the women said, but it actually proved to be an interesting view they unfolded for me. When many young men are migrating to Europe these days, the women’s voices often seemed muted. It proved to give me a suiting introduction to my urban fieldwork, which was very much characterized by young Gambians who were focused on a future in the West, in search of what they called “greener pastures”.

The fruit outlet
One day I stopped by a small outlet in the tourist area where you can buy fruit, vegetables, bread, and tea. There were four to five people gathered around the outlet sitting and chatting whilst one of them was cutting potatoes. It did not take too long before I introduced myself and my reason for being in the country. Starting a conversation with one of the two men working at the outlet proved to be very fruitful. He was 21 years old and named Omar, he works in his uncle’s fruit outlet every day. It is located right by the highway, which goes through the main tourist area in the country.

Omar is a laidback boy who was always in a good mood. He was happy to answer all of my questions and could also ask me certain questions about Europe from time to time. He worked in the outlet together with Gassama, a 30 year old man from Guinea-Bissau. Gassama came to the Gambia a couple of years ago in search of work, so he could provide for his wife and children who are still living in Bissau. He is from the ethnic group Fula, which is very well represented in the country, so like many other Fula people is he able to speak Wolof with the others in the outlet. Bissau used to be a French colony, so his poor English skills combined with my absence of French skills made us dependent on translation from the others. One of the women who usually hung around the outlet is named Binta. She is in her late 20’s selling telephone credit about 50 meters up the highway, but often came down to the outlet for lunch. Lamin and James were also usually hanging around the outlet selling clothes. Lamin is in his
early 40’s and married to a white Swedish woman that is about ten years older than him. He has long dreadlocks and often commented on my hair, giving me tips for how I could maintain my own dreads in a good way. James is in his early 30’s, even though he looks quite young. He is a very extrovert man who was curious what the world outside the Gambia looks like. He used to tell me, “Philip, I give you Seynabou and you give me a white woman”, indicating that white women symbolize a channel to get to Europe. Suleiman is the one who seemed to use most energy speaking and thinking of the West; America is the place he is dreaming of. Suleiman is also a very extrovert guy around the age of 30. He was very interesting to get to know because he often spoke English with an American accent expressing clearly how he admired certain “gangster elements”. During my stay was he single and showed a great deal of interest in female tourists who passed the outlet, something which he was not alone in doing.

Rapture for the future
I asked Omar for the reasons why thousands of Gambians are risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea and if the past has anything to do with that. He said that “the white man used to come to Africa to take both the people and resources that they used to build their own country. That is why many Gambians now wants to go to Europe and bring home what the Europeans owe them”. Binta commented that “the white man can change your life in five seconds…they came to Africa and stole our money. The white man has money because of us, and everything we had they came and took it from us, they took people to build their countries”. When I asked whether or not Binta wanted to take revenge, she said “even if we want to take revenge, we cannot. A man holding a gun and a man holding a knife, they cannot fight”. Omar replied to Binta by saying “now we have to be wise and smart, we can’t fight them because they have more technologies than us”. He told me that revenge can be taken in a smart and clever manner. Many Gambians want the same opportunities as many Europeans. He emphasized the possibilities for achieving this, and that, because of what he sees as asymmetrical relations regarding technological development; they cannot fight the Europeans but rather be smarter and wise about it.

Binta and Omar’s statements are stressing the notion that Europeans exploited the African continent and that they today still see differences, for example regarding technological innovations and development. There is no doubt that they looked inside the Gambia for moral and religious guidance, even though most of them saw the West as the only decent place for a
bright future. It may, then, appear as a paradox that they see the Gambia as morally superior and exploited, but still want to go to the land that is morally inferior and made them poor. This can be seen as an effect of lack of alternatives regarding which direction to go in the postcolonial landscape. If the Gambian people of 1965 had the opportunities to choose between creating their own country based on their own values, traditions and moralities, on one side, and on the other side carry on as a continuation of the implemented British societal system, it seems reasonable to think that they would chose the former. It may look like they have run out of alternative actions today, when looking at the big focus on the West as the place to be in the future. Binta and Omar’s mental state seem shaped by colonial violence\textsuperscript{13}, which throughout the period of independence has restricted the society’s freedom of choice, both through lack of faith in themselves as Africans, and because the later governments politics seems to have created a gap between the general Gambian and the labor force. This appeared to have created a feeling of isolation among my informants, which made them see migration as the only alternative for a bright future, even though they uttered differences in appreciation between Gambian and European values and traditions.

Within van Dijk’s continuation of the nostalgia concept it looks like my informants’ “rupture with the past is intimately linked to an overwhelming orientation- one might say, a rapture-for the future” (van Dijk, 1998:157). He argues that the past is not made powerless, nor turned into a direct resource of empowerment, but that it is broken or shadowed in the meeting point with a longing for the future, trying to reveal how people may be empowered by mindsets that enclose a vital portion of prognostics (van Dijk, 1998:157). This can point to Omar’s comment about being smart, which Seynabou, a woman presented in the next section, is an example of. van Dijk’s notion regarding a break with the past can be seen as forgetting or neglecting the past. This make sense when taking, for instance, Seynabou and Omar’s focus on the West into consideration. It was at times remarkable how much they, on the one hand, knew and reflected on the West and what benefits marrying a white man or woman would bring, and, on the other hand, how their answers were limited when I asked about the past, and how little they seemed to care about my topics of interest. The thought that a strong longing and focus on the future is causing a break or shadowing of the past seems applicable to a large portion of my informants.

\textsuperscript{13} “Colonial violence will here be understood to man relationships, processes, and conditions that attended the practice of colonialism in (Kenya) and that violated the physical, social and/or psychological integrity of the colonized while similarly impacting on the colonizer” (Simaiti, 2005:85).
European means, European goals

One Friday afternoon, I met Binta close to the outlet whilst she was talking with a friend. They greeted me as we sat down at the outlet starting to talk about everyday matters. She introduced me to her friend who was named Seynabou or Sey as they called her; Sey is a 26 years old woman who has a 2 year old son. One of the first thing she told me, which stuck in my head, was that she had been married to a 50 year old English man for some months. She asked where I was from and after telling her that my mother is Norwegian and my father Gambian, she told me that she thought half black/half white is the nicest skin color; she did not like full white skin too much. The appreciation of the mix of black and white skin color can be a pointer to what I experienced as a wish to combine the African and the Western worlds. As shown by referring to the youth in the outlet, there was a view of the West as materially and technologically more advanced and of Africa as morally and traditionally superior. Her comment on my skin color may symbolize a wanted fusion of the two places where a combination - best of both worlds - is the highest wish. She was, however, quick to say that skin color was not important when she married her husband. I replied; “Are you sure skin color was not important for you to marry him?” with a smile around my mouth. She just smiled, and it seemed to me that she instantly understood what was behind my smile, a hint that I found her marrying a much older European man a bit surprising.

I was coming to spend a lot of time with Sey and the boys at the outlet, and little did I know about her becoming one of my most trusted informants and friends. After some weeks Sey and I started to go the beach a couple afternoons in the week. The beach is pretty cool in the afternoon, plus it gave us the opportunity to talk without having all the people at the outlet listening. As the weeks went by, it became easier for me to ask the questions I wanted, and I became less afraid of asking personal questions, especially questions regarding her marriage. To me it was striking that a young woman like Sey was married to a man twice her age that also lived in a different part of the world. One afternoon, Sey and I sat down at a bench on the beach and after a while she started showing me a bunch of money transfer receipts that came from her husband. The receipts ranged from 1500 to 15000 dalasi\(^\text{14}\) and it made a lot of sense when she told me that he had his own café in England, so he could easily afford sending an amount of money every month. There are many Gambians that have family members who live

\(^{14}\) Dalasi is the Gambian currency.
in Europe or North America and send money home every month. This is for many people a very important economic support in a country where the level of unemployment is quite high; around 777,000 people were in work in 2007, (CIA 2007). The possibility of ending up without a paid job as a young person is, hence, quite big.

Sey and the husband were at this time trying to get Sey and her son to England. Their plan was that she could work in her husband’s café and her son would start going to kindergarten and learn the language. She was clearly frustrated when telling me about their plans to live together in England, because they had been waiting for her parental evidence from the Kanifing municipal council (KMC) for about three months. The plan that she was going to Europe was often a subject of conversation between the two of us. As we spent more and more time together, she often said that she wanted to visit me when she moved to England. I used to say “of course” and that “it would be great to see each other in a totally different place”, but I asked one day what her husband would have thought about her visiting me or the opposite way. She said that her husband was afraid he was going to lose her when coming to Europe because she would maybe find a younger man. I asked Sey if he had anything to worry about and she replied that “I don’t see that he is the only man I am married to…”

I am trying to show how Sey’s situation can illustrate what Omar and Binta said about being smart and wise. Sey was similar to the other young Gambians I met; when being under the impression that Europe is the only solution for a better life, something that can be confirmed by “the backway syndrome”. The main reason for people going, as I understood, was the longing for Europe in combination with lack of channels to get there. By channels, I mean papers or people that can bring you to Europe in a legal way, which is not very common for young people to find because the state does not give visas to travel out of Africa unless they are guaranteed you are coming back. This means that it is almost impossible to leave the continent as a Gambian if you do not have formal duties or obligations across the ocean, a very strong economy, or some sort of scholarship for an educational institution. The notion of “aspire to dependence” (Ferguson, 2013:231) is fitting when looking at Sey’s dependence on her husband to receive documents that would let her travel. Seeing this from Sey, Omar and Binta’s perspective, when sitting at the outlet watching the tourists passing by, makes me think of the outlet as a place where a sort of claustrophobic notion of being stuck in the Gambia meets the European visitor’s global mobility. You can say that Sey is being smart and wise when using her husband as an agent for traveling overseas. When Omar said they wanted
what the Europeans have, but cannot fight them, this is exactly what Sey is doing; marrying a European is opening up a channel which she can use to get to Europe. Sey may look like a bumster aiming for the graduate level: “A few even graduate to the level of getting immigration papers qualifying them for permanent residence, work or citizenship in the West” (Nyanzi et al. 2005:563).

Sey`s relationship looks like a way to realize what Omar said about being smart at the same time as seeming to have an element of submission to her husband, illustrating how her future already looks dependent on her husband. Pa`s statement about Gambians being tired of the past and focusing on the future illustrates Sey`s action and how I perceived her way of thinking. It seemed clear in the case of Sey that the futuristic focus was what occupied her mind during my stay in the Gambia. Both she and her friends constantly talked about different aspects that they thought would be beneficial when staying in the West. Easily earned money, education, and free access to internet and TV was presented as more interesting than present day aftershocks from the imperial era. Seeing this made it quite easily explainable that the big parts of the youth were more interested in the future, and, hence, did not acquire more knowledge regarding the past than what is learnt in school.

“You come steal us!”

Sitting day in and day out at the fruit outlet made it one of my most used ways of observing people and the traffic with all the honking taxicabs passing by. The local taxicabs are yellow with green stripes on the side and on the hood. When taking a local taxi you have two choices. Firstly, you take a taxi from fixed point 1 to fixed point 2, and if you want to go further you have to take a new taxi that drives between point 2 and point 3. This is the cheapest option and what most local people do when going someplace. Secondly, you can take what is called “town trip”, which is the same as a taxi trip in Norway; you enter the taxi, tell the driver where you want to go and he will drive you there. I found it striking that the green tourist taxies that are standing outside hotels were so much more expensive than the local ones, where a local taxi would cost 200 dalasi to get from the outlet in Senegambia to Banjul town and back, a tourist taxi would cost me 1000.

Walking home from the beach one day, I passed a tourist taxi garage where the drivers were sitting around chatting while waiting for passengers. I stopped on the road where they had put up a board with all the tourist taxi fares listed. After looking over the fares, I asked one of the
drivers how the fares from tourists to local could be that different. “You come steal us, that’s why we now have to pay back!” was the driver’s reply, he was clearly upset and looked angry with me asking why they were charging tourists so much more than the local people. His comment made me upset as well; I thought he was unfair and oversimplified his statement because I never stole anything from anyone. As I thought of this, I understood how I could interpret this situation. He probably did not mean literally that I had stolen from them; his argument was much likely based on what he associated with me when in this particular context.

