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# No country for young women and men? Youth perspectives on the climate crisis and (im)mobility in Senegal

Sarah Walker and Elena Giacomelli

## **INTRODUCTION - Who are you? Introduce yourself visually (a selfie or whatever you think represents you)**

Hello my name is Abou Sow, I'm a geographer and I live in Saint Louis

### **Q1: What does climate change mean to you?**

By definition, climate change is a lasting change in climate parameters due to the increase in greenhouse gases. The latter leads to the destruction of the ozone layer, which causes radiation to penetrate the surface of the globe to an abnormal extent. To illustrate my point, these images shared reflect the impacts of climate change in my area. [...]

[INSERT figure 1]

This photo was taken in the Guet-Ndar area to illustrate the destruction of coastal habitats due to climate change. This causes material damage, as well as loss of people's economic activities, such as fishing (the economic heart of the area), tourism, etc.

### **Q2: Please take pictures of places in your town/village that have changed in the last 10 years due to climate change**

Here are my photos taken in my locality this evening. The village of Djougap Peulh is about ten kilometres from Saint Louis. This village is also affected by climate change, which is constantly degrading the physical environment, as shown in the images below.

[INSERT figure 2]

Reduced rainfall together with increasing temperatures is causing loss of vegetation in low-lying areas, leading to aridity and increased soil salinization. [...]. Some of these lands have been abandoned because of the salt, and this has led to most of these farmers moving into other forms of employment.

### **Q3: How are you coping with the changes in the environment?**

These two photos show the adaptation strategies of the populations in the Northern zone to climate change.

Here we have a dike being built at Gohou Mbatie to slow down the effect of the waves. Basaltic rocks have been put in place and surrounded by wire mesh.

This is in the Senegal River delta, specifically the Diéri area, where people used to practise rain-fed agriculture. Owing to reduced rainfall due to climate change, farmers have developed a new strategy of irrigated agriculture. This is an irrigated pepper plot, which enables cultivated areas to be extended, yield increased and year-round cultivation.

#### **Q4: MOBILITY: What is mobility for you?**

The concept of mobility in a simple way is the totality of movements of people recorded for more or less long durations and for various reasons. [...] However, in relation to climate change, there is an increase in the spatial density of human mobility because of its impact on people's lives, as the photos show.

Mobility linked to daily travel has led to traffic congestion in Saint-Louis. This is accentuated by rural households negatively affected by the effects of climate change, who converge in the city to find work [...].

If we go back a little in the history of Saint-Louis, the years of drought led to a massive rural exodus leading to unplanned occupation of the lower areas of the city without connecting to the city's sewerage system. This is the origin of the flooding in the peripheral districts of Saint-Louis.

Finally, human mobility linked to climate factors also concerns the youth in Senegal, who no longer have any hope in this country because of high youth unemployment linked to lack of policies to support young people and the weakness of their resilience to the effects of climate change. For this reason, some leave for western countries, hoping to find a better future and to improve both the living conditions of themselves and their families.

#### ***Abou Sow: Climate diary excerpt, May 2021<sup>1</sup>***

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This is an extract from Abou's 'climate diary', a visual method we adopted to capture perceptions of the climate crisis and its interconnections with mobility (see Giacomelli and Walker, 2021). Abou is a young geographer from Saint Louis, Senegal who we met during fieldwork in Senegal in 2021 for the EU funded research project *ClimateOfChange* (Giacomelli et al., 2022) on which this chapter is based. His images and words strikingly portray the interconnectivity of negative climatic effects, socio-political inequalities, rapid urbanisation, poor waste management, traffic pollution and diverse forms of mobilities in Senegal. People from rural areas, unable to make a living due to agricultural land degradation, crowd in on urban spaces, themselves heavily affected by the climate crisis and exposed to coastal erosion. Abou connects all these trends, highlighting the multiple, often devastating, impacts of the climate crisis on people's lives, particularly young people, and the manner in which it exacerbates already existing inequalities. In this sense, as we shall discuss in the following, notions of 'mobility justice' (Sheller 2018a; 2018b) thread through his climate diary.

