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Indirect migration management: Entangled histories of (externalized) repatriation in and beyond the Gambia's colonial legacy

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ABSTRACT

This article challenges Eurocentric and presentist understandings of border externalization from Europe to Africa. It describes how techniques of migration governance concretely reinvent legacies of colonial rule, while also pushing research beyond the colonial frame by heeding the plural histories of migration control that co-constitute border externalization on the ground. The article investigates in particular the Gambian node of a EU-IOM joint initiative aiming to repatriate and reintegrate West African migrants from transit countries along the Mediterranean routes to Europe. Postcolonial dependencies between the Gambia and Europe, together with the post-authoritarian transition in the Gambia since 2017, have allowed the EU-IOM venture to rapidly expand and operate autonomously. At the same time, externalized repatriation depends on and seeks to integrate local state, community and family actors in order to control returnees and prospective migrants. This results in a form of "indirect migration management" that has colonial and postcolonial roots. Powerful organizations such as IOM may exploit societal institutions of mobility and simultaneously conceal or delegitimize them. Speaking of "indirect migration management" thus urges us to study border externalization within a heterogenous landscape of postcolonial governance in Africa, including the alternative histories and geographies of mobility control that become entangled in and through externalized bordering.

1. Introduction

Africa represents an important stage of Europe's border externalization, the multifarious ways in which the control and management of mobility that, normally carried out within or at European borders, are offshored and outsourced beyond Europe's territorial boundaries. Much as these extraterritorial processes obviously reverberate with the long, uneven history of EurAfrican relations, policy and public discourse in Europe is patently ahistorical and framed by (alleged) emergencies (Gaibazzi et al., 2017). Recent scholarship has challenged this presentist focus by pointing to the colonial origins of Europe's ideologies, policies and techniques of control vis-à-vis Africa and African migration (Hansen and Jonsson, 2011; Korvensyrjä, 2017; Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019). "Reversing the gaze" on border externalization (Deridder et al., 2020) has further led to excavate the colonial legacies of the current illegalization, racialization and spatial control of Africans who are actually or potentially on the move (Gross-Wrytzen, this issue; Gross-Wyrtzen and Gazzotti, 2020; Ould Moctar, 2020, this issue).

While tracing colonial legacies is of vital importance, choosing the African postcolony as a point of geographical and analytical departure to study border externalization refracts a more heterogeneous temporality (cf. also Deridder et al., 2020, p. 27). In this article, I show that Europe's attempt to "remote control" African migration becomes tangled up in a fabric of governance of interwoven historical threads, some of which might lead beyond Europe and the colonial encounter. Providing historical depth to externalization should therefore not be reduced to writing a history centred on Europe and its borders, but it should rather strive to describe the multiple histories that intersect and articulate at the frontiers of externalized migration governance (Gaibazzi, 2020).

My privileged point of observation is the Gambia, a small and marginal country in the geopolitics of migration control, though one that since the "refugee crisis" (2011–18) has become a frontier of border externalization. What makes the Gambian case interesting is also that the new phase of border externalization coincided with the rise of the New Gambia in 2017 after two decades of dictatorship and tense relations with the EU. What is more, I will focus on a relatively new intervention: the externalized repatriation of so-called transit migrants from Libya and Niger operated by a joint venture between the EU and the International Organization of Migration (IOM). For all this newness, which seems to justify presentism, I will show that the expansion of

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migration governance was compounded by older dynamics (cf. Ould Moctar, this issue).

I am especially concerned with how different histories and scales of "migration management" coproduce the externalized governance of repatriation in the Gambia. The country's postcolonial dependency on aid and its permeability to international organizations enabled the IOM to intervene rather directly and to quickly expand its operational capacity. At the same time, the governance of repatriation assumed the guise of an "indirect migration management". I use this expression to describe a concrete colonial legacy of border externalization, thereby contributing to push research beyond mere evocations of coloniality (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019). "Indirect migration management" is clearly a play on words on "indirect rule", a label used for the diverse set of practices through which European powers sought to rule colonial populations through their own authorities and institutions[1]. Taking cue from governance speak, I have replaced the term rule with the term management. IOM is a global champion of a management approach to migration (Geiger and Pécoud, 2020; Bartels, 2022): repatriating "irregular" migrants from unsafe places like Libya and northern Niger putatively contributes to a well-managed migration, that is, a safe, orderly and regular migration. Thus, indirect migration management refers to the ways in which IOM and other powerful organizations rely on, coopt and exploit existing structures of mobility and population control, which in turn condition the diffusion of migration governance in Africa. Along the Gambia valley, these structures include central and local government institutions emerged in response to a long-standing youth question in the Gambia – which is at the heart of unauthorized migration to Europe.

The concept of indirect migration management further includes "management" practices at the societal level (cf. also Vammen et al., 2021). In the Gambia as elsewhere, externalized governance routinely recruits, and conflicts with, non-state organizations (Aucoin, 2022; Marino et al., 2022). I will pay specific attention to the ways in which IOM sought to extend migration management not simply to organizations but also to community-level and "traditional" authorities as well as families. IOM did explicitly reach out to communities, however it did not necessarily employ affective discourses or only with limited effects (Vammen, 2021). Kinship and household relations were also a more indirect target and linchpin of extraterritorial migration governance compared to other cases such as family reunion visas (Alpes, 2017). Nevertheless, I will show that the apparent "success" of the EU-IOM joint venture was to a significant extent parasitic on the social, affective and moral (border)work of communities and families (cf. Raineri, 2021). Referring to indirect migration management therefore does not only question a Euro-centric and a state/governance-centric perspective on border externalization (Aucoin, 2022; Sylla and Schultz, 2020; Raineri, 2021), but also gives visibility to the social forces that make it work on the ground. Ultimately, it raises the key political question of who actually manages migration and has or should have the legitimacy to do so.