Jennifer Cole (1998:121) argues that where the winners write the history, losers tend to dwell on it. She leads on to argue that a “chosen trauma” became a metaphor for the villagers’ lack of influence on state politics. A “chosen trauma” is an event that makes one group feels victimized and helpless by another group (Volkan, 2001). The incident with the taxi driver can seem to underline this. It was clear that past injustice, made by people the driver associated with, me was a vital factor for his reaction. I represented the group of people that has contributed in creating the reasons for him being in the situation in which he is today. I should not be too bold in claiming that he feels he cannot influence state politics, but based on my experience of how people in general relate to political issues, I do not think he feel he can influence state political cases. Based on this, it can look like the driver is seeing the past, either the slave trade or the colonial past, as a “chosen trauma” because he legitimizes taxi fares by referring to past injustices. In the meeting point with the tourist he drives, the differences in material wealth are much more likely to become significant. This may create a feeling of being underprivileged compared to the tourists, where the seemingly obvious reason for difference in wealth may be grounded in the past. Because what happened in the past, this can be more easy to understand and, hence, judge than present day national and international politics, which is also probably a factor in his life today. Take the transatlantic slave trade; it is a well-known phenomenon most Gambians know. Seeing the European tourist spending money and carrying expensive clothes can for some people make it easier to draw the link between their present day wealth and the slave trade, because they are seen as descendants of the slave traders. It is likely that these are vital factors for the emergence of the driver’s reaction.

Talking about global “flows” and movement, James Ferguson (2006:47) claims that globalization “hops instead, efficiently connecting the enclaved points in the network while
excluding the spaces that lie between the points”. One could say that, from the empirical evidence I just elaborated on, it looks like both Omar and the driver are under this impression that the global position of present day Gambian is excluded from global movement as a result of historical processes. Both of them referred to structures integrated in the transatlantic slave trade when they were making sense of the relations between themselves and Europeans today. To be able to stretch one’s own mobility many Gambians choose, as Sey has, to use European people as agents for a legal channel to Europe or North America.

**Interviews at the university**

Towards the second to the last month I got the feeling that, even though all of my informants were telling me interesting things, I was somehow longing for more thoughts and opinions regarding my subject. I decided to interview people affiliated with educational institutions to see if I could get some more reflections about my subject to shed local academic light on my gathered data.

Dr. Sidibe is a man in his fifties working in his own mental health clinic. I was put in contact with him through AIU, where he is working as a psychology professor. I went over to his clinic, which is located about 7 minutes’ drive from the fruit outlet. He was sitting in his chair expecting me. Once I came inside I sat down and started asking him the questions I was keen to get answered. I was, for example, curious if he thought there were any positive sides of being a British colony. He started saying that by being a member of the commonwealth you get some privileges and the Western education that was introduced during the colonial era is a positive aspect, one out of few: “If you look at costs and wins, they exploited us. And if you look at Africa you see that the continent is rich in resources, but the people are poor. All these privileges are gone; it is not proportionate between the UK and the Gambia”. Before I was able to ask another question, he started elaborating on what impact this has on the present day society:

> We are not mentally independent yet. Take “the backway” for instance; people are mentally colonized thinking they can only make it in Europe. I use the word “xenocentrism”, which means that foreign goods, foreign values and foreign ideas are better than your own. It is a big problem! Are we independent? We have incorporated that white culture is better than our own.
Sidibe’s answer can underline this chapter’s empirical material. Both Sey’s story and the thousands of Gambians who fled the country last year can illustrate Sidibe’s concept of “xenocentrism” and how many Gambians, according to him, are mentally colonized when constantly looking towards Europe.

Sidibe was very clear that the Gambia was impoverished, that Europeans made the country poor by intention. “The colonial era was quite wicked, but now they rule us indirectly through the economy. Even though the infrastructure is better, we inherited a very poor economy. In the end of the day they are selfish”. That the country’s poverty is not an accident underlines what the tourist taxi driver said to me about stealing from them. According to Sidibe is it a mental colonization and feeling of inferiority that have affected the Gambian people the most when drawing lines from the past to the present. Emphasizing that they are still under European economic rule can be seen in relation with “xenocentrism” in that the Gambian labor market is quite scarce, and that the national currency are so weak that the general purchasing power is very low. One may think that this leads to “xenocentrism” because moving socially or economically within the national borders is very difficult for most Gambians. This is something most local people are aware of, and it stands in high contrast to what is being seen as transparent and easily accessible European economies. Sidibe’s thought about Gambians being mentally colonized can make sense when looking at people in the outlet and their faith in Europe as a provider for a great future.

Sidibe’s reflections about a mentally inferiority complex was shared by another academic I interviewed. Momodu Mousa Boro is at Sidibe’s age and Head of the Anesthesia Department at AIU; he was the man who sat me up with Sidibe. The interview was conducted in Boro’s office, and I started by asking him if he thought the past could help us understand present day Gambia in any way. As Sidibe, Boro was quick to draw lines between the past and the present; “We were enslaved on plantations and we lost a lot of youth. They exploited us, colonized us, and took a lot of wealth. This has had a psychological effect in that Africans now feels inferior to the white person”. His statement is quite similar to what Sidibe said about feeling inferior and seeking luck outside the nation’s borders. I asked whether present day attitudes towards Europe can be directly connected to certain parts of the past, and there was no doubt in Boro’s mind that “being enslaved has physical and psychological impacts that are being passed along generations”. It was clear that Boro did not look at the present day society isolated from the past, but that did not mean that he shared the same feelings as all my
informants. He emphasized that being bitter about the past was no help for the Gambian society today. “Forgive but never forget”\(^\text{15}\) was a saying I heard several times during my fieldwork. Boro said that the door to the certain parts of the past should be closed so they could move forward and develop themselves as they want.

Closing the door to the past is similar to Hassoum Ceesay’s view of Gambian’s general historical interests. On the question of why so many people seemed to lack knowledge about the past, he answered that:

> The school syllabus does not address fully these topics of history, it is inadequate. There is also a disinterest because the media does not focus on it. The youth, again, only focus on the popular culture and the media. It is only recently that people start to know their history through slave trade sites like James Island and Fort Bullen.

Ceesay’s answer illustrates how I interpret my informants’ relation to the past. Seeing a picture of James Island on his wall made me ask him about the historical sites you find in the country; “first and foremost tourist attractions” was his first reply, which leads me on to the next section.

**Historical sites as symbols of forgetting**

One morning I was sitting in Attaya Café reading the Daily Observer newspaper when I came across an article that told me to “remember Fort Louvel in Banjul”. The article said that the fort was built in the management of the French Lieutenant Louvel, in an effort to support the British who fled Fort Bullen during the Barra war\(^\text{16}\). Barra is the city located on the opposite side of the river Gambia from Banjul, and is, according to the fort guide, Ebrima Mballow, where you can find the only remaining building in the country that was built to abolish the transatlantic slave trade, Fort Bullen (pictured on the front page). According to the info plates placed on the walls of the Albreda museum and the museum on Fort Bullen, the abolition act was signed on March 25\(^{\text{th}}\) 1807. The act abolished slave trading within the British Empire and was supposed to fine captains who did not obey the act, with £120 per slave found on the particular ship. Fort Bullen had canons that were just able to reach halfway across the river.

\(^{15}\) The guides in the villages of Albreda/Juffureh constantly told the tour groups that we can learn from the past. And that we should forgive but never forget.

\(^{16}\) This was war between the British colonialists and the people of Barra in 1831. The Barra people attacked the British fort Bullen before they were counterattacked by the Europeans. It ended after severe fighting when the British retook the fort and forced the Barra people out (Mbaeyi, 1967:1).
By building Fort Louvel in 1831 at the river mouth; the British became able to reach the whole width of the river using canons from both sides of the river. They were then able to shoot the ships that tried to enter or leave the river Gambia with slaves or other goods.

After I read about Fort Louvel in the newspaper I decided to visit the fort in a couple of days. The days in between I asked several people if they knew Fort Louvel, and it surprised me that only a few people had heard about it, but none of the people I asked had ever been there or could tell me where it was located. I asked my family, and only my father had ever heard of the fort. Of all the people hanging around the fruit outlet these days, only James had heard about it, but he could not tell more than that it was a fort built in the past. The day after, I was going to NCAC in Banjul to ask if anyone could guide me to the fort because I still had not been told where in Banjul the fort was located. At the NCAC I met a young man who said he could walk me to the fort because it was hard to explain exactly where to go, something I soon was about to see for myself.

Leaving the NCAC and crossing the road that continues in to the Banjul market, we started walking through small alleys in between houses which was going alongside sewage runs filled with trash. Many of the houses are standing quite close together, so the alleys that are created between the houses are way too tight for cars. We walked along the small alleys and across the bigger streets; we crossed the last street before we entered a small alley where the fort was located. I was told that Fort Louvel was bigger than Fort Bullen, so I had my expectations that this could be a strong symbol of the past and maybe how the local people in Banjul think of it. And I was right. There was no doubt that this Fort would strike me as a symbol of how the local people relate to the slave and colonial era.

Fort Louvel is a small monument, 2 meters in height and 1 square meter area built of marble. The monument is located within a fenced garden, approximately 2 meters in width and about 15 meters in length. The garden has a fence on one of the long sides and a white wall of stone on the other, and there are benches standing alongside the wall. The benches are painted in the same burgundy red color as the fence and are surrounded by flowers that are planted alongside the wall between the benches. I asked the man I was with if this was it, if it was not bigger than this. He replied that “it used to bigger, even bigger than Fort Bullen”. In one way I was very surprised the Daily Observer had promoted this as a tourist attraction when I only saw it as a small monument that was left. On the monument it said: “SITE OF FORT
LOUVEL- DIRECTED BY LEUT.LOUVEL OF FRENCH NAVY 1831”. After I had taken some pictures, I took a look into the next street that is located at the opposite end of the fort, or garden, as I entered. Seeing the fort from this angle made me see how it is hidden between all the houses, small shops, and elementary schools in the area. During my visit there were no other people visiting the fort and it was, to me, an illustration of my own interpretation on how many Gambians relate to the slave and colonial past. To me, Fort Louvel stands as a symbol of collective forgetting in that the small monument stands in its garden hidden in between houses. The sight of the monument and the garden was not striking in this environment, neither the colors nor the size can be said to be eye-catching because both the wall and the fences only make the monument less visible in that urban environment. Seeing people walking passed the monument made me ask myself whether they know about it all; none of my informants had ever been to the fort nor knew much about it, so it was not obvious to me that the people living in the same area knew much more about it.

My interpretation of this site, as a symbol of forgetting, can be supported by Connerton’s (2009:29) argument that the construction of memorials begets forgetting. It permits only a small portion of the past to being remembered, for example the abolition act lead by the British. To me there was something special with this monument, especially when seeing it as a memorial. As Connerton says is it often a fear of forgetting that begets memorials (Connerton, 2009:29), because a memorial regarding the abolition act is reasonably thought to make one remember that act. But seeing how small and especially how hidden the fort was now, Connerton’s notion seems to be quite accurate. The Louvel memorial conceals a lot of its significance by being hidden in between alleys and streets in a neighborhood that to me seemed as busy as any other, providing its people with educational services and groceries. He is also saying that memory is closely connected with places, making you evoke memories when passing a familiar place in the spatial environment (Connerton, 2009:5). Of all the people I spoke to, passing this fort would probably not evoke too many memories because they did not know anything about it. Coming there with a guide who told me the fort’s purpose in the past, helped me to get a portion of remembrances evoked, but the fort itself did not make any memories pop up in my mind, or in my body in general.

**Fort Bullen**

I visited Fort Bullen twice during my fieldwork. In the preface of my second visit, I asked several of my informants if they knew Fort Bullen, all the people I asked knew it, but not
many had been there. Of all the tourists I spoke to while spending time in the villages, only a handful had visited this fort. It is a huge stone construction and the whole original building is still standing as it was built in 1826. The fort is formed as a square with big circle shaped bastions on each corner of the square. According to Mballow, the building made a monument in 1978 and is now on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites. This means that the fort shall not be restored nor get any treatment that will make it different from its original construction. I asked Mballow if the fort is a popular site for tourists. He said that “the villages of Albreda/Juffureh and the historical sites you find there are definitely more popular, but there are quite a lot of school classes that comes to learn about Fort Bullen as well”.