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<sup>1</sup> For full diary including all photos see: <https://climateofchange.info/diaries/abou-sow/>

At COP27, youth activists spoke of how “*our futures are being stolen!*” owing to the climate crisis and its “*irreversible life changing impacts on young people.*”<sup>2</sup> Just as, as Abou outlines, many young people in Senegal maintain they have no hope, or ‘no future’ in Senegal owing to the mobility injustices that limit their opportunities. This then leads some to risk their lives making the dangerous boat journey across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe, as it is perceived as the only option for a better future. More than 60% of the Senegalese population is under 25 years old. For these young people, the devastating impact of the climate crisis is being felt *right now*, and indeed has been felt for years, as opposed to being a future threat. This chapter draws on qualitative fieldwork enhanced by visual methods carried out in fishing communities in Dakar and Saint Louis in 2021 to present the perspectives of young people living in these areas on the climate crisis, and the mechanisms they use to resist its devastating impacts. These two cities are significantly affected by the climate crisis. In particular, coastal erosion, driven by rising sea levels, increased intensity of storm surges, and rapid urbanisation. Further, they are both sites of complex intertwined mobilities, both seasonal internal, rural-urban and outwards towards neighbouring countries as well as transit points for movements further afield, which interconnect with the climate in multiple ways. The chapter then evidences the complexities and multicausal nature of migration, and how it interconnects with the climate in multiple ways. Further, as pointed out by Geddes *et al.* (2012), given the large role economic motives has to play, we also present how migration may then be *towards* environmental risk in cities like Dakar or Saint Louis.

Indeed, as we shall discuss in the below, fishing ecosystems are themselves being destroyed by the climate crisis, ocean grabbing, rapid urbanisation, the rural exodus, as well as pollution and waste. This creates a situation in which young people feel they have no hope. As noted by the United Nations ‘There is no universally agreed international definition of the youth age group’. For statistical purposes, the United Nations, defines ‘youth’, as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, whereas for the European Commission statistics, young people are defined as being between 15 and 29 years old. Whilst recognising that the significance of ‘youth’ is highly divergent between countries, organisations and cultural systems (Honwana, 2012), we adopt the age category of 15-29 years for the purposes of this research. Senegal is one of Africa’s few liberal democracies and has a long tradition of youth protest (Dimé, 2022). We set out here how the young Senegalese people in our study engage in everyday activism to resist the climate crisis and render their environments more habitable.

Through its focus on the voices of marginalised youth, the chapter aims to counter stereotypes of ‘climate migrants’, still too often defined as passive victims or threats (Tschakert and Neef, 2022). Given that ‘climate migration’, despite significant critical scholarship of the nexus (Bettini, 2013; Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe, 2019; Boas *et al.*, 2022), is now a common rationale for enhancing border control in the Global North, there is an urgent need for more nuanced understandings of this issue. Interrogating dominant narratives of mobile lives in the climate crisis, we seek instead to prioritise the views and embodied experiences of those enmeshed in climate-related movements (Tschakert and Neef, 2022). We adopt a climate mobilities approach (Boas *et al.*, 2022), which recognises the impact of colonialism on both mobilities and places, and that adaptive capacity is highly uneven, mediated by intersectional considerations, such as one’s position in relation to capital, gender, ethnicity, class, race (Baldwin,

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<sup>2</sup> UN News (2022) see: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130422>

Fröhlich, and Rothe, 2019). Indeed, as the work of Neel Ahuja (2021) shows, the climate crisis is embedded within longer histories of race, colonialism, and capitalism, which also intersect with mobility rights. Through these lived experiences, we underline that the ‘climate migrant’ remains a dehistoricized figure that masks the underlying global structures of inequality and ongoing colonial continuity (Ahuja, 2021; Baldwin, Fröhlich, and Rothe, 2019; Baucom, 2020; Sultana, 2021).

The chapter commences with the environment in which the young people in our study find themselves and the impacts of the climate crisis in Dakar and Saint Louis. This is followed by a description of the methods utilised. We go on to present the concept of mobility justice and how this is understood and reflected in the lives of the young people. Having outlined their lived experiences and perceptions of the climate crisis, the subsequent sections outline various everyday climate actions the young people adopt to try and resist its impacts. Finally we conclude by reflecting on how young people perceive and experience the climate crisis to enhance understandings of the ways in which the climate crisis is resisted from below and its complex interconnection with mobility.