This brings me back to the multiple historical threads of border externalization. Speaking of indirect migration management is as much a reminder of the coloniality of border externalization as an attempt to go beyond coloniality. Historicizing the societal practices of "migration management" reveals heterogenous, partially autonomous trajectories of migration and return (see also Gross-Wrytzen, this issue). Externalized repatriation is colonially inflicted precisely because it seeks to build on and vertically integrate these diverse historical practices that intersect but are not entirely determined by the colonial past.

This article is based on fieldwork conducted in the Summer of 2019 on return migration in the Gambia[2]. While at this time the issue of repatriation and reintegration of Gambians from transit countries polarized my research, I strived to maintain broader focus on return and mobility[3]. The article therefore also draws on long-standing ethnographic and historical research on im/mobility in, from and to the Gambia carried out since 2006, and since 2015 on Gambian and West African migrants in Angola and Europe. In 2019, I conducted interviews as well as participant observation primarily with returnees and their families and communities in both rural and urban areas: the Greater Banjul Area, Central River Region and the Upper River Region. I also interviewed representatives of various state, international and civil society organizations involved in the management of return.

2. Governing youth and migration in the Gambia

Human mobility has long defined the social and economic profile of the Gambia river valley. Working, trading, studying or simply travelling away from home has historically been a standard option, especially for young men, to ensure personal and family subsistence, prosperity and sociality (Meillassoux, 1981; Manchuelle, 1997). Since the 1950s, international emigration from the Gambia to African and global destinations has grown steadily. It was not however until the 1980s that emigration became a public issue as an element of a wider youth question[4] (see Gaibazzi, 2018a). This was a decade marked by structural adjustment and the rise of youth unemployment, also among the urban educated classes. Emigration became a generational aspiration, not only to provide subsistence, but also to leave a country in which corrupted politicians and their local allies were perceived to have disrupted the hopes brokered by decolonization and blocked the path to emancipation of a growing young population. Ensued from a bloodless coup d'état in 1994, the early Jammeh regime skillfully mobilized youth and their cry for change, while also seeking to reform their attitudes towards emigration (Bellagamba, 2008). Railing against the Western dream, and inviting young Gambians to patriotically stay in the country, remained a leitmotiv for the following twenty-two years of Jammeh's authoritarian regime (Hultin and Zanker, 2020).

In the mid-2000′s, the Gambian state approach to the youth question provided an entry point for a first wave of border externalization against boat migration from the North-West African Coast to the Canary Islands. In addition to an agreement on repatriation (2006) and vehicles for patrolling the coast, Spain invested in skills and vocational training facilities, one of the key domains of the Gambia's developmental agenda for youth. Later on, the EU also supported agricultural projects against the backway, agriculture and the return to the land being another pillar of Jammeh's anti-migration rhetoric (Gaibazzi, 2015, pp. 65–67). The Atlantic route was effectively curbed by 2009, and although it was an important laboratory of Europe's externalization (Andersson, 2014), border initiatives in the Gambia did not develop much further.

A few years later, in contrast, the "backway" surged to national and international attention. Between 2013 and 2017, arrivals from the Gambia along the Western and, especially, the Central Mediterranean route increased fivefold. This momentous increase of unauthorized migration was rooted in the unresolved youth question in the Gambia, and was compounded by several other conjunctural factors (Conrad Suso, 2019). There can be little doubt that a major driver was the Jammeh regime's further repressive turn in the 2010s, and the direct and indirect impacts that this had on the economy and on aid flows[5]. In

[1] On the in/direct styles of colonial government in the Gambia, see among others: (Bellagamba, 2002; Hughes and Perfect, 2006; Sarr, 2016; Wright, 2004)

[2] Fieldwork was carried in partnership with ActionAid Italy.

[3] For a more comprehensive overview of repatriation programmes, see Actionaid (2019), Marino et al. (2022)

[4] On the question of youth in the Gambia and Africa at large, see among others: Honwana and De Boeck, 2005; Janson, 2013

[5] In late 2014, the EU suspended an aid package after Jammeh outlawed homosexuality.

turn, Jammeh used the backway to propel his anti-imperialist rhetoric against the West and its restriction to the freedom of movement, all the while he negotiated with Europe on migration control and large development initiatives for youth (see below) (Hultin and Zanker, 2020). This was possibly a last attempt to quell an increasingly uncompromising young population or perhaps, more cynically, to use the Gambian arrivals on Mediterranean shores as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Europe.

The backway is believed to have been an important element in the runup to the December 2016 election, in which a coalition of opposition parties defeated Jammeh's party against all expectations (Hultin et al., 2017). Following a month of political stalemate, a military operation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) entered the Gambia on 19 January 2017 and forced Jammeh to leave into exile. Adama Barrow, a real estate agent and a former migrant, was sworn in as the President of the Third Republic. A new era began for the Gambia and for EU-Gambia relations, just as a new phase of border externalization was in the making.

3. New Gambia, old approach: externalization meets extraversion

As Zanker and Altrogge (2019) have shown, a dual policy approach to migration has emerged in the New Gambia. Having been a major supporter of the opposition to Jammeh, and providing almost 20 % of the Gambia's GDP in personal remittances, the Gambian diaspora lobbied for relevance in national affairs. Yet while the new National Development Plan framed high-skill diaspora of the Gambia as a development resource, it explicitly defined the low-skill dominated backway as a development problem. "Irregular migrants" and returnees from the backway appear under a different chapter of the development agenda: youth empowerment. Rather than as agents of development, they were framed as aid recipients (Republic of The Gambia, 2018, p. 113).

This dovetailed with, and was shaped by, Europe's revamped developmental approach to migration control. In response to the "refugee crisis" in the Mediterranean, the EU both extended and intensified the process of border externalization in Africa, geographically through a greater focus on countries and regions of origins, and structurally by placing emphasis on governance and stabilization. Unlike neighbouring Senegal, the Gambia was not included in the EU Framework Partnerships, the "migration compacts" created in 2016 with priority countries (in West Africa: Senegal, Mali, Niger and Nigeria) (European Commission, 2016). The main framework of intervention in the Gambia has been the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), which was launched during the EU-Africa Valletta Summit in 2015 in order to "address the root causes of destabilisation, forced displacement and irregular migration" (European Commission, 2015, p. 1).