“Without tourism, these sites would disappear. Adults in the Gambia cannot relate to these sites because there is no concrete effort to make them remember their history. For us, history is only today. Anything yesterday is not important. People do not celebrate past events or past personalities”. Ceesay’s further comment on the relevance of the historical sites made it clear how he saw the connection between Gambians and their relations to the region’s past. Although parts of his comment seem a bit bold, his argument about disinterest and hence lack of knowledge seems suiting to my empirical findings and own my interpretations.

Fort Bullen represents the abolition act and is probably the biggest of the historical sites in the country. I was told, by Mballow and the villages` guides that the fort was built exclusively to cover the other part of the river that the canons fired from Bathurst could not cover. This was a means to controlling the river and abolishing the trade, and can hence be a physical, still standing symbol of the special history of the Gambian colony and the use of Banjul (then Bathurst) as a part of the British abolition-effort (Gijanto, 2013:100). What I find interesting is that even with Bullen’s special history as the world’s only remaining slavery abolishing-site, according to the guides in Albreda/Juffureh, and the size of the whole building, it is far from the most popular nor well known sites in the Gambia. As I experienced it, was it more common to have visited Albreda/Juffureh and James Island, both for the locals and the tourists. The reason can be that the historical narrative that is sold when presenting the attractions is not based on the abolition of the trade, but based on the slave trade itself. This is because the elements that attract tourists are based on the popular notion of Africa as a victim. The authentic African experience of the Atlantic world is based on slavery and victimization (Gijanto, 2013).
Inspired by Maurice Hallbwachs (1950), Jennifer Cole (1998:105) claims that memory is updated to suit the present in that past recollections is arbitrated by political interests in seeking resources and meaning of events. She is trying to shed light on the political side of memory and includes Joanne Rappaport (1990:15) when arguing that the past can be a tool for empowerment (Cole 1998). This appears to suit Gijanto (2013), who says that an international audience often influences the choice to promote specific sites. According to her own look at the Gambian tourism sector, the “Roots” narrative is an illustrating picture of how tourism in the Gambia is a process based on interactions between tourists and locals where a certain narrative becomes the base for who will visit and why (Gijanto, 2013:96). Even though “Banjul’s connection to the British abolition of the slave trade is stronger than any other African city, with the possible exception of Freetown (Sierra Leone)” (Gijano, 2013:101), this part of the colonial history is somehow neglected in the meeting point between Gambian tourism and tourists. Fort Bullen is, to me, a picture of a crucial part of the past that today is overshadowed by “the current emphasis within the heritage tourism sector on the local slave trade” (Gijanto, 2013:93) from the government, NCAC and the Gambian Ministry of Tourism. This may seem paradoxical when I, in the next chapter, elaborate on the President’s ongoing comments on the importance of independence. Based on this, it maybe seems natural for the government to emphasize the Gambia’s role in the abolition act. The government’s use of the past as an instrument for the present, and the future, will be the focus of chapter four, and I will try to show how the President is constructing a main historical narrative today where polarization between Africa and the West seems important for him.
Figure 3. A common board/poster of the President, placed along the highway. 
Source: Author
Chapter 4- Past, president, and politics

The previous chapters have been based on data I gathered through participant observation among informants and interviews I conducted. I have tried to elaborate especially on how young Gambians in urban and rural areas relate to the past in their knowledge and everyday life. So far I have been discussing how my informants show a kind of disinterest regarding historical happenings in general and a surprising lack of knowledge, especially regarding the colonial era. As I have shown, there have been situations and conversations where the past becomes present through the local people’s attitudes, either towards me or towards tourists. The West has proved to be very important for my informants in how they are constructing a picture of themselves and of the world. In this case, the amount of migrating Gambians illustrates how many of them focus on the West. Talking to people about this also made it clear that some do not see any historical relevance in present day Gambia, while others explain today’s mass migration to Europe, poverty, and inferiority in relation to what happened when the Gambia was not an independent country.

In this chapter I will shift my focus from the people I spent time with, to the President. His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh (Jamme) took the power in a bloodless military coup from then president Dawda Jawara in 1994. Over recent years, he has made some political choices that have made him more visible to me, compared to what he used to. In 2007, he publicly claimed he was able to cure HIV/AIDS by using natural herbs. In 2012, he announced that by the end of September all people on death row were to be executed. And at the start of 2013, he chose to withdraw from the Commonwealth of Nations because he saw it as a “neo- colonial” institution. All of these actions can be said to somehow mark a distinction between himself and the West in terms of medical practice, international politics, and religious differences.

His Excellency Sheikh Professor Alhaji Dr. Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh

On 18th February 2015, the Gambia celebrated 50 years of independence from the British colonial power. I was then still in the villages where nobody seemed to care about the independence celebration. But in Banjul was there people parading while saluting their country in honor of the government, the President in particular. From television reports, it

17 The Commonwealth- choice looks like a pure statement towards “the West” because of the specific comment about the institution being an evidence of “neo-colonialism”. The other choices seemed basically meant to tackle internal problems.
seemed like the people who participated enjoyed it, and it looked similar to how independence, the 17th of May, is celebrated in Norway. Around these days there were often interviews with the President on the subject of independence and his thoughts and opinions regarding this. He often stated how little the British colonial power did to improve the Gambian society and how much they did to feed their own pockets. But to me, it was an interview I read in the Daily Observer newspaper from December 10th 2014 about homosexuality that made me think of the President’s actions and statements as relevant for my thesis. The article was about an anti-gay demonstration in Banjul on December 9th 2014 (Ceesay, Ndow, 2014). Jammeh expressed that homosexuality is something that he does not want in the Gambia and that his country never will accept such modern and un-Islamic elements. I read it as a comment on something more than just his view of sexual preferences. It could seem like a statement where he marked his loyalty and made a very clear distinction between the Islamic world and the world that accepts such things. During my fieldwork, I was about to realize how important the past, especially the colonial era, is to President Jammeh and how it appears to influence his ways of thinking.

Jammeh is, thus, not the only African leader who talks of homosexuality in terms of a Western immoral concept. Homosexuality is illegal in the Gambia and several other African countries (Semugoma, Beyrer and Baral, 2012). This way of looking at homosexuality becomes very clear when there are several Western medical scientific institutions in the country that are working within a Western medical scientific framework. The Islamic notion that the Quran is the moral compass for bodily practices is well supported in the population, which makes the President’s bold statements regarding homosexuality quite uncontroversial in such a social landscape. In this way, it looks like Jammeh creates a connection between personal health and morals, using Islam and heteronormativity as a distinction against Western secularism and tolerance for homosexuality.

Jammeh and the UN

I thought it was remarkable how often the President mentioned the colonial era either in the newspaper or on the national television; because in my experience the population in general did not offer this subject the same attention. So whenever I saw the President comment upon the past, it tended to appear to me as a way of stating a point or somehow creating a picture of “us” and “them” with reference to past injustice made by Europeans.
I will start with a collection of statements the President made in the 68th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York on Friday, 27th September 2013. In this collection I found statements he made on different topics on this session, and I found it in the library in the Faculty of Law at the University. This collection was placed beside a similar collection where the headline was “A million reasons to leave the commonwealth” which was from the 60th session of the United Nations General Assembly in 2005. I looked both of them over, but chose to make a copy of the first one because it was more up to date than the latter, which was 10 years old.

On page 7 of Jammeh’s statements from the UN Assembly 2013, I found him stressing the biggest threats to human existence, which in his opinion are “basically three and are a consequence of human behavior which are ungodly attributes”. Number one is said to be “excessive greed, and; therefore addiction to gather material wealth by any means necessary mostly through violent or immoral schemes.” In the following paragraph he elaborates on how and why excessive greed has come to play such a huge part:

The first one led to not only colonization and the plundering of African and Asian human and material resources but also led to two devastating wars among the western powers-that-be and, unfortunately were wrongly termed World Wars. Colonialism was maintained by subjugation and massive looting of resources in the colonies leading to the impoverishment and destitution of hundreds of millions of colonial subjects. This was during the colonial era when the African continent was treated like an abandoned game park; and Africans were treated worse than animals. Today, after fighting for our freedom and liberating our continent, we are being prescribed a religion- DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS and GOOD GOVERNANCE- by descendants of the same colonial powers. Present day Africans cannot be hoodwinked anymore and we are determined to defend our independence and dignity, and take control of our own natural resources at any cost and by any means necessary (Jammeh, UN Assembly N.Y., 2013).

This quotation can point to where President Jammeh stands when speaking of certain elements from the past. In the paragraph, he draws quite clear lines between the colonial past and guidelines for how Africans in general should act today. Saying that Africans today cannot be hoodwinked and need to take control over their own natural resources can seem to be an example of how he makes the past relevant today by using it as strong reference point, which marks the distinction between the West and the African world. I would also argue that claiming they are prescribed a religion by descendants of the same colonial powers today is marking a connection between the old colonies and the present day Western nations, which
can be interpreted as a continuation of the European colonialism, a comment on “neo-colonialism”.

The second threat Jammeh mentioned was “Obsession with world domination by any means including the resolve to use nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to achieve this fanciful dream”. He further claims that;

Obsession with world domination; we have seen the unprecedented development of deadly nuclear, biological and chemical weapons as well as other weapons of mass murder by the same western powers. We all agree that all forms of human tragedy and catastrophe emanate from the same West. They spend more money on killer technologies than on medical and agricultural technology up to this day. If they unleash a third world war, that would put an end to human existence on planet earth including this UN itself (Jammeh, UN Assembly N.Y., 2013).

I will try to show how the President seems to express a continuation from the colonial era up to now. Saying that the West, as an entity, is obsessed with world domination can seem to convey a view of the European and North American world as based on the same values and principles as they were during the slave and colonial era, when they explicitly exploited the African continent. The two paragraphs I have quoted can serve to underline his view of the past in relation in to the present. Being very clear on the moral judgement on the early imperialists, and connecting the present day West to the imperialism by saying “the same West”, is to me an example of how he in certain regards seems to see the present as a continuation from the past. This is obvious when looking at the meaning of the terms involved, but not so obvious when spending time with my informants.

One evening in late May I was watching the GRTS news with my father when they, as usual, showed one or several reports where the President was the main focus. The report I took notes of this evening was from a seminar with members from the Parliament at the National Assembly, where the aim was to discuss impacts of slavery and colonialism on the African continent. President Jammeh was not present, but most of the participants represented his own party, Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC). The seminar and its delegates concluded that “colonialism is a crime against humanity with no statute of limitation and declared slavery during colonialism as a crime against humanity as well as genocide” (Sanyang, 2015). Bala Garba Jahuampa, the Minister of Transport, Works and Construction, stated that under the pan-African leadership of the President, the Gambia aims to take a look
at the history and put things straight for the good of mankind. He said that colonialism destroys not only African nations’ social fabric but the political and economic fabric of the colonies as well. Garba also claimed that “the British colonial rule of indirect rule has made some of us so obedient to the former empire and colonialism which also gave birth to apartheid, corruption, bribery that were unknown in Africa until now” (Sanyang, 2015).

A week later, the President confirmed this himself by adding that the Gambia not will surrender to acts that are oppressive, and that he and his people can only be slaves to Allah. Like Garba, Jammeh claimed that if slavery is genocide, then colonialism is equally genocide, and that is the reason why they passed the law in the National Assembly which states these acts are crimes against humanity (Faal and Njie, 2015). An interesting fact about this is that neither my father, nor anyone else I spoke to, ever mentioned this seminar to me. I did not hear any conversations about it, only a comment on it in the Foroyaa newspaper the day after, which will be laid out later. This can point to my experience of people lacking interest in these subjects.

In the light of Rijk van Dijk (1998), President Jammeh seems to politicize the cultural memory when he uses the past “to gain historically rooted legitimacy”. van Dijk argues that what he calls “syncretic nostalgia are blending the longing for a past and it`s evocation within present social reality to create a specific route of empowerment” (van Dijk, 1998:156). Jammeh seemed to use to the past actively in his political statements to explain and legitimize his actions today. It also appeared to be a crucial factor for the political path he is staking out, which looked like a path based on his own feelings and thoughts regarding past injustice. The past seems to become present especially through Jammeh`s actions and statements, which appear as continuing comments on these injustices done by Europeans.