### **A hostile environment for youth**

The environmental crisis may be one across the globe, the impacts are not felt in the same manner. UNICEF’S recent report ‘*The climate crisis is a child rights crisis*’ (2021), evidences how severe hazards are compounded by overlapping vulnerabilities due to socio-economic factors. The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) found that the human cost of disasters falls overwhelmingly on low and lower-middle income countries: vulnerability to risk, and degrees of suffering, are determined by levels of economic development, rather than exposure to natural hazards per se (2018). Vanessa Nakate, a 25 year old Ugandan climate activist, who brought world’s attention to the marginalisation of African (youth) voices in the climate crisis debate, stresses:

People in Uganda, in Africa, and across what’s called the Global South are losing their homes, their harvests, their incomes, even their lives, and any hopes of a liveable future *right now*.

“This situation is not only terrible, it’s also unjust. Although the African continent has just 15% of the world’s population, it is responsible for only between 2% and 3% of global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions (Nakate, 2021).

The urgency of the crisis and its impact *right now*, as raised by Nakate, is starkly clear in Abou’s climate diary. As is often cited in talk of the climate crisis, those who contributed the least, suffer the most from its consequences. Youth are some of the most affected by the climate crisis, particularly those in the Global South who are on the frontline. We present here the perspectives of young people living on the frontline of the climate crisis in Senegal. In interrogating the impact of the climate crisis on young lives, we also examine its interconnection with im/mobility and how this is embedded in pre-existing power structures (Boas *et al.*, 2022).

Around the world, people also experience mobility in radically diverse ways. As Hirst and Thompson pointed out in 1999, states still control their borders and the movement of people across them, and so, despite the rhetoric of globalisation, 'the bulk of the world's population lives in closed worlds, trapped by the lottery of birth' (1999). Thus, the freedom to move has become a stratifying factor of today's world (Bauman, 1998; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012). Yet, as reinforced by Nick Gill (2009), the possibility to choose to stay still is also important. In addition to underlying issues such as poverty, limited channels for regular migration also compel people to undertake extremely perilous journeys at sea, leading to many lives being lost (IOM, 2021). As much research has evidenced, border controls have, in many cases, simply rerouted migrants towards alternative, often more dangerous routes (Squire, 2017; De Genova, 2018).

These socio-spatial inequalities, as we shall explicate in the below, are keenly felt in Senegal. The country is significantly exposed to the climate crisis and has a high incidence of climate-sensitive economic activities, including farming and fishing. More than 65% of Senegalese live in coastal areas, predominantly concentrated around Dakar and other urban areas (Ndour *et al.*, 2018) which exacerbates climate sensitivity. Senegal's coastal areas are highly environmentally fragile and face sea level rise, coastal erosion, soil salinization, pollution, maritime storms and depletion of fish stocks and biodiversity (Amara *et al.*, 2019). Senegal is ranked as the world's eighth most at-risk country in terms of sea-level rise (Amara *et al.*, 2019). According to a 2019 World Meteorological Organization report, erosion is causing the coastline across West Africa to recede by some 1.8 metres a year. Coastal erosion in Senegal is determined by both natural processes and also by human actions, for example, once palm trees and cactuses protected the coast, fixing the soil, but these plants have been lost due to urbanisation, worsening the effects. Urban expansion is also partly based upon a capitalist extractivist system rooted in colonial histories of exploitation (Bernards, 2019; 2020). As reflected in Abou's climate diary, the effects of the climate crisis are multiple: rising sea levels are eroding the coast, while extreme weather events have decimated the ecology and made the land salty and arid, creating an increasingly uninhabitable environment.