In a nutshell, the developmental idea of the EUTF is to tackle "the root causes of irregular migration" by rooting potential irregular migrants. The largest share of EUTF funding in the Gambia has been earmarked for socioeconomic development. The main project is known as "Tekki Fii" (2019), a Wolof expression meaning "make it here". This is a multi-agency consortium that has absorbed a previous EUTF project called Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) run by International Trade Center (ITC)[6]. Tekki Fii, especially via YEP, pivots once again on skills and vocational training, while also placing greater emphasis on entrepreneurship (Marino et al., 2022, p. 15; Marino and Lietaert, 2022). Also in continuity with the past is a focus on agri-business and rural areas, including through social development. YEP and Tekki Fii convey the message clearly: skills and vocational training together with entrepreneurship schemes "empower" young people to find opportunities and thus to "make it here". This reiterates a sedentarist, colonial view of development as a way to remove and mitigate problems that cause people to leave the locations in which they would normally live (Bakewell, 2008; Deridder et al., 2020, p. 16; Landau, 2019). The very emphasis on causes belies a tendency to view mobility as abnormal (Klute and Hahn, 2007), which as I shall detail later is at odds with the historical reality of the Gambia.

Externalization has met "extraversion"[7] in the New Gambia. The Barrow administration had an interest in cooperating with the EU on migration as part of a broader aid package, on which its very survival and domestic legitimacy depended (Zanker et al., 2019, pp. 11-12; Aucoin, 2022). Barrow inherited a state with a grim financial outlook, a delicate security situation and a young population that, past the euphoria for the end of dictatorship, awoke again to the familiar reality of unemployment and everyday struggles to make ends meet. If the nascent democracy was to survive, external help was needed. And this was a successful selling point in negotiations with the EU, which released a relatively high amount of aid. Whether conditionalities on migration cooperation attached to aid from the EU have played a role remains disputed. That the Gambia's dire financial straits would lead the government to comply with Europe's requests on controlling migration has been constantly rumoured in the country[8]. In August 2019, a representative of the Focal Point for Migration at the Ministry of Interior who sat at the negotiation tables said during an interview that the delegate of one EU member state once hinted at the possibility of withholding aid, if the Gambia failed to cooperate (specifically, on repatriation). This was nevertheless a single incident with no repercussions in an otherwise cordial exchange.

4. Direct migration management? The IOM and the repatriation of transit migrants

Aside from Tekki Fii, the other main EUTF project in the Gambia is the "EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration", which involves 14 countries in West Africa[9]. The purpose of the Joint Initiative is to assist migrants along the route to Europe to return and reintegrate, and in general to promote better migration management. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative has de facto shifted deportation from Europe to transit countries. Between 2017 and June 2021, the IOM carried out 118,139 voluntary and humanitarian returns to West African countries, including about 6,000 Gambians. Only 3,122 returns were from Europe, the rest were essentially migrants stranded along the Mediterranean routes, mostly in Niger (50,016) and Libya (43,498) (IOM, 2021a). Given that migrants became stranded to a significant

[6] https://www.tekkifii.gm (last accessed: 28 October 2021). ITC is a joint initiative of World Trade Organization and the United Nations dedicated to supporting small and medium size enterprises. The other implementing partners of Tekki Fii (officially "Building a Future: making in the Gambia) are the development agencies of Germany, Portugal and Belgium. GK Partners, a consultancy firm codirected by a Gambian expert that is part of the consortium for diaspora-related issues.

[7] Popularized in African Studies by Jean-François Bayart and others (Bayart and Ellis, 2000), the concept of extraversion takes into account the dependency of states and economies on aid and resource exports entrenched by the (neo) colonial world system, while simultaneously overcoming the limits of dependency theory by paying attention to African regimes' strategies to turn their dependencies into an asset of internal politics. Europe's externalized migration governance offers an additional platform for extraversion in African polities (Pastore and Roman, 2020) as well as for non-state actors (Fouquet, 2008; Boyer et al., 2020).

[8] Although the expansion of the migration governance industry occurred rather smoothly, a number of Gambian interlocutors echoed international criticisms waged at the EUTF, especially with regard to the lack of local ownership and accountability (Barana, 2017; Castillejo, 2016; Altrogge and Zanker, 2019, pp. 30-31).

[9] https://www.migrationjointinitiative.org/ (last accessed: 28 October 2021).

degree due to European pressures on such states to police migrants allegedly in transit[10], this can arguably be considered a doubly "successful" case of externalization: it has reduced migratory pressure on the Mediterranean shores; and it has depoliticized this kind of deportation by framing it as a humanitarian intervention (Alpes, 2020; Sylla and Cold-Ravnkilde, 2021).

By offshoring repatriation to transit countries, the EU has also sidestepped the notoriously difficult cooperation with African states on voluntary and forced return (Cassarino, 2018; Zanker et al., 2019). The Gambia is no exception (Cham and Adam, 2021, p. 10). With autocracy and persecution gone, the fear that Europe would deport rejected asylum seekers back to the Gambia increased (and remains high). Between December 2018 and February 2019, Germany deported Gambians at a rate of circa three flights a month, each transporting 15–20 persons. Despite being a much smaller phenomenon compared to the repatriation of transit migrants, these deportations from Europe stirred up protests in Germany, the Gambia and on social media. The Gambian government then decided to impose a moratorium on deportation in February 2019; cooperation with the EU on the matter has since been difficult[11]. Repatriation from Libya and Niger has also been a potentially destabilizing factor for the New Gambia. As hundreds of Gambians were repatriated from Libya in the first months of 2017, returnees accused the Barrow government of "selling the backway" and mounted protests and political pressure (Zanker and Altrogge, 2019, p. 177). Past the 2017 peak, however, the level of conflict seems to have abated.