**Jammeh through the TV**

As shown, Jammeh expresses very clearly what he think of the slave and colonial era. I do not find his view and opinion about this surprising itself, what I find interesting is with how much weight the government, with Jammeh in front, put on this subject. I am under the impression that most people in the country share the governments’ opinion that slavery and colonialism was bad in general, and that it had negative effects on the African continent. Therefore, it surprised me when I saw how little conformity there was between the President’s interest in this, and the people I spent time with. My informants were also aware of some of the effects,
especially the slave trade, but most of them did not express any bitterness or anger towards today’s Europeans. The way people saw Jammeh’s actions and statements varied, and it was interesting to note how he was present in people’s lives. A taxi driver once told me that “if you sit in a room with nine people and two of them start to talk about the President, the seven others will leave”. The most common notion I caught when asking people about the President was this: people were afraid of expressing any criticism or disagreement towards the Government, because they were afraid of being punished; thrown in prison. Most people did not say more than that he used to be a good president, but that they wanted some change now, without saying why and what kind of changes they wanted. There was at the same time a sense of proudness around him, even though people saw him do and express strange and unpopular things did they not write him off as a decent state leader. My brother often expressed his dissatisfaction with the government regarding low wages, high prices and international relations. But he also stressed that the President got courage and that he is a very proud man who takes his Islamic faith seriously.

Through sitting in the couch watching the ten o clock news on TV with my family, in addition to reading two of the daily newspapers, I was able to get a glimpse on how the President appeared in the lives of the people I spent time with. I overheard a few people express their disagreements with Jammeh and the policy he follows. An example of a policy that was not appreciated by many families was the closing of all betting institutions during one night. This upset people because many Gambians lost their jobs and income. One of my father’s neighbors told me that “Jammeh act like he is leading a global superpower and forgets that the Gambia is a small African state which is dependent on the world economy and international relations”. And even so, he could laugh when Jammeh expressed himself on TV, commenting Jammeh like many others: “He started out well but has lost his track and focus the later years”. I got a feeling that it was a paradox that many of my informants disagreed with a big portion of his policies at the same time as there was clearly something which made people pull him towards them. Like my brother, it seemed like there was some kind of quality or asset which people admired or saw as positive in him.

“Grow what you eat and eat what you grow”
President Jammeh was twice on an agricultural tour during my fieldwork. This tour consists of him travelling to different villages every day for two weeks where the aim is to promote his campaign, Vision 2016, which is a program that aims to make people in the country’s rural
parts self-sufficient through farming. Watching the news during his two weeks tour gave me an insight in some of the villagers’ meeting with the President. From my father’s couch it looked like the villagers were happy to welcome their president, often dancing and singing as a gesture. Jammeh was always dressed in the same clean white kaftan-dress holding a prayer chain and mace in his left hand, and the Quran in his right, speaking of the importance and fruitfulness of ‘growing what you eat and eat what you grow’. This sentence can be interpreted as a pointer to the broader discourse regarding the past related to the present in which we has often been seen to express himself. When Jammeh is travelling, visiting different villages with this message, it can look like he is referring to the importance and pride in being independent. ‘Grow what you eat and eat what you grow’ is a notion that can be said to be built on some of the same elements as the postcolonial discourse regarding state independence from the Europeans. It evolves around the importance of being self-sufficient, not depending on anyone, and the value of place as a vital factor for the villagers’ life. The President being present in the village made the significance and importance of this particular village very obvious, and that would make these villagers not depending on anyone but themselves. It can seem like he is talking to a devaluation of Gambian life that has been present when the Gambia was not independent. In an effective manner it looks like Jammeh is playing on deep-seated feelings related to independence where the villagers become their own source of food and income and, hence, symbolize an independent, rural Gambian that does not need modern or Western interference.

Seeing this every day for two weeks made it clear that there was something positive in this meeting point. Jammeh was focusing on and giving attention to the individual Gambian which seemingly felt something satisfying when the President came to their village to promote a campaign based on the villagers themselves. It made me think that Jammeh can be seen as a performer, whose performances vary from context to context but that the past is laying in his knowledge as a backdrop all the time. In the right context, he picks out elements from the past which he chooses to stress to be able to create the performance he is presenting. Always seeing him with his kaftan-dress, mace and Quran, made me see this as his façade filled with symbols, in Goffman’s (1959) terms: elements that seem to always be there. Both the dress, mace and the Quran can seem to represent Islamic and African elements, which I see as

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18 Kaftan is a full body dress that is common in the Gambia and often seen as typical African. The male version differs from the female by being a full dress with long sleeves and long legs. People use these both in the everyday and special occasions.
marking a stark contrast to colonial past and the West. His personal façade did not seem to change even though the scenery changed from a festivity meeting in rural areas to a post-independence interview with the state newspaper.

When Jammeh spoke on TV, the past was often brought up, though in a different way than the past seemed present in my informants’ lives. Jammeh seemed to intentionally bring up the past every now and then as a way to explain certain aspects of the present. My informants seemed to bring the past present in much more unintentional matters, which first of all were rooted in an aim to improve their own lives with the West as an important factor to succeed, not with the West as an evil or guilty counterpart. The President’s presence in people’s lives varied greatly, but there were some factors of his policy which seemed uniting. It could be his Western-critical and anti-colonial attitudes that are keeping the population in a sphere of loyalty, which in many ways are showing people that he is on their side with the same values based on Islam and independence. But this looks like a paradox when keeping in mind how the general Gambian I met did not see the West as negatively rooted as the President did.

Bambi Ceuppens and Peter Geschiere (2005) is writing about autochthony in an African context and uses the concept to understand and shed light on the willingness to create a distinction between “us” and “them”, based on the thought that certain people belong to one special place, and hence belong to the state, nation, etc. Autochthony means “self” and “soil”, and inspires discourses to safeguard ancestral land against strangers (Ceuppens, Geschiere, 2005:386). Using this concept here mean people one see as indigenous and bound to a natural place, and hence may be called autochthons. According to Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005:402), autochthony needs movement as a counterpoint to define itself, and when the vision 16’s aim is to make the villagers self-sufficient it can look like the campaign will make the villagers less mobile, and hence understate the authors’ notion. This is because self-sufficiency entails a much less need to move physically, the villagers will then only depend on their own soil that provides them with the food they need. In this way, Jammeh look like he is creating real autochthons by building vision 16 on the symbiotic relation between the villagers and their soil. At the same time as this campaign and vision (16), as mentioned above, can be interpreted as a comment on underlying assumptions related to Jammeh’s view of the dichotomy dependence/independence where he seems constantly busy creating a notion of “us” and “them”. The villagers of Juffureh for example, can be thought to constitute authentic Gambians, who do not need anything more than their spatial environment in which
they are thought to belong. This seems to fit Ceuppens and Geschiere’s argument, especially when linking this to the deeper emotions about dependence and independence.

If we look at how the government and the cultural institutions’ focus on presenting the Kinte family as an integrated element of the Juffureh spatial environment, it can look like they are trying to create autochthons. By making this a vital part of the Gambia’s tourist industry, it looks like they created autochthons by stressing the link between pre-slavery Juffureh and the Kinte family. This has made it possible for many Africans in the diaspora to feel a relation and connection to the African continent, because Haley was able to show how his family tree emerged through centuries, originating in Juffureh and stretching all the way to the United States. If we also remember that the President renamed James Island to Kunta Kinte Island, can we say that a focus and respect for Kunta Kinte is obvious, much because he is famous for his proudness of being Gambian and Muslim.

The dichotomy of dependence/independence lies implicitly in “Roots” because the importance and significance of independence in shaping Kunta’s behavior and mentality when his life became governed by the slave drivers. Based on this, it seems like Jammeh’s agricultural tour is playing on strings connected to feelings about this dichotomy where the independent villagers symbolize the real autochthons, maybe as descendants of villagers that was not affected by imperialism and slavery. But the challenging part of autochthony is thought that it is “haunted by a basic insecurity through the apprehension about its own authenticity” (Ceuppens, Geschiere 2005:403), which in the Gambia has been expressed through some people feeling more connected to their own ethnic group, and accusations of the President for jolanizing\(^\text{19}\) the country. In other words, as Ceuppens and Geschiere argue, it is hard to find out who belongs to what and where. This is the case in the Gambia, even though the Kintes seem to belong to Juffureh, and hence are presented as an authentic part of the Juffureh environment, for example in the name of Kunta Kinte Island.

According to Richard Werbner (1998), the postcolonial government’s nation building, which is centered around its own liberty is problematic, fragile and contradicting. He claims that the remembrance stressing the triumph over the imperialists makes the question more politicized: who belongs to the nation, with what place in it, and with what acknowledgement in

\(^{19}\) There have been people expressed that president Jammeh have a plan of putting people of his own ethnic group, Jola, to the country’s main key positions (Sarr, 2015).
collective memory (Werbner, 1998:73). The government’s focus on the past injustices can appear as an indirect way of focusing on the country’s liberation from the British colonial power. The amount of focus Jammeh and his government put on the negative aspects of colonialism, and the positive aspects of independence, can be interpreted as a way of building the Gambia as a nation around one historical narrative. What is interesting here is that even with the President’s focus on past injustice, the great majority of my informants were also focusing on the West, though in futuristic and hopeful terms. Werbner’s questions seem accurate when looking at my informant’s sense of belonging to the Gambia together with their view of the past compared to the President’s. Maybe Jammeh is trying to create a clear distinction between the Gambia and the West when using the past as a reference point. It looks like a paradox when the youth focus on the West as a place of opportunities instead of connecting it to injustice and structural violence, as their president seems busy doing.

Jammeh’s reasons for emphasizing parts of the past may be challenging to understand. Some of his actions seem to not benefit the country as a whole, for example his harsh statements about execution, which caused a number of Europeans to seek other holiday destinations. This affects many Gambians who depend on selling fruits, nuts and other stuff to tourists. His reasons for actively seeking a solid distinction may lie in my own empirical data. Maybe his motivation is based on an aim to somehow remind the people that the struggle they meet in their everyday was caused by the old colonial power and is not a product of present day Gambian politics. In this way, the focus may be on the past and the West, and not on the government of the present day. Because of the absence of interest and knowledge regarding this, is it easier for him to shape and influence their minds. Pulling the country out of the commonwealth may have been a symbolic action to keep the importance and presence of the past in the population’s mind. This can seem to work to an extent when speaking of the population in general; there are few people I met that expressed any strong disagreements or thoughts. Not everybody I spoke to was all satisfied and there is a general reaction that people who express their anger or distrust towards the government will be punished, so there was, either way, not many people who blamed him when speaking of problems or challenges they experienced.

The intellectuals can hence be an illustration on the exact opposite, showing how difficult it is to affect their minds when pointing back to slavery and colonialism. They presented thoughts and opinions that took both the past and the present into consideration, making it clear that
blaming either only Jammeh or only the Europeans would be too simple. In this context, speaking about the government benefitting from the high illiterate percentage can make sense when seeing, for example, how some academics disagreed with a portion of Jammeh’s statements. Binta or Suleiman seemed a lot more liable to accept the government’s Western pointing fingers than Dr. Sidibe, who had read a lot about African history and present day politics.

AIDS and herbs

As mentioned in the chapter’s introduction President Jammeh, in 2007, officially claimed that he could cure HIV/AIDS with a secret remedy consisting of seven herbs from the Quran. Rebecca Cassidy and Melissa Leach (2009) argue that President Jammeh implicitly shows how he uses a framework that is in big contrast with the more common, global framing of HIV/AIDS - treatment based on biomedicine - when he is seeing his cure connected to tradition, ethnicity, religion, nation and pan-Africanism. When rhetorically asking why the President suddenly launched his HIV/AIDS- treatment, several personal characteristics are suggested. Commentatores have brought up diagnosis like mental illness, considering him to be deluded and acting irrationally, or that he has unshakeable beliefs in his personal powers (Cassidy, Leach, 2009:564). It is, though, the political context they argue this all arises out of. When Jammeh announced his cure in 2007, there were several private Western agencies involved in the country’s health sector. Even though the country benefitted in different ways from the international agencies, it looked like there was some structures created by these agencies that gave the President the opportunity to act in the direct opposite way than towards the foreign agencies.