A closer look at the EU-IOM Joint Initiative, and the management of transit returnees more generally, allows us to detail how externalized migration governance becomes integrated in the broader governance landscape in the Gambia (see also: Aucoin, 2022; Marino et al., 2022). In the first place, I will pay heed to the IOM as the implementing agency and, more generally, as a key partner of the EU in the Euro-African zone (Lavenex, 2016; Brachet, 2016). Concurrently, the Joint Venture among other projects has allowed the IOM to expand its influence as a transnational actor of migration management in the Gambia and West Africa. In this and the next section, I outline the political conditions and institutional infrastructure that have made this expansion possible.

In mid-2017, the IOM turned its branch in the Gambia into a standalone country office. Its operational capacity expanded dramatically. Previous to that, IOM The Gambia offered Assisted Voluntary Return (AVR) to migrants with or without choice but to return home[12]. Only a small number of the returnees could benefit from longer-term assistance (Zanker and Altrogge, 2019, p. 173). With the operational beginning of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative in mid-2017, AVRs were upgraded to AVRRs (Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration). The Gambia was initially expected to receive 1,500 returnees over three years but, as mentioned, arrivals far exceeded this initial estimate.

IOM exercised rather direct control over the repatriation process. Some Gambian interlocutors spoke of monopoly, others lamented the lack of transparency and accountability. During an interview with an IOM Reintegration Officer in 2019, I asked whether I could visit a facility connected to repatriation. The officer politely declined the request because the privacy of the assisted had to be preserved. I had been warned by persons involved in reintegration activities of the difficulty of accessing people and services assisted by the IOM. Consistent with IOM's official communication, the officer carefully emphasized cooperation with Gambian institutions, the highest level of which was the steering committee of stakeholders overseeing repatriation. Yet I found unease during an interview with a representative of the Focal Point for Migration of the Ministry of Interior, which chaired the steering committee. Among others, the representative said that "we have told IOM that we want to have our own monitoring system", instead of relying on data and reports by IOM alone.

This comment reveals how externalization may operate through grey areas and generate frictions over sovereign prerogatives (Gaibazzi, 2020, p. 225). At the same time, IOM's rather direct and autonomous intervention reflects a permeability to external influences that has characterized transnational governance in postcolonial countries like the Gambia and which the EU exploits to create clienteral forms of cooperation on migration management (Spijkerboer, 2021). This is to an extent a legacy of (indirect) colonial rule (ibid., p 11), while also partly resulting from the mentioned strategies of extraversion of the Gambian state. International organizations, such as the ITC and some of the donor country agencies managing Tekki Fii, have a firm footing in the Gambia and variously sustain policy reforms and forms of multilateral governance such as the steering committees overseeing repatriation among other aspects of migration governance. This extends to the lower, NGOized levels of governance (Nugent, 2012), particularly those actors adapting to the EUTF-flooded development sector[13] (Marino et al., 2022; cf. Boyer et al., 2020; Sylla and Cold-Ravnkilde, 2021). The Joint Initiative cooperates with YEP and other Tekki Fii projects through referral mechanisms for the reintegration phase. Returnees are considered potential re-migrants and thus in need of empowerment and a vision for them stay in the Gambia. Later on in the interview, the Ministry of Interior reiterated his concerns about coordination and transparency vis-à-vis other NGOs and civil society organizations that had clustered around assisted repatriation.

5. Indirect Migration Management I: Local State and Community

In the Gambia, the IOM did not simply seek to create an enclave of migration governance away from state supervision. As an actor of global governance, it seeks to diffuse norms and practices of "migration management" (Geiger and Pécoud, 2020), also by developing state capacity (Frowd, 2018). From this point of view, the New Gambia constituted a virgin land. One of IOM's most publicized achievements in the Gambia has been the Gambia's first standalone National Migration Policy (2020), and the related National Coordination Mechanism for Migration (NCM) overseeing its implementation (IOM, 2021b, p. 14). The EU-IOM Joint Initiative included measures to reinforce border and migration management. Furthermore, since managing reintegration implies networking with the development sector (Marino et al., 2022), the governance of repatriation moves beyond the route towards the roots, becoming more spatially and institutionally capillary. Far from being a mechanical diffusion, however, I will show that migration and repatriation management spread along the Gambia valley by becoming articulated with existing structures of population control of and beyond the state, and eventually came to depend on, and shape, their capacity to manage aspiring and returning migrants. This is what I refer to as "indirect migration management"; in this section, I pay specific attention to such articulations at the local state and community level.

In the summer of 2019, the IOM inaugurated an extension office in Basse Santa Su, the capital of the Upper River Region (URR). This served to reinforce operations in the more remote areas of the country. As I shall detail later, a few months before the deadline for applications

[10] There is a longer history of Sahelian migration and expulsion to Libya that in the past decade has been heavily polarized by Europe's securitarian concerns (Sylla, 2020).

[11] The Gambia lifted the moratorium in January 2020 to then impose it again in June 2021 in view of the upcoming presidential elections (December 2021) (see also Cham and Adam, 2021). In October 2021, the EU retaliated by imposing visa restrictions on Gambian travellers (European Council, 2021).

[12] IOM Gambia was established in 2001 as extension of the regional office in Dakar. During my visit in 2012, it was staffed by one to two officers at a time.

[13] In the Gambia and internationally, the development sector has also criticized the EUTF for its: quick-fix and containment-driven logic, underfunding, lack of transparency in resource management, poor relevance and performance, support to oppressive states, scarce local ownership and accountability (Barana, 2017; Castillejo, 2016).