The claiming of curing HIV/AIDS with herbs can seem to indicate a need to mark a distinction with the already-sat structures that are constructing and re-constructing the global biomedical framework, not only regarding HIV/AIDS, but in general. He was not afraid to link his cure to a strong pan-Africanist and anti-Western discourse when he spoke after discharging his first batch of patients on 31 July 2007 (Cassidy, Leach, 2009). Implying racist reasons for HIV being primarily a ‘scourge’ on Africans, he constructed ‘global’ science and funding for HIV as a part of a continued Western project of colonial and post-colonial domination (Cassidy, Leach, 2009:569).
Jammeh pointed to HIV as a ‘scourge’ on Africans by the West and linked the global fight against the virus to a still-going colonial domination based on asymmetrical global power relations. The anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004:317) argues that the distribution of AIDS, just like slavery, is given by history and driven economy, linking the victims of HIV/AIDS to the global structures regarding poverty and violence. Farmer seems to agree with Jammeh on the point that global asymmetrical structures play a part when making sense of this disease. When Farmer says that racism and poverty are linked to social plans and programs ranging from slavery to the aim for unrestrained growth (Farmer, 2004:317), he somehow addresses the same sources for the ongoing epidemic of AIDS in Africa as Jammeh. He is not saying as bluntly as Jammeh that HIV/AIDS is a scourge on Africans, but he is expressing a view that implies a connection between this sickness and how the global world looks in terms of wealth and power, pointing to the notion that HIV/AIDS programs are not created exclusively to uplift people that are infected, but also to seek economic growth. Seeing this in the light of his zero tolerance for homosexuality, it can look similar to what some of the readers of the Zambian magazine *Chrysalis* considered “dangers to the nation of inappropriate “copying” of the West” (Ferguson, 2006:144). As the readers, Jammeh sees homosexuality in a stark opposition to biological reproduction, which he sees exclusively related to heterosexuality. Out of this, one could interpret Jammeh’s cure as a way of removing amoral and Western components that have embodied the infected people, hence the HIV virus could be a symbol of Western amoral secularism which may be unavoidable if “following the path of the West” (Ferguson, 2006:141).

Steve Robins (2006:315) claims that Treatment Action Campaigns20 (TAC) is rooted in distrust of the government’s response to HIV/AIDS. Jammeh’s statements then look rooted in distrust of the Western institutions’ response and actions. Within a Gambian society that is lacking a strong civil society engagement, Jammeh’s challenge could best be understood similarly as part of a political struggle with the institutions, largely international agencies who promote ‘foreign’, globalized, biomedical AIDS programming and research (Cassidy, Leach, 2009:571). When President Jammeh officially announced that he can cure this sickness using herbs, he marked a distinction between the Western medical science and traditional medicine. This can, hence, be interpreted as a statement where he stresses his faith and reliance on

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20 TAC is an HIV/AIDS activist organization in South Africa focusing on available treatment for South Africans.
Islam, as another boundary marker towards the West, a distinction between a viewpoint from the West and a viewpoint who confronts the Western notion.

When Jammeh, in December 2015, announced that the Gambia from the 10th of the same month was to become an Islamic republic, did it seem like he understated my argument about using Islam as a boundary marker. “He called on Africans to do away with colonial mentality, noting that the majority of Gambians are Muslims and thus Gambia cannot afford to continue the colonial legacy” (Ndow, Jallow, 2015), illustrating the link between the past, the present and Islam, and also how he appeared to keep on thinking and acting based on certain dichotomies.

“We need an academic revolution!”
During my last two weeks in the field I decided to visit the Point newspaper because I had heard that this was a government-critical newspaper, but not as critical as Foroyaa. I arrived at the paper’s office and introduced myself to what appeared to be the main boss. He referred me to the paper’s editor, Ousman Kargbo, who was just coming in after running an errand outside. Kargbo welcomed me into his office which was quite small with a desk placed in the middle; there was just enough space for two chairs on the guest side and also just enough room to get in and out of the door. There were newspapers placed all over his desk, in big piles behind him and up alongside the wall, which gave me the impression that he was a busy man.

After I had made it clear why I was here he immediately started to talk about his own interest in African history. Ousman said that he enjoyed having discussions about history and politics and I was more than welcome to interrupt him with thoughts and questions. When speaking of the past he said he could “discuss this for hours and hours”. I decided to engage in this discussion as an active listener so he could share as much of his thoughts as he was able or willing to. Right before we got started he got up and called a student, who was around my age, to assist us so I could get thoughts from more than one head. Lamin, the student, proved to be a nice addition to our little session which looked like a mix of interview and group discussion. I had as usual brought my sheet of questions, but those questions were used more as a vague framework for the conversation; several of his most interesting thoughts was shared when he freely span further on his own thoughts.
“There was slavery, then colonialism, and now we have neo-colonialism. Look at the history, 400 years of slave trade where they stole people and natural resources, then 200 years with colonial rule where they stole our land and introduced Western education”. This was one of the first things he said at the start of the conversation. “The most important factor for why Africa is still behind the rest is because of the Western educational system. It has made Africans dependent on a system made by and for Europeans which do not fit in Africa”. The majority of the other intellectuals I spoke to saw Western education as the only positive element from either the slave or colonial past. They usually sat with the notion that education itself is important and that this system is more efficient than the way Africans were educated pre-colonialism. It took me a few minutes to wrap my head around his statement but it eventually started to make sense to me.

It is how this system can be said to isolate Africa from the West with political and economic consequences that made him see it as a continual mean for driving neo-colonialism. The Western educational system requires certain skills when it comes to for example reading, writing and doing math, and to be able to pass the knowledge down generations. He referred to the book “Kicking away the ladder”21 to illustrate how the Western educational system has become the standard global educational system that one has to be a part of if getting a foot inside the labor market today. He meant the problem for Africans, in general, is that they lack a solid foundation based on skills and knowledge, which creates a gap between Africa and the West, which again can seem to put Africans on the bottom of the global labor market.

James Ferguson’s (2006) notion about doubling appear fitting in this regard. The concept emanates from his idea about the “shadow” which can take form in terms of the “shadow state” or “shadow soldiers”. These are, in this particular example, states and soldiers that stand beside, or in addition to, the real or formal ones. “In all of these figurations, the first version is the “official”, and implicitly Western, model, while its uncanny dark double is the “African” version thereof” (Ferguson, 2006:16). According to Ferguson, this leads to questioning whether certain “African” elements are what they try to be; are political elections in Africa really political elections? And in this context; is African education really education? This seem to underline Ousman’s argument about being dependent on the most valued, standardized educational system which stems from the West. Ousman’s thought that African

21 “Kicking away the ladder” is political economic book written by Ha-Joon Chang, published in 2002.
education is not valued in the global world can then seem suiting with Ferguson`s argument about Western standards and African “shadows”. Seeing African education before the implementation of Western education as Western education`s shadow. In other words; the West got the standard, Africa got the standard`s shadow, a copy.

Much of Ousman`s opinions did not differ too far from how I had interpreted the President. Like President Jammeh, Ousman was fast to draw lines between the past and the present in terms of historical structures and political frames, which have had significant effects on the modern Gambia. But there was one point where he seemed not to be on the same terms as the President. I asked him if there were any specific elements or factors from the past which have had direct impact on the present- day Gambia, and it was Lamin, the student, who answered: “Much laws was put there by colonial masters, laws that said you cannot make comments about the government. These laws are maintained by the present- day government”. Both Ousman and Lamin added that people did protest against the colonial government; now they claim that you will have to leave the country if you are not happy with the country`s current condition, because you cannot make the government leave. “African leaders use intellectuals to fill their own pockets and to serve Europe and USA, like self- agonizement”.

Ousman stressed the importance of good quality education which improves people`s reading and writing skills at the same time as being a strong base for reflections and discussions.

We need an academic revolution! People need to get more enlightened and improve their knowledge. Africans was a part of the slave and colonial history, some helped the Europeans while others got fooled into it. We need our people to be educated so that this will never happen again.

When Ousman spoke of an academic revolution, he is pointing to the fact that knowledge can be seen as power. There is a significant part of the Gambian population who are illiterate, 45, 4 percent (CIA 2016). Not being able to read or write prevents you from taking part in many societal and political discussions, and can in many respects be connected to disinterest and lack of knowledge regarding these subjects. Like Ousman said, educated people have a greater chance of seeing how and why certain structures have emerged and can therefore be better suited in preventing these structures to arise again. This can point to a paradox where the West is responsible for the present day subverted situation; at the same time as one is
trying to become a part the Western practice, it is somehow another kind of “aspire to dependence” (Ferguson, 2013:231).

Erving Goffman (1959:62) writes that if one does not manage to regulate the information to the public, one might lose the desired definition of the situation. The performer then risks being ritually infected, meaning a loss of the performer’s ability to control how the public see the situation. When a big portion of the population is illiterate and uneducated, it seems easier for the government to define the acceptable arguments or viewpoints in the social and political landscape. Limited capacity to read and write seems equal to regulating the flow of information. I am not implying that the government is actively seeking an uneducated population, but that they may benefit from the fact that a big portion of the people is illiterate and uneducated. An example of this is using the past as a clear reference point to legitimize own actions without being confronted, hence undermining the present government’s role in shaping the life on the people.

My conversation with Ousman and Lamin can shows how they, as intellectuals, share Jammeh’s view to a significant extent at the same time as they think the general Gambian public need more and better education than what they see today. Both of them see, as Jammeh, how many of the standing global structures can be connected to parts of the past, and how these structures can seem to be a disadvantage for Gambians. Some of the structures and institutional frames created during the colonial era are still present in the Gambia. One can still find a government that will clamp down on people who express their dissatisfaction. Taking this into consideration, it can seem like the present government paradoxically does not represent a break with the colonialism, but rather continuity. It may seem that president Jammeh is repeating the history, somehow colonizing the Gambian people by not making space for political opponents. When Ousman expressed a need for academic revolution, it could seem like he wanted to tackle the lack of knowledge to be able to confront oppressive structures by creating aware and critical thinking people.

**History is repeating itself**

What made me realize that the Foroyaa newspaper differed very much from both the Daily Observer and the GRTS was their focus on people disappearing and being put into detention without trial.
The national assembly should not be found guilty of double standards colonialism condemned while innocent parents and even a child are in detention without trial. It is an irony that while national Assembly members and the mover of the motion were shouting their voices hoarse against colonialism and declaring from mountain tops that it is a crime against humanity, elderly men and women as well as youths who are related to the insurgents were picked up at odd hours and taken to destinations unknown to their family members and imprisoned without any charge. This is exactly what happened during slavery. People who were abducted had no rights...Once they put an end to all forms of violation of rights and make the Gambian people the freest people on earth then they would have the moral authority to be the spokespersons of the African people and Nation and to indict colonialism and slavery. As long as Gambian or human beings is in detention without trial the state has no moral authority to indict anyone for committing crimes against humanity (Foroyaa, 2.6.15)

This paragraph is taken from an issue on June 2nd 2015, just after the forum in the National Assembly where the parliamentarians concluded that colonialism and slavery is regarded as crimes against humanity. As the quote indicates, it can be argued that it is a paradox that the government expresses such hard statements regarding colonialism and slavery at the same time as they are letting people sit in detention without trial.

One can argue that it looks like a paradox to claim that certain countries or institutions represents “neo- colonialism” when one is taking away rights from the population one is in power of. Detention without trial, no religious, sexual or political freedom, and a majority of the population with no further education; this exemplifies how social aspects in present day Gambia can work as an illustration of how the government is taking away certain elements, which in many regards constitute a society based on independence and dignity. Which were exactly the two factors that Jammeh pointed to in the UN Assembly when expressing a need for Africans to defend against the descendants of the colonial powers. One can argue that the government is reproducing the colonial framework for the general citizen when they are taking away elements that for many would seem vital to what I would call personal freedom.

Rather than being a break with the colonial era, one can see that the present day Gambian government as continuity because it is not creating an environment where the general Gambian can easily improve her or his own social- economic position. Both Ousman Kargbo and Dr. Sidibe described the colonial era in terms of implementing Western values and political structures onto a population with barely any right to speak for themselves, and almost no opportunities to hold high level or administrative positions. Today, most of these positions
are held by Gambians, but looking at the high level of unemployment and the distance up to a state administrative position for the general Gambian, it makes me think that the situation has not changed too drastically for most of the people. As the young people I spent time with expressed no hope of improving their life if staying in the country, the government seemed to alienate the general citizen from his or her own opportunities and autonomy. Ousman Kargbo’s academic revolution does not only look like a response to the Gambia’s position globally, but also a response to the national environment in terms of the distance between the government and the general population.

Connerton (1992) writes that the society’s ruling group will often use its knowledge of the past in an active way, where an investigation of the recent past will lay the foundation for their behavior and decisions. Comparing this to his statements claiming that subordinate groups live by a different rhythm, which does not consist of the people’s intervention in the dominant institutions (1992), can make us see the Gambian society as constructed along these lines: Jammeh and his government use the colonial past actively in legitimizing both national and international policies at the same time as the societal layering seems to prevent the country’s majority from participating in the dominant institutions. An empirical illustration of this isolation in the national landscape is Binta’s lack of worry regarding dying on her way to Europe. She made it clear that she will die here anyway, if she does not die there, implicitly commenting on the absence of opportunities for a bright future within the Gambia. Lack of opportunities to find work, expensive courses at the University, difficulties leaving the country; these are all examples of institutions most of my informants were looking at from the outside. This leads me to ask what difference it would have made for the general Gambian who governed the country when so many locals still sit on their bottoms watching the symbol of a mobile life: the European tourists passing by.

I have tried to show how Ousman’s interpretation of the past share many of the elements with the President’s view. Ousman’s way of seeing the past is both similar and in an opposition to the President. The main oppressive dimensions from the European imperial powers were agreed, but the way the present day government acts out of and into the present was not. Jammeh appears to use the past actively in his political actions and statements, and it seems that he is aiming to mark a clear distinction between the Gambia and the West. He does this by often referring back to the times of colonialism and slavery; implicitly he seems to base his thoughts on the dichotomy of dependence/independence. I see the first part of the dichotomy
as consisting of imperialism, as well as “neo-colonialism” manifested in global asymmetrical power relations through medical science on HIV/AIDS and moral values regarding homosexuality. The latter part can be said to be based on the authentic Gambian, an independent Muslim who is connected to the country’s landscape, hence symbolizing a Gambian freed from dependency on global structures created by what he see as Western colonialists. It seems that Jammeh and his government are trying to create “us” and “them”, “the Muslim Gambian” and “the secular European, the descendent of the colonialist”. Even though he put a lot of energy pointing back to past injustices, and connecting it to the present day West, it does not result in keeping the youth’s mind in the Gambia. In the next chapter will I show this by discussing two phenomenon I met in the field, which can illustrate both how the Government’s focus is not affecting the youth in a similar way and how the youth’s relation to the past also seemed to be filled with paradoxes.
Figure 4. From the Daily Observer (2015, May 7th). Illustration of how “the backway” is present in the youth's mind.
Source: Author
Chapter 5- From progress to egress

In chapter four I focused on how President Jammeh uses the slave and colonial history as an instrument for his actions today. A strong focus on the negative intentions from the British colonial power and how it has affected the Gambia was something he mentioned quite often publicly during my stay in the field. My informants’ attitudes differed from the President’s when it came to the amount of energy spent on talking about and focusing on the past. The men I interviewed appeared to have offered the subject more thoughts which were reflected through their answers; the slave and colonial era has affected the Gambians mentally in a way that is visible today.

In this chapter I will look at two present day phenomena which can seem to be connected to the past through concepts that are being shaped and actualized today. These phenomena also illustrates how many of my informants seem to bear the paradoxical elements when thinking of the past and how their view of the present is not as rooted in past injustices as the President’s. I will start by looking into the concept of Babylon, a concept referring to North-America and Europe, or the West, which is picked up from reggae music. I am then going to discuss this concept, which in the Gambia has emerged out of this music through combining experiences from both the past and the present. I will make it clear how this concept has emerged and also how certain Gambians, indirectly through Rastafarianism, seem to have their own interpretation on the historic-theological concept of Babylon.

After this will I show how the embodiment of such feelings is getting manifested through what is known as “the backway syndrome”, which is the second phenomenon. This will be the part of the section where I argue that memory and space are closely intermingled and that thinking about history often means thinking about space. It is necessary to stress the point that remembering also envisages body, which means that reflecting upon my informants memories regarding the past cannot be abstracted from their physical bodies (Connerton, 2009). Memory, space and body are all taken into consideration when trying to understand how the incentives for the phenomenon of “the backway syndrome” are created.

I want to clarify that I, in the distinction between place and space, will use space as the counterpart of what Thomas Barfield (1997) says about place being a space made meaningful by people, and that it as physical setting includes geographical locations among other things. In parts of this chapter will space be more fruitful because big parts of the analysis and empirical data revolve around spatiality that is imagined and not always specifically located.
“This fucking country man, I want to go to Babylon!”

During my stay in the villages of Albreda/Juffureh I went to Barra when I needed to check my email, take out money in the ATM, and make a call on Skype. The area around the port is always filled with people trying to make a living selling food, driving taxies or bumsing. One day in mid-February I went to Barra to do these things, and on my way back to the bus garage a young man stopped me to ask if I needed a ride. I did not, but we started talking. The young man was named Bai, and he began telling me about the hard living conditions in the Gambia. Bai said that he was frustrated that he had not found work even though he had finished school. He said that the only solution he saw was going to Europe because he supposed the chance to make a good life was better there. He kept talking about Europe, until he suddenly used a different word: “Babylon don’t give visas, only if you can get people to invite you”. He using the concept of Babylon interested me. Having listened to reggae music for many years, I already knew the concept, but I was surprised to hear it from a young Gambian without dreads or any other visible symbols usually associated with reggae music or Rastafari.

I was to hear people mentioning Babylon quite often further out in my fieldwork, especially my brother was talking about Babylon almost every day. An example can be a late afternoon we were laying on the bed doing nothing special. The light had been off (no power) for a while so the feeling of having nothing to do, or boredom, was strong. “This fucking country man, I want to go to Babylon!” shouted my brother in frustration of seeing himself stuck in the Gambia when the majority of his classmates from high school had left for Europe or the US. When speaking of Babylon, my brother was thinking about a place he was longing for, even though there are some elements one could see as negative according to many Gambians. This can be exemplified with Suleiman from the fruit outlet. My brother and Suleiman were the two of my informants who talked most about Babylon. One morning when I arrived at the outlet, Suleiman was standing, almost preaching to the people present at the outlet about what he called all the “hellfires” in Babylon, typical things you find in the West that he sees as negative. He told us that there are many pagans there, non-believers, and that you will have a short life if you work as a priest because the Europeans want to hurt people who are preaching. The fact that young people in Europe do not have any respect for their parents was something all the people at the outlet could agree on.
The emergence of the concept of Babylon

It is through The Bible that Rastafarianism has developed its own content of the concept of Babylon. And hence, through Rastafarian themes in reggae music, the concept has found its way into the Gambia. The city of Babylon is located almost 100 kilometers south of Bagdad in today's Iraq. There are different stories connected to the city of Babylon. Maybe the most well-known is from the book of Genesis about the tower of Babel, which is the Hebrew name for Babylon. The story is based upon the notion that all people on earth spoke the same language, but when the people of Babel built a tower in an attempt to reach heaven, God chose to punish them by giving them different languages so they could not understand each other (Gen. 11:1-9). Besides this it is the Babylonian exile in Judaism which is seen as the punishment on Israelites after suppressing their own people. The Jews were deported to Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar had plowed and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC (2 Kings 24:8-16). Babylon was also to become associated with the New Testament’s whore of Babylon who was seen as the mother of all prostitutes (Rev.17:5). All in all in the Bible, Babylon seems to have negative connotations and is often associated with paganism and evilness. It is this interpretation that many people identified with Rastafarianism got when talking of Babylon, but the interpretation within the Gambian context seem to be characterized by a portion of paradoxes and ambivalence.

Ras Tafari

Rastafari as a movement emerged in 1930’s Jamaica as a reaction to the century-long oppression of the island’s black people. A big part of the Rastafarianism is based upon the teachings of the Jamaican journalist and politician Marcus Garvey who in 1927 encouraged Africans in the diaspora to look to Africa for the crowning of a black king. Three years later Halie Selassie was crowned king of Ethiopia and many followers of Garvey saw this as his prophecies being fulfilled. Selassie was about to become who Rastas saw as God and the reincarnation of Jesus Christ. Halie Selassie’s original name was Lij Tafari Makonnen, but was called Ras Tafari after being crowned king because Ras means head (leader) in Ethiopian (Savishinsky, 1994).

A vital part of many Rasta’s world view is the dichotomy of Babylon/Zion which originally emerged in the Bible. As said above, many Jews see Babylon as the place their forefathers was sent in exile, while Zion is Israel, and hence seen as their own land. Rastas got the same interpretation of the history, but with themselves in the Jews place: Africans were taken from
their home land and sent into slavery in the strange land of Europe and America. Thus making Africa, and first and foremost Halie Selassie's place of birth Ethiopia, Zion. The West is Babylon. Much of the dichotomy builds on this notion that Zion is the Promised Land where you want to go and live your life; and, opposite to that Babylon, represents a sort of spiritual alienation through materialistic and capitalistic elements. A big part of reggae music is the encouragement to go back to Zion where your forefathers lived before being captured and sent to Babylon. Reggae music is probably the premier channel by which Rastafarian beliefs are promoted all around the world, and even though there are different sub-categories of Rastafari, many reggae musicians put emphasis on the dichotomy of Babylon/Zion. To illustrate how the dichotomy can be presented through Rastafarian reggae I will in the next section lay out a couple of reggae lyrics I heard in the Gambia.

Reggae music is very popular in the Gambia, especially among males, and my father's car was the most certain place to hear reggae music during my stay in the Gambia. During my stay, my father often played an album called “Liberation” by Bunny Wailer. Already in my first week it was obvious that all the three of my brothers enjoyed this music because they often sang along with the songs. Song number five on the “Liberation” album is called “Ready when you ready” and it has quite a clear message regarding the concept of Babylon. The chorus goes:

Mi ready when you ready fi go chant down Babylon, dutty system/ Mi ready when you ready fi go lick down Babylon, in a rhythm/ Mi ready when you ready fi go tear down Babylon/ Mi ready when you ready fi go mash down Babylon (Bunny Wailer, 1989).

Bunny Wailer is singing that he wants to tear down the West whenever the listener is ready. The fourth verse can also say something about his view of Western politics in a historical perspective:

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23 An album produced by Bunny Wailer where he also sings the lead vocal. It was released in 1989 on Shanahie record label.
24 His birth name is Neville Livingston. He is a Jamaican reggae musician who was a part of the trio who started the band the Wailers with Bob Marley and Peter Tosh.
Both of the excerpts illustrate well how the Western world is often portrayed in reggae music. From many Rastas’ and reggae musicians’ point of view, the unequal distribution of power and resources is a direct and continually result of past slavery and colonization. The fourth verse shows a typically argument where the artist is connecting the history of slavery with the present day situation where the West is the bad guy and oneself being presented as a victim. I found it interesting to see how much similarity there was between many reggae lyrics’ presentation of the felt lack of liberty related to the powerful West and how many of my informants felt. But at the same time, it seemed like the people I got to know were more interested in looking towards Europe in the eyes of opportunities, rather than looking back at past injustice.

After I heard Ibo mention Babylon, I heard this word plenty of times later in my fieldwork. Both my brother, Suleiman and other men at the fruit outlet mentioned Babylon at least every other day I saw them. If basing the analysis on my brother and Suleiman’s notion of the concept, it follows the thoughts of what Rastas put into it. There is indeed one point where the Gambian notion of Babylon/Zion differ from its original concept, and that is the longing for Babylon. By first sight this may look like a contradiction; using the concept of Babylon, with all the negative connotations it brings, whilst at the same time as seeing Babylon as the land of opportunities and the place for a bright future. This came up during my conversation with Ousman Kargbo and Lamin at the Point. I told Ousman that it seemed strange that young Gambians who often listened to reggae music were longing for Babylon at the same time as they did not show any particular interest regarding historical aspects that this music often presents. Ousman said that “It is a lack of consciousness, lack of historical and political education. They don’t connect reggae music with history. They may like the lyrics but they don’t act upon it”. I gave them Suleiman as an example of someone who listens to reggae and understands the concept of Babylon, but at the same time was longing for Babylon. Mr. Kargbo responded by saying “what you are saying about your friend illustrates what we are talking about. He is like a Muslim who doesn’t follow the Quran”. My brother could tell me
different negative aspects of what he saw as typically European. This could be lack of respects for elders, no belief in God, or acting badly by smoking and drinking. On one side there was a clear moral and emotionally distance from them, being my brother and Suleiman, to the West. There was no doubt that they saw their own cultural and traditional foundations as superior and morally correct compared to the West. Child rearing, food traditions, and practices based on religion are examples of values that most of my informants would never give up in favor of what they saw as the Western practices. It was little doubt that they were looking toward Islam for moral guidance, and that they knew what constitutes a good Muslim. In the fruit outlet or in the villages, everybody I spoke to saw themselves as Muslims, but not everybody felt they were good ones. Not praying, lying, and drinking alcohol were typical elements that prevented you from fulfilling the category of a good Muslim.