(December 2019), a number of returnees had yet to receive or claim their reintegration assistance. One of the two newly appointed officers reported being particularly involved in outreach. Possibly, the IOM was also under pressure to boost its delivery performance. In parallel, one of the three Regional Migration Information Centres (MICs) was being created in Basse under the aegis of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative. The other two were in the West Coast and Lower River Regions. MICs were a partnership with the National Youth Council (NYC), an advisory body to the government and a coordinating platform that oversees civil society initiatives. The NYC would take over responsibility for the MICs at the end of the Joint Initiative (2020, then extended). It was therefore no surprise that, at Basse, there seemed to be a degree of continuity and fluidity between the nascent MIC, the IOM office, the Regional Youth Committee and the Youth Centre of the NYC, in terms of personnel, activities and competences.

The creation of the MIC and the regional office of IOM was meant to facilitate a further extension of migration management to the community level. The MIC in Basse and associated institutions launched a pilot project in ten villages aiming to involve village authorities and grassroots associations in the expanding landscape of migration-related programmes. One of these communities was Sabi, where I have been conducting fieldwork since 2006. In August 2019, the pilot had not gone beyond a public meeting and the tentative creation of a coordinating committee with members of the Village Development Committee, a local government body. The public meeting, which took place a few weeks before my visit, had served to raise awareness about opportunities for youth with respect to the new information facilities, upcoming skills training and entrepreneurship opportunities in the region. Also, backway returnees were encouraged to attend the meeting and were briefed on reintegration assistance, especially on what IOM calls "collective reintegration". Some of the Sabi representatives understood their task was to draw up a list of the returnees and form small groups for joint business (whereby the returnees pool their reintegration packages, thus yielding collective reintegration). In addition to cooperation on data management and reintegration assistance, the further exchanges with Sabi representatives focused on development needs and possible future projects.

Three considerations are in order. In the first place, externalized migration management once again relies on the Gambia's state responses to the youth question. The NYC, a key partner of EUTF programmes, was created in 2001 as de facto an attempt to rein in the youth after Jammeh had deployed them to break down the previous regime at the local level (Bellagamba, 2008). While this might change in the New Gambia, the political role of the NYC has typically been to simultaneously mobilize and contain the civil society, including the "traditional" youth associations that help governing villages like Sabi (Gaibazzi, 2015, pp. 163–167).

Secondly, the extension of migration management to the village level follows the EUTF's colonial logic of the development-sedentarization nexus mentioned in a previous section. Socioeconomic development would purportedly lead to "community stabilization" in migrant-sending regions like the URR. Accordingly, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative aimed in its last phase (2020) to move beyond the individual, one-off character of AVVR assistance toward "collective reintegration"; even more ambitiously, it shifted toward "community reintegration, by addressing the social and economic needs of communities and thus creating the conditions for 'sustainable reintegration'"[14] (Samuel Hall, 2018a; see also Marino and Lietaert, 2022). Failing to reintegrate, the discourse goes, returnees may turn to the backway again, thereby perpetuating irregular migration.

Thirdly, externalized migration management perpetuates a (post) colonial legacy of "indirect rule" through societal institutions. As I detailed elsewhere (Gaibazzi, 2020), the interaction between Sabi and state/governance representatives reenacted a political culture between "outsiders" or strangers – be they rulers or destitute migrants – and "insiders" or hosts, whereby the former simultaneously defer to and coopt the locals through a chain of (gendered) political and moral authority. The (Gambian) representatives of the Youth Centre liaised with the village chief and his advisors, who then called upon the Village Development Committee, an assembly of male dignitaries coordinating community development, and the local youth association. In addition, word was sent to household heads, for them to invite returnees in their households to the meeting. This political culture of hospitality and entrustment has a long history in the Gambia river valley. The colonial and postcolonial state in the Gambia has integrated it notably by relying on village and district chiefs to govern the rural population, including the youth. This form of "indirect rule" has both reproduced and mined the efficacy and legitimacy of chieftaincy and entrustment more generally (Bellagamba, 2004; Beedle, 1980; Kea, 2010). As noted, this is one of the reasons behind the youth question and political crisis in the 1980s/1990s.

It is worth noting that, while it clearly pursues a sedentarist view of "stabilization", indirect migration management rests on, ironically, a logic of mobility. Hospitality and entrustment have long served to regulate the movement of people – settlers, migrant workers, traders, clerics and others – in a valley that has historically thrived on human and commercial circulations. Furthermore, while the British colonizers (1894–1965) certainly adopted a territorializing gaze on settlement and migration in the Gambia (Sarr, 2016, ch. 6; Ceesay, 2016), they were equally concerned with promoting mobility (cf. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh, 2000). They were constantly preoccupied with the inflow and settlement of what they called "strange farmers", seasonal migrant farmers hailing from and beyond the Gambia valley. These constituted the backbone of the Gambian Protectorate as a "groundnut colony" and one of the largest migratory phenomena in West African history. The strange farmers movement pivoted on host-stranger arrangements between domestic groundnut producers and the migrant farmers (Swindell and Jeng, 2006). The British were at times suspicious of these arrangements and did attempt to regulate them, though mostly ineffectively and for generating fiscal revenue (Swindell and Jeng, 2006, pp. 217-220). For the most part, however, they adopted a laissez faire approach. Seasonal and permanent immigration has made the Gambia a small but rather diverse country[15]. Much as the colonial and postcolonial governments have reified ethnic categories, racial-ethnic politics has had limited scope in the Gambia as a tool of population control (Hultin and Sommerfelt, 2020).

Whether indirect migration management will have long-lasting implications at the local state and community level remains an open question. It nevertheless reveals how externalization articulates with, and vertically integrates, diverse histories, logics and scales of migration control practices in and beyond the colonial frame. What is more, the fact that "community" is in the purview of migration management urges us to consider how societal actors shape migration *within* the governance arena (Raineri, 2021). I mentioned that household authorities were invited to recruit young men and returnees into governance initiatives like the pilot project in Sabi. This is a hint to a broader fabric of social practices that, both more indirectly and pervasively, become stitched to externalized repatriation management. As for local authorities, this stitching, too, has both regenerating and disruptive effects. I will begin with the latter.