On the other side was the longing for a future in the West, one of my most obvious findings in the whole of my fieldwork. “Seeking greener pastures” was often the answer I got when I asked why people expressed such an eagerness of going to Europe. All the young people going “the backway” are pointing to this. Even though my informants’ ways of relating to Babylon seem to contradict the original concept, it can be said to represent the past in a way that highlights the geopolitical aspects of my informant’s lives. Babylon, as a concept in historical terms, has represented “the other”, a sort of a reference point for moral and ethical dimensions. Even though the Gambian version of Babylon is locally shaped, it is still based on “the other”, and it still represents elements of amorality. It is interesting to see how the concept gets shaped locally to seemingly fit my informants’ position in the global world, as a place associated with hope.

Lack of hope, lack of Zion

My brother often complained about how little there is to do in the country. Watching a lot of TV from United States and Europe constantly reminded him how big the difference between the West and the Gambia can appear to be. Several times was he commenting “look at Babylon, beautiful!” while watching TV. This indicated very well how he saw the infrastructure and materiality compared to the Gambia. An example of this is my brother sitting on his iPhone, which was sent from his older sister in the UK, scrolling down on Facebook showing me all his friends from school who have travelled to Babylon. This made him more “naps”, which means that he really wants to go to Europe. “Naps” is simply an emic concept that describes a feeling of longing and wanting to go to Babylon. During my
fieldwork I heard Suleiman say it a couple of times in addition to my brother who used it when talking to me and to his friends that already had gone to Babylon. The concept interested me, but I did not get more complementary answer than what is mentioned. In my own interpretation, naps is a very good example of how the picture of the West, or Babylon, in combination with their own feeling of being cut off from the world is getting rooted in many Gambians mindset. This can be seen as another pointer to their lack of faith in the Gambian future. From my perspective was it a clear picture of how my brother felt distanced from his friends and opportunities in the West. He once told me how one of his classmates had described his first emotions after landing on the airport in the US. There were smells he had never smelled before and everything had been so clear in a way he, according to my brother, could not explain.

All the hours spent on top of the bed listening to reggae music and answering my brother's questions about Babylon gave me a very good insight in how his everyday life feels. A thing I noticed one day when I was looking through my field notes was the lack of gathered data on the concept of Zion. I was simply lacking data on people using the word Zion, instead of Africa. And even though people used “Africa” every now and then, it was not as an opposite of Babylon. In other words; I cannot read in my notes or recall that anyone I spoke to was using the dichotomy Babylon/Zion, they used only the word Babylon.

I say fly away home to Zion (fly away home)/I say fly away home to Zion (fly away home)/one bright morning when my work is over, man will fly away home.

One bright morning when my work is over, man will fly away home /One bright morning when my work is over, man will fly away home/Say one bright morning when my work is over man will fly away home (the Wailers, 1973).

The song quoted is by the famous group, the Wailers. It is called “Rastaman chant”, and is another song I heard several times during my stay. The focus on Zion can be a good illustration of how that concept is often used in reggae lyrics and it can implicitly tell us some things about the dichotomy. The Wailers are singing that they will fly home to Zion. This seems to point to the fact that they are not in Zion at the moment, which means that they are in Babylon, the opposite of home. They are also emphasizing that they will fly home when
their work is over, which can imply that where they are now, in Babylon, bound to work. While Zion is the place they can rest and not be dictated by such thing as obligational labor, I would argue that this also shows how the concept of Babylon actually requires a concept of Zion, and vice versa.

The fact that Zion was not mentioned in any conversations can be a pointer to the lack of optimism and faith in their own country. Ferguson (2006) claims he saw a trend in Africa where people tend to twist their focus from temporality to spatial mobility. Lack of patience and belief in national development has also turned many Gambians from thinking about Africa in terms of future, to an intensive focus on leaving for Babylon. The quote “Not progress, then, but egress” (Ferguson, 2006:192) points to the shift from focus on time to space. The Babylon/Zion dichotomy’s content illustrates a shift in focus from time to space, temporality to spatiality. The idea is about Babylon seeming to have become equal with development and a bright future. The future is equal to Babylon because progress and social mobility have become alien for many Gambians in the Gambia. In this regard, it can look like the dichotomy also inhabits a temporal dimension, thinking about how future and progress are associated with Babylon. Lack of progress economically, and lack of social development are associated with Zion, or Africa. Lack of Zion can actually seem to be explained simply with a lack of hope and a lack of future. It seems that the idea of a good and rewarding life has been intermingled with spatiality and in this respect has become a geographical concept with temporal connotations. It can seem that many Gambians have run out of alternative actions regarding which direction to go. A fully independent Gambia, with social mobility and wealth for the people, seems far away and there is more hope in searching for Babylon than staying in the Gambia waiting, or working, for change to come. This can again look like the notion in earlier chapters about “aspire to dependence” (Ferguson, 2013:231), because going to Babylon can seem to imply a dependence on the West to be able to improve your life. The Babylon concept entails an opposing concept of Zion which represents the righteous and moral good. Knowing this and still longing for Babylon at the same time as Zion is neglected can in this context be a result of a feeling that Zion is no alternative for the future, at least not materially. In this way, Babylon can be said to represent a very common paradox; both something you long for and something you want to distance yourself from. This explains why so many youths do not relate directly to the past as a clear and logical narrative, but rather through concepts and modern elements that make the relation between past and present filled
with paradoxes. Following the President`s historical narrative may be difficult when you feel your future depend on the West, the same West the President is blaming for the present day societal conditions.

**The “backway syndrome”**

In addition to the discussion regarding Babylon, I will further my focus on the most common channel that connects the travelling Gambian to Babylon; “the backway”. “The backway” can be explained as an emic concept for the unofficial travelling route from the sub- Saharan Africa to Europe. “The backway” metaphor is quite illuminating when thinking of the associations connected to the backway into a house. The watchdog is not guarding the backdoor, nor does the family of the house pay as much attention to the backdoor. The backdoor is also less visible from the street and for the neighbors so that it is easier to enter and leave the house through the backdoor without being seen. But maybe the most illustrating point about this metaphor is that people who are invited rarely use the backdoor, this door is usually used by people who do not want to be seen, people who want to sneak in. This metaphor can work as a pointer to how one can understand “the backway”; the whole phenomena are grounded on the structures that are preventing Gambians having a legal, easy and affordable way to Europe. “The backway” is a concept which I had never heard of before entering the field.

Big portions of Gambians who want to travel are young males people between 20 and 35, and the majority of these never get a visa because the authorities do not see any incentives for them to return, which means that they see most traveling Gambians as migrants who seek better lives, not as tourists that will return to the Gambia a couple of weeks later. Said simply; most Gambians seek greener pastures in Babylon because they do not find any green pastures in the Gambia. Seeing this phenomenon in a historic al context can point to interesting elements connecting the past to the present.

Se Omar Faye, gender coordinator at the MDI, said that the complex is already here, when I asked him what he thought about the complex of inferiority that other people had mentioned for me. Mr. Faye told me that:

> History repeats itself. Africans feels that you must go if you are not in place, than can trigger you to go. In the context of slavery, they were taken to Europe and USA, the whole labor force was taken. People are taking themselves now; they are not waiting but prepare themselves to be a part of that labor force. They are expecting reward at the end of the day.
Mr. Faye’s statement can seem to underline what other intellectuals referred to as a mental colonization, which stems from the past and is made evident today through the longing for Babylon. His remark about the labor force being taken can be read as a comment on the amount of people brought to America and Europe; there were a large amount of enslaved Africans, and it proved to impact local African nations’ labor forces. The present day longing for participation in a global labor market may look like an effect of a cause partly created in the past.

Right from the time immemorial in spite of what our African forefathers in the hands of the colonial masters, it is still a dream of Africans to step foot in any of the white man’s land. In the past people travel with excitement to study, visit and look for greener pasture when it necessary. But now the journey of excitement, achievement and prestige has turned journey of sad, sorrow and of no return (Daily Observer, 7.5.2015).

This excerpt from the Daily Observer comments on “the backway syndrome”, saying that the motivation has shifted and no longer contains education and greener pastures. This seems to contradict with data I gathered regarding Babylon as a goal in end of “the backway” journey. “Babylon'-the emic name for 'the West’, is a dream destination flowing with milk, honey, prosperity and wealth. This highly fantasized wealth forms the core of young men's aspirations to travel abroad” (Nyanzi et al.566:2005). I saw it as a longing for opportunities in terms of education, work and economy. I do not share the Daily Observer’s view of the incentives now only being based on sadness and sorrow. As Ruben Andersson (2014:20) says, there is twofold hunger lying behind the motivation for this migration, both to meet the young men’s desire for the West, but also as a response to the craving of the Western labor market.

The excerpt from the Daily Observer seem to somehow be an answer to Mr. Faye’s quote about history repeating itself. “The backway syndrome” can seem to be an embodiment of Omar’s notion of being smart, which also points to the interesting role that space plays when remembering and making sense of the past. Binta told me: “I will die here anyway if I don’t go”, when I asked why she wanted to risk her life going “the backway”. Keeping her comment about the white man’s wealth being a product of them, it looks like she is using the past as a way to legitimize, or explain her own need for going “the backway” (van Dijk,
Mr. Faye is connecting “the backway” to the forced migration of African labor during the slavery, saying that Africans want to take themselves now, as a contrast to the times of slavery when they were taken by force. Omar Faye seem to speak to Mr. Ceesay` s argument about the possibility of tracing all predicaments back to the past.

**Thinking about history requires thinking about space**

I would argue that thinking of the past regarding slavery and colonialism is closely intermingled with thinking about space. A good picture on this is the triangular trade, which is the naming of the practical structures of the slave trade; a trading system shaped as a triangle because people and goods was traded between Africa, Europe and America. As both Omar and Binta said, Africans were taken to America and forced to use their labor there. Space refers to Low and Zuniga`s (2001:18) view of a contested space as geographic locations where conflicts based on control of resources and power have been acted out.

According to Connerton (2009:5) it is well known that memory is dependent on topography and that remembering relates implicitly to the human body. He claims that a set of places, either real or imagined, can function as grids onto which images of certain items to be remembered are placed in a certain order; you can then remember the items by mentally revisiting the grids, or places. The system is premised on the notion that the things that are to be remembered are preserved by the order of places. The concept of Babylon may look like such a place when seeing it as a combination of a real and an imagined place. None of my informants had ever been there, but there were still clearly elements from the past that they remembered in relation to Babylon. To think about the slave trade implies thinking about the Africa-America-Europe relation, because the whole institution was, as shown above, based on topographical elements connecting these particular spaces. In the first conversation I had with Omar at the fruit outlet, I asked some questions regarding the slave era. He talked about his ancestors being taken from Africa, across the Atlantic Ocean to build America. These few lines show us how this part of the past are almost impossible to remember without thinking about space at the same time. This can exemplify Connerton`s argument about different places working as grids for items to be remembered.

Saying that memory relates implicitly to the human body seems to underline the fact that certain memories can be manifested through embodying practices and reactions. Situations that evoke memories of specific situations, phenomena or parts of the past, may be felt physically in terms of joy, sadness, bitterness, happiness, anger, and so on. Take the incident I
had with the tourist taxi driver; it can look like he saw me as a continuation of the European part of the slave trade, a walking embodiment of past injustice manifested in the present through my own body. “You come steal us, that’s why we have to pay back”; he may have seen me as belonging to a different place which he seemingly connected to the past. Because human beings often create a symbolic nexus out of the interplay between bodily actions and place (Connerton, 2009:17), is it reasonable to think that the taxi driver read both him and me into the environment in which we met. Taking his reaction into consideration made it seem like the connotations he got while seeing my behavior in that particular environment was first and foremost negative; it clearly presented a difference between him and me based on happenings in the past. Claiming that I had stolen from them seems to imply a notion that I represent the early European`s who colonized and exploited Africa. The taxi driver`s way of connecting me, as an individual to both space and event seem natural when speaking in Edward Said’s (2000) terms. Said (2000:181) claims that there can be dialectic of memory over territory, which makes the relationship between early colonizers and colonized alive again. This emerges out of his example with Robinson Crusoe on how geography and conquest go together, which again has the tendency to construct unnerving pictures of certain historical figures. In the meeting point with the driver it was clear that I represented elements that were not native; a descendant of what Jammeh says it is “the same colonial powers”. Connecting conquest and space together makes the spatial dimensions in these parts of the past totally essential.