6. Externalities: institutional abandonment and social marginalization

Although externalized borders penetrate deeper into the Gambia

[14] Interview with IOM Reintegration Officer, August 2019.

[15] Immigration and settlement in the Gambia have also been characterized by forms of discrimination and exclusion (Gaibazzi, 2012).

valley, neither their reach nor their effectiveness should be taken at face value. Like governments, village elites and associations adopt tactics of extraversion to attract development funds. Sabi administrations were certainly interested in EUTF-driven initiatives. For the time being, however, many villages like Sabi relied primarily on their migrants and hometown associations to finance projects and to link up with development organizations abroad (Bellagamba and Vitturini, 2021). Underfunded and subordinated to short-term security objectives, the effects of development measures have been uncertain. Many villages are yet to see any concrete example of community development besides the occasional awareness campaign touring the rural areas. Barriers to access and other difficulties have characterized vocational training courses as well as grant schemes.

Rather as beneficiaries of development, the communities seem to feature as recipients of externalities (cf. Lessenich, 2016). The political, human, social and economic costs of securitizing the European space are more and more externalized, together with migration control, towards countries and communities of origin. Nowhere is this more evident than in the case of migrants repatriated from the Central Mediterranean route. Arguably the most effective intervention in the EUTF portfolio for reducing the migratory pressure along the route, the EU-IOM Joint Initiative has probably had greater deterrence effects thanks to the sensitization of returnee associations such as the Youth Against Irregular Migration (YAIM) and Gambian Returnees from the Backway (GRB). The vivid stories of hundreds of other young men (and women) returning with no money and not infrequently with signs of violence, disease and psychological distress have further amplified the social trauma caused by those who had perished or disappeared along the way, and obscured the success of those who have arrived in Europe. By 2019, in the cities and in the countryside, the backway had lost traction and was perceived as a loss – of lives, money and family cohesion. Together with the securitization of the Central Mediterranean route and with the end of autocracy in the Gambia, this might have contributed to a substantial reduction of departures after 2017.

Reintegration was, in contrast, a widespread source of frustration (Sylla and Cold-Ravnkilde, 2021). For those who had signed an AVRR with IOM, the thorniest issue was by far about the “reintegration packages” (Actionaid, 2019). The package – worth 1,060 Euros (about 60,000 Dalasi) in theory adjustable to personal needs – included a number of services (medical care, vocational training, etc.). Some of the returnees had to wait one year or longer before benefiting from their package. Processing times became decidedly shorter past the peak of arrivals in 2017, but delays were nevertheless reported by more recent arrivals during my 2019 fieldwork. The IOM reintegration officer that I interviewed found my findings “very weird” and assured me that packages could be processed in two to three weeks. She added that the IOM made strong efforts in information and outreach via TV and radio programmes, alleged that returnees sometimes registered a phone number and then changed it without notifying the IOM. However, many AVRR beneficiaries reported problematic – one might add “weird” – stories in their interaction with IOM. Confusion about requirements and procedures were not infrequent, also fuelled by different and contradictory experiences reported by returnees. This seemed to be a greater problem in the rural areas due to the higher transport costs incurred by those wishing to reach the IOM headquarters[16].

In short, many backway migrants went from being stranded abroad to being stranded at home. Blocked and bounced back, they were given “chicken change”, as a development worker put it, and then abandoned to themselves. Institutional abandonment extended deeper into social relationships. Post-backway reintegration is often marked by forms of discrimination and exclusion (cf. also Schultz, 2021). Some family and friends may be resentful and avoid the returnees. In turn, the returnees might avoid their families and friends out of shame for failing to reach Europe, returning empty-handed, and/or squandering scarce family resources. They regret the dependency on their families and the being stuck in the condition they had been in prior to migrating. Sensitizing against the stigmatization of returnees, in and beyond their families and communities, was one main concern of both GRB and YAIM, and was becoming a trope of public and even academic discourse on post-deportation reintegration in the Gambia and elsewhere (Altrogge and Zanker, 2019, p. 32; Actionaid, 2019, pp. 27-28). This is a strong reminder that communities and families are not necessarily cohesive and supportive units, especially in a context like the Gambia marked by diffused poverty and competition over scarce (migratory) resources. Heavy expectations, and sanctions, are placed on the younger generations to provide for their families.

On the other hand, the discourse on the social marginalization should be approached critically. In the first place, it risks blaming the victims. Social marginalization should instead be read as a toxic externality, in that border externalization and the chain of responsibility behind the marginality of transit returnees become socialized and concealed as interpersonal acrimonies (Gaibazzi, 2014). Secondly and importantly for this article, it risks to further obscure the work of families in de facto filling the space of institutional abandonment created by the EU-IOM Joint Initiative. As soon we shift the perspective on families, we not only see the social disruptiveness but also the social productivity of border externalization, or more precisely, how externalized migration management comes to indirectly to depend on the social work of repatriation and reintegration carried out by families.

6. Indirect migration management II: families

In a survey conducted in 2017 by Samuel Hall, the consultancy firm that has written IOM’s reintegration plan for the Gambia, it transpired that only 21 per cent of the Libya returnees interviewed in a sample of communities countrywide had been assisted by IOM. “This suggests that”, writes Samuel Hall, “there may be a significant number of self-sponsored returns” (Samuel Hall, 2018b, p. 6). In the absence of more detailed data, it is difficult to draw conclusive evidence from this finding. Yet Samuel Hall’s suggestion has curiously generated little to no interest. If not the IOM, who or what brings backway young men back? And why?

Parallel to but also woven in the very fabric of externalized repatriation are strong, if less visible, societal mechanisms of recapture, repatriation and reintegration. Much as friends and family send money to support migrants’ onward travel along the route, they may finance the latter’s return. Repatriations from Libya and Niger are thus not infrequently co-sponsored, rather than exclusively IOM-sponsored or self-sponsored. With or without co-sponsorship, migrants may be “pulled back” by strong affective and moral pressures. Haruna, a man in his early thirties, used to run a small groceries in Wellingara, in the Greater Banjul Area. His elder brother had helped him to set up the shop. Ensuring subsistence for the family was nevertheless hard. Many peers of his were leaving for the backway and arriving in Europe. One day in 2015, he sold his business and, without informing his family, he hit the road together with three friends. The route was difficult and it took him many months, and the help of friends, to reach Tripoli. As attacks and killings against sub-Saharan migrants intensified in Libya, he escaped towards the coast, seeking an opportunity to cross to Europe. He ended up in a warehouse with other migrants awaiting their boat. But as days passed, he realized that no boat would arrive. It was then that he called his family for the first time since he had left. His brother said he would no longer support him and exhorted him to come back. His mother, worried about his life, warned him that if he tried to cross the Mediterranean, she would never talk to him again. She, too, told him to come home. Haruna’s return was again difficult and lengthy, as he had to pass through Algeria to avoid being caught and sent to a detention camp in Libya. He also had to work

[16] As noted, this was a reason for the IOM to open extension offices upcountry. Reportedly, the IOM gave transport allowances to applicants summoned to an appointment or orientation meeting.

to finance his southward journey. Finally, partly expelled, partly self-organized, he reached southern Algeria, crossed to Niger and signed up for an AVRR with IOM. He arrived in the Gambia in late 2017.

Upon arrival in the Gambia, Haruna went to his brother's house in Serekunda, but was refused hospitality. The brother was still mad at him: "it was better you took your money and threw it into the river", the brother said to him, and reiterated that he would no longer help him. Haruna went back to his village, a Fula hamlet in Niamina, Central River Region, where I interviewed him in August 2019. His family were happy that he was alive, he said, and they helped him to settle back. He resumed farming in the family fields and spent the 2018/19 dry season at home. The problem was that he was no longer helping them: "I used to contribute [thanks to my shop], but now I am just here sitting around". Backway companions who crossed to Europe sent pictures with nice clothes and backdrops. "I feel it", he added, but he did not talk about this feeling with anybody. He kept to himself. His hope was now to get enough capital to resume business in Wellingara. More than a year after his arrival, however, he was still waiting for his reintegration package from IOM, which had now given way to other perspectives. Perhaps his brother would pardon him, or other sponsors among his relatives and friends might get him started up again.

Whereas Haruna's stories exemplifies the resentment and exclusion that some backway migrants face upon return, it also highlights how families work for repatriation and reintegration. Haruna was after all welcome home. He was granted lodge and food; had he had health problems like a number of his backway fellows, he would have also been cared for. In an ordinary rural household like his with many mouths to feed, this is no small feat. This made Haruna feel he was at the wrong end of helping relations, and like many other young men in the Gambia, he tended to overlook the contribution that he was making by staying at home. This is nevertheless an important aspect of reintegration (see Gaibazzi, 2015). Haruna joined the other men in the household fields and busied himself as best as he could during the dry season. Surely, he earned little money in what is mostly subsistence agriculture. But he enabled those, like his elder brother, made money abroad, by managing household matters, caring for aging parents, supervising the migrants' children and wives.

Social networks play again a decisive role in economic reintegration. To able to return to his business in Wellingara, Haruna estimated a startup capital of about 60–70 thousand Dalasi, around the value of a standard AVVR reintegration package. Interestingly, his mind was not however on the IOM. Like so many other returnees, he hoped to find a "supporter", as Gambians call it, by networking with better-off kith and kin who might sponsor business, employment or re-migration. This subjects economic reintegration to rules and modes of (kinship) solidarities which, far from being automatic, demand of the young returnees to strike a difficult balance between autonomy and dependency (Gaibazzi, 2014). While many Niamina people like Haruna's brother deemed the backway to be the wrong solution, many equally thought that backway returnees should not feel ashamed, for they went for "hustling" – a shorthand in Gambian English for the willful, creative and arduous search for livelihood means for their families. This might give Haruna a chance to find a supporter.

Beyond the Colonial Legacy: Historicizing Family and Community "Management"

Gambian families and communities have long reckoned with the very real prospect *and* consequence of failed hustling attempts like backway migration. In the 1950s, young men shaking with diamond fever left for Sierra Leone. Similar to Haruna and other backway migrants, some escaped at night without informing their families, after selling, or stealing, their mothers' jewelry or bags of groundnuts, cattle or some other asset owned by their households. Families tolerated the (customary) bravado of their sons, hoping that one day they would return from their adventure with a bounty. But some sent for their young men, especially underage ones, or these would be sent or escorted home by more senior migrants in Sierra Leone.

Throughout the decades that followed, as the social and economic weight of migration grew, families in the Gambia continued to send for their members stranded abroad. These were variously kept from returning by lack of resources, the shame for failing their mission, or the stubborn search for wealth in zones plagued by war, such as Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Sometimes relatives would travel to find and bring back men who had been missing for years without sending news. These are just some of social practices in a broader spectrum of "involuntary return". The death of a parent, household duties, pressures to marry and marital pressures, curses and spells, among other reasons, have variously forced migrants to end their migratory venture prematurely and return home.

In Sabi, looking for greener pastures abroad is a standard option for young men. Heavy expectations are placed on them to emulate the efforts of fathers and elder brothers who have ensured the survival and relative prosperity of this village. This being said, nobody expects the path to be smooth. In 2019, while I was in Sabi to conduct research on the backway, I caught up with a number of young and mature men returning from Angola, where I had done fieldwork in 2015/16. Their commercial businesses had been devasted by an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions or they were simply deported (Gaibazzi, 2017, 2018b, 2019). The more prosperous among the Angola returnees diversified their business and travel destinations, but the more recent and younger ones often returned empty-handed to their families. Away from the spotlight on the backway phenomenon, they too sought to reintegrate. Little did they differ from backway returnees and from other returnees from Europe and elsewhere. When the path of migration fails, they all said, you go back home and find another path.