I saw space as a vital element behind Mr. Faye`s statement about history repeating itself. The spatial similarities between the transatlantic slave trade and “the backway” can be seen in relation to what the Danish anthropologist Henrik Vigh 25 (2016) says about previously available routes have been shut off and thus created space for Africans to re-open these routes in the aim of greener pastures. One can see the routes the Europeans created during the trade as the backdrop for the present day routes many Gambians embark on. Here, Connerton’s (2009) thoughts about places as grids for remembering can be fitting because it is the spatial dimension that the European traders used when constructing the slave trade that Vigh is pointing to. Being re-opened by Africans implies that those same routes have once been

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25 Henrik Erdman Vigh, professor at Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen held a talk at the University of Oslo`s Social Anthropological Department February 3rd 2016. The talk built on his fieldwork in Gunia Bissau was called “Curse and catalyst: cocaine connections and transnational organized crime in Bissau”. I am referring to concepts he proposed during that talk.
closed. Seeing “the backway syndrome” in this analysis makes it difficult to separate space and memory.

"It’s the white man who got money, and he got it because of us”

One afternoon I sat with Binta while she was selling credit along the road. After a couple of hours she decided to call it a day and invited me for a walk down to the beach. It only takes crossing the road and walking for about five minutes slightly downhill at the backside of some of the hotels before arriving at the beach. During our little walk she started to complain about how hard her life is. I asked what she saw as the most important thing in her life and she answered her mother, family, and money. I told her I did not find money too important and that it was not my impression that too many people in the country are suffering. “You don’t know how it is because you are born and raised in Europe” was her answer. Her response hurt me a bit because she made me feel like a stranger, like my body and mind could not comprehend how it was to be born and raised in the Gambia.

She was right; being born and raised another place of the world will make me remember certain phenomena and situations differently. Like Said (2000:180) says about Palestine evoking different memories for Jews, Christian and Muslims. This notion can be applied when making sense of our conversation. Even though Binta and I seemed to agree on what happened in the past regarding the slave trade was it no doubt that the past affect us differently. Claiming that I could never understand because of my place of upbringing can in many respects be true. It is also a good illustration of how people think about the past in the present, with space as an important marker and reference point. This is one of the reasons I had big problems in understanding how one could leave the Gambia by crossing the Mediterranean Sea in a small boat. It is the feelings of frustration which I have difficulties embodying because I am experiencing the mobility that prevents me from being stuck in one particular place. The feeling of isolation and lack of opportunities seem to make people flee the country, and it becomes striking when seeing different European tourists every day. When I asked if she was not afraid of dying on “the backway” she replied: “I will die here anyway of I don’t go”.

This can work as an example of how one should bear the physical body in mind when remembering (Connerton, 2009). Our conversation made me understand that it was first and foremost her own feelings of lacking opportunities and mobility that made her want to leave the country, and her earlier comment about “the white man got money, and he got it because of us” made me connect it to her feelings to the past. Being stuck in the same routine, day in
and day out, seemed to make Binta long for something more, just like almost all of my young informants. Andersson (2014) writes about how many Gambians have inhabited a mindset similar to Dr. Sidibe’s concept of “xenocentrism”. “…In neighboring Gambia, their brethren experience a state of “nerves” as they hear the tall tales off success brought back by visiting emigrants. As in other postcolonial regimes, access to foreign lands has become a source of increased polarization, with Europe rendered as a mythical repository of wealth and transformative power” (Andersson, 2014:19).

Hanging around the fruit outlet made me see the everyday situation as an illustration of how one’s spatial environment can create a feeling of isolation. Sitting a couple meters behind Suleiman in the outlet as he was yelling towards the tourists in order to get their attention gave me a hint to the isolation he may feel. I was often at the outlet around 11 in the morning, by that time Suleiman and Sey had usually been there for about one hour. I greeted everybody present - Suleiman, Sey, Omar, Gassama, Binta, James and Lamin - before I sat down and joined their conversation. Throughout the day we would sit and chat while watching the traffic pass by. Every now and then some people would stop by to buy cellphone credit, and sometimes tourists stopped because of all the yelling, or to buy fruit or groceries from Omar. He and the others were sitting here the whole day, waiting for people to stop by. Tourists that were passing by were either on their way to the restaurants and clubs, or on their way back to one of the hotels. Sitting there with them painted an unsettling picture of the experience of my informants; they will be doing the exact same activities tomorrow. I could at times get bored and decided to take a walk or do something else the next day. But Omar and the rest did not appear to have many alternatives when thinking about tomorrow. This common everyday situation at the outlet was repeated every day, with Sey’s migration plans as the only outlook for change.

I thought it was striking when towards the end of my stay I thought I somehow could understand how Suleiman and the others felt. I experienced it as frustrating and boring to go through the exact same routines every day for parts of my fieldwork; eating breakfast, taking a taxi for ten minutes to the outlet and then sitting there the whole day. What stuck in my mind was that I could count down to my departure; this did not exist for them. Suleiman, for instance, had no reasons for thinking he would get his wish fulfilled by going outside Africa; no reasons for believing the next week would look different. One could see this as a crucial source for “the backway syndrome”, and it makes it visible how they depend on European
individuals to be able to travel. In this way, Sey was lucky. It seemed like she had won the “white ticket to Babylon” by marrying her husband (Nyanzi et al. 2005), and hence re-opened certain routes from the past (Vigh 2016).

The white ticket may symbolize this exact spatial mobility, which can become a means to achieve her mobility, but can at the same time be thought to also connote negative elements. Stressing to me the importance of bringing them a white European was, to me, an indirect comment upon a longing for the West. After spending hours and hours in the outlet, it was quite clear which passing people would get the most attention; the white tourists. The notion that they need a European to leave the continent can be seen as a vital factor in creating a feeling of isolation. Henrik Vigh’s (2016) term “global spatial trampolines” can create a picture which frames this: every white person you see becomes a possible means for leaving your routine based life, and hence can function as a trampoline that can take you up and away.

Mr. Faye’s remark about history repeating itself, and Fatima’s (chapter 2) comment about the hierarchical lunch-situation, can seem appropriate when thinking about the social structures that were present during the slave and colonial past: The local people were “serving” the Europeans, and I caught a somehow similar notion when I sat in the outlet watching the everyday life of the Senegambia tourist area pass by. The majority of restaurants and shops in the tourist area are ran by locals and used by tourists. One could argue that this is a local manifestation of a global phenomenon regarding asymmetrical structures between what is termed Babylon and the Gambia, which was created by past slave trade and exploitation. Binta explicit saw her own longing for the West in a relation to the past. The everyday situation at the outlet made me able to feel Said’s (2000) notion about different memories being evoked for different people through a focus on my physical body (Connerton, 2009). As mentioned above, was I feeling that I could comprehend Suleiman and Binta’s frustration and boredom regarding lacking alternative actions. It became easier to understand Binta’s view of the world today as unequal because of what the “white man” did during the slave trade. This because the outlet at times conveyed a picture of my informants as immobile and bound to the Gambia, in stark contrast to the travelling European visitors who according to Binta can “change their life in five seconds”, pointing to her view of Europeans’ many alternative actions. Sitting in the outlet, remembering the slave and colonial era made it visually and bodily obvious to me and Binta among others, how the past is shaping the present, but also how the present shapes our connection to the past. The outlet provided me with a setting where I thought it seemed quite clear that “all predicaments be traced back”.

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Concluding remarks

As mentioned earlier, my empirical findings did not fully match my pre-fieldwork thoughts and expectations about memory. I was expecting that people in a country so heavily affected by the transatlantic slave trade would show more interest and knowledge in the slave trade and the colonial past. I took it for granted that Gambians in general were interested and hence knew Gambian, or West-African history. I may have been naïve and probably forgot to bear in mind how Norway’s past seems present today. If I look at my own circle of friends, the past regarding Norway as Danish colony or as union with Sweden is very rarely discussed. One could argue that this is because the past did not have too a significant negative impact on present day Norway, e.g. when looking at the general standard of living; also, Danish colonial history has little relevance for contemporary social and political contests (different from, say, early 20th century Norway). So at the beginning of my field notes I found pointers to lack of knowledge and lack of interest; I was thinking that the obvious negative impact of colonialism did not itself create interest for the past among young people I spent time with, seemingly similar to what Cole (2001) experienced during her research on colonial memories in Madagascar, the past seemed to have been erased.

How the past is present in people’s knowledge and everyday life was therefore a slightly broader research question that I felt I was able to answer when looking at the totality of my data. The notion of “the West”, in particular, and the relation between the Gambia and the West, has been a crucial factor for understanding a lot of the Gambian youth’s sense of the past and their historical place in the world. They showed me first and foremost that the future, which seems intertwined with the concept of “the West”, is a more popular topic for both discussions and reflections than the past. By discussing a local emic and imagined picture of the West-Babylon, I deepened my understanding of the social every day workings of memory. Local understandings of illegal migration, “the backway syndrome”, also seemed to indirectly deal with the slave trade and colonial past in terms of a shift in focus from historical time to geographical space. Hence the past may in many respects appear more present in the everyday life than in their explicit historical knowledge. This was particularly evident when speaking of the colonial era, which I was only able to discuss with some of the intellectuals because my informants did not show any knowledge, or much interest, regarding it. At the same time as I saw extensions of the colonial times, and an explicit use of history, in the
government’s way to rule, in the meeting point between local people and tourists, and a notion of mental inferiority regarding faith in themselves as Gambians.

My informants in general were not too interested in the past, but President Jammeh was regularly out in the public commenting on the past injustice done by the Europeans during the slave and colonial era. I thought it was interesting to note that the public did not appear to share the President view in drawing lines between the past and the present seemingly to point fingers towards to a connection between the early imperialists and todays Europe. Jammeh was focused on creating boundaries between the Gambia and the West, based on slavery and colonialism intermingled with his faith in Islam. His attempt to create a clear narrative of the history where an independent/dependent- dichotom seemed vital appeared to me as a paradox because none of my informants joined Jammeh in his attempts to create “us” and “them” based on the past in a combination with religion (Ceuppens, Geschiere 2005, Cassidy, Leach 2009). “The backway syndrome” can in this respect seem to be evidence in that his policies in creating loyal Gambians within an “us”- and- “them” mindset is not working.

It was not only the President that was driven by paradoxes. Both in the villages and in the urban area, paradoxes were present in how people related to the past, either related to the “Roots” story presented in the physical environment of Albreda/Juffureh (Gijanto, 2011,2013), or to the use of the “Babylon” concept. Such paradoxes kept popping up at times, and they are hence good illustrations of the seeming ambivalence that many people feel regarding the past and the future. I have shown this by arguing that it seems that people wants to be dependent in order to one day become independent. Dependence for independence (Ferguson, 2013) can hence illustrate my interpretation of my informants’ way of tackling their lack of socio-economic mobility, which became very evident in the meeting between the local people and the tourists. Through a broad sense of memory, I have laid out empirical material, which I have used when showing how the past in different ways become present and presented today. Some situations and phenomena are clearer than others, but it still seems that “all predicaments can be traced back”.

It is tempting to speculate about why memories of slave trade, colonial oppression and exploitation are so relatively absent from public discourse, even though they proved to be present among intellectuals and in the President`s politics. One could argue that the President, with his decreasing legitimacy and narrative of continued opposition to the West inherited
from slave trade and colonization, enacts some- if limited- power in the political climate. It has to be stressed that his way of presenting a linear story of European violence did not seem to convince the population in general. For the young people who make a living out of tourism whilst dreaming of the West, any explicit historical narrative that is emphasizing African suffering and European crimes would probably appear paradoxically within their everyday engagements with tourists and intense longing for the West. Though, in a different social reality, one could imagine that the colonial past would be given more attention, but at this point in time, for this particular group of urban youth, it is clearly not of particular empirical value.
References


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