Offering protection and support for vulnerable returnees is not a natural task of households, but a product of history. When I began my fieldwork in the mid-2000s, at the height of boat migration to the Canary Islands, the collective memory of traumatic migration was rather dominated by the civil war in Sierra Leone. Gambian families had to abruptly flee from what had become a second home for them; some died during raids and shellings. Thousands of Gambians arrived in the Gambia along with Sierra Leonean nationals, and rather than in camps or programmes managed by the UNCHR (Altrogge and Zanker, 2019, p. 44), they returned to their families in the village or in the city.

Finally, return, reintegration and permanence are an integral element of migration along the Gambia river valley. Rather than returning to a normal condition of rural sedentarity, as the developmental discourse has it, migrants like Haruna reintegrate in a position endowed with some social value also because it sustains ongoing migration. Having developed in a historical context of mobility, kinship and household relations are such to enable the migration of some (men) and demand the permanence of others (see Gaibazzi, 2015). As noted above, migrants might be recalled home under specific household circumstances. There is no denying that the backway is associated with a host of societal problems, yet we should see these problems partly as the result of externalized deportation, let alone of global economic inequalities, which overloads families already under heavy pressure to accommodate several young household members unable to make it either in the Gambia or elsewhere.

7. Conclusion

Indirect migration management pertains to a broader, colonially inflected process of socioeconomic externalization. Claude Meillassoux (1981) was among the first to identify this process beginning with the colonial cash crop economy (such as groundnuts in the Gambia) and extending to postcolonial labour migration from the Sahel to Europe. He described the Western Sahel as a reserve of industrial labour for European economies, such as the French automobile industries that boomed after the Second World War. Capital would ensure access to cheap

labour by externalizing the social work and cost of reproduction onto the (rural) families and communities in the Sahel. This articulation between capitalist and domestic modes of re/production required the continuity of the latter, while mining its foundations over time. Meillassoux maintained that dependency on the cash economy, including labour migration, would increase, thereby straining intergenerational relations and domestic organization. As Meillassoux was writing in the mid-1970s, and European countries like France affected by economic crisis would start introducing restrictions to travel from, and return programmes to, former colonies (Quiminal and Timera, 2002), a new chapter of this externalization process began.

Today, rather than solely a reserve for European labour markets, Sahelian communities are reserves in the reservation sense of the word: a territorial container and a dumping ground for job and asylum seekers in excess. Disconnection and expulsion, rather than articulation between modes of re/production, mark the political economy of (unskilled) migration from West Africa to Europe. One might nevertheless argue along with Ruben Andersson (2014) that West African migrants are needed by the growing border industry in the Euro-African zone. Without this raw material, the industry cannot keep producing what it seeks to eliminate: the illegalized migrant. From this perspective, families and communities keep deploying their social and cultural means to reproduce border-able migrants, and to reabsorb those expelled as externalities of the border economy.

The concept of indirect migration management signals, in this respect, an articulation or entanglement, not solely of modes of production, but also of modes of migration control. Clearly, communities and families are neither pawns of (border) capitalism nor passive recipients of externalities. As shown throughout the article, Sahelian migration has long been shaped by diverse migratory circuits other than labour migration to Europe as well as by historical experiences not reducible to a neocolonial, capitalist dynamic. It is precisely these historical experiences that, sedimented as social practices and institutions, come into play through externalized migration governance. What is exploited through backway migration to Europe is neither solely the labour nor the mobility of social cadets across the expanded EurAfrican border zone (from whom economic, political and other value is extracted) (Andersson, 2018; Achtnich, 2022); it is also the societal capacity to regulate their movement (Raineri, 2021). In the case of transit returnees, this capacity begins with the process of repatriation itself and continues with post-deportation reintegration. The point is not that Gambians are an unwitting partner of IOM that supply logistical, financial and socio-economic support to returnees. Rather, it is that IOM indirectly exploits regulatory powers at the societal and intimate level (cf. Gross-Wrytzen, this issue), while effacing them behind the image of a UN international organization stepping in to provide humanitarian assistance and pastoral care. Even more poignantly, it conceals the very political fact that communities and families depicted as being bereft of social and economic resources, hence in need of external supervision and support to prevent their youth from leaving, can in fact manage their own migration flows.

Even though "community" is more firmly within the purview of governance via concepts of stabilization and sustainable reintegration, it is unlikely that these self-regulatory mechanisms will gain greater visibility, let alone legitimacy. In rural Gambia, development aid may beef up youth centres and committees with resources that they can redistribute to village youths. But association with governance actors like the IOM, whose poor reintegration performance has already alienated so many returnees, might affect state agencies already struggling to regain the legitimacy lost during the Jammeh regime.

In sum, the more European borders become externalized the more they become entangled in a heterogeneous field of governance in postcolonial Africa. Heeding this entanglement or articulation moves us beyond an analysis centred on Europe, geopolitically and historically (see also Gross-Wrytzen, this issue). European borders do not move southward by the force of an inner logic, nor are they a linear continuation of a colonial model of population control. The case of repatriation of transit migrants certainly showed how Europe and international organizations can leverage their political and economic power to operate extraterritorially in a direct fashion. To understand this intervention it is necessary, however, to historicize this pliability to international intervention, to consider the contingent political transition in the Gambia, and to understand the extraverted strategies of the Gambian government via-a-vis shifting aid flows and development agendas. More importantly, it is only by flipping the lens on this intervention that one can see the less visible actors and historical forces operating in the shadows of externalizing forces and that, in complex and paradoxical ways, may contribute to the apparent efficacy of the intervention as seen from the outside.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Paolo Gaibazzi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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