Mobility is frequently used as a coping strategy to address climate risks, especially by the most vulnerable portions of the population in Senegal (Rigaud *et al.*, 2021). Whilst Senegal has a long history of mobility, indeed, as Cissokho *et. al* (2021, p. 4) put it 'Senegal was built through migration', research shows increasing population movement occurring within the country because of worsening environmental conditions linked to climate change (Rigaud *et al.*, 2021). Dakar and Saint Louis are sites to which rural migrants from Senegal's internal regions migrate in search of employment. The rural to urban seasonal migration patterns have become a large rural exodus in Senegal. This is the result of changes in rainfall patterns, desertification and lack of investment in new technologies destroying agricultural livelihoods in rural areas where land degradation is increasing.

Since the 1970s, a cycle of drought has broken the economic and social equilibrium of the Senegalese rural regions and migration towards cities has become the most common adaptive solution (Gueye, Fall and Tall, 2015). It must be stressed, however, that there is no direct link between periods of drought and the rhythm of departures, instead the link between climate variability and migration to cities is a

complex one and it is important to integrate other vulnerability factors (e.g. liberalisation of agricultural and trade policies, lack of bank credits, post crop losses, and limited resources diversity) (Gueye, Fall and Tall, 2015). As other studies have shown, seasonal workers migrate from rural economies for multiple complex reasons, intertwined with the climate crisis (Ribot et al., 2020). As Zickgraf asserts in relation to fishing communities in Saint Louis, 'migration is not born of climate change, it is part and parcel of maritime fishing livelihood', fishermen have for centuries moved in search of fish, following seasonal fishing habits (Zickgraf, 2022, p. 3455).

St. Louis is particularly vulnerable to the climate crisis as a result of its geography. The city's historic centre is located on an island in the Senegal river, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. A peninsula known as the Langue de Barbarie, a narrow sand spit of almost 30 km in length, protects it from the Atlantic. However, human interventions have worsened the situation too. As a quick fix to protect Saint Louis from the risk of flooding from a rapidly rising river in 2003, the local government dug a four-metre-wide breach, or canal, cutting through the Langue de Barbarie. This had dramatic consequences, notably by acting as a new river mouth that underwent rapid and significant widening; from 4 m when it first opened on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2003, to more than 5km in 2016 (Ndour et al., 2018). This engineering error has also upset the balance of the local ecosystem as the artificial canal brought seawater into the river, increasing its salinity level. The resulting soil salinization has damaged local crops, already destabilised by irregular rainy seasons and sand storms (Zickgraf, 2022).

In addition to coastal erosion, Dakar is particularly vulnerable to flooding, predominantly due to high urban density and lack of planning (Gueye, Fall and Tall, 2015). The population of Dakar has been increasing exponentially since Senegalese independence in 1960, from 1.5 million recorded in the 1988 census increasing to 3.1million in 2013, date of the last census (ANSD, 2013 in Gadiaga et al., 2021, p.11). This has led to rapid and unplanned urbanisation, with the city spreading into the area surrounding it and large-scale spontaneous settlements with poor infrastructure and drainage systems (Gadiaga *et al.*, 2021). In Dakar, the fishing communities of Rufisque, Thiaroye-sur-mer, Dalifort and Hann were selected owing to their particular vulnerability to the climate crisis and the diverse mobilities at play in these sites.

Fisheries occupy a pivotal role in Senegal, as Abou notes, fishing is the 'economic heart' of his local area. It is estimated that marine artisanal fisheries alone employ almost 100,000 people and around a quarter of the total labour force in fisheries is female, mostly employed in post-harvest jobs, especially in fish processing activities (Daniels et al., 2016). The fishing ecosystem is being destroyed by the climate crisis, as changing currents cause fish to migrate elsewhere, as well as coastal erosion and pollution. This is compounded by ocean grabbing as large industrial boats take the more expensive fish under agreements with countries in the Global North, including the European Union (Daniels et al., 2016; A. F. Johnson et al., 2021; Kaczynski and Fluharty, 2002; Okafor-Yarwood and Belhabib, 2020; Zickgraf, 2018). Such agreements often have little concern for the adverse environmental consequences (Johnson *et al.*, 2021). Indeed, the EU has been strongly criticised for its role in the depletion of West African fish stocks (Okafor-Yarwood and Belhabib, 2020).



The fishing communities in Dakar and Saint Louis are, thus, simultaneously arrival and transit points for migrants from internal rural areas, as well as some neighbouring countries, and departure points for some seeking to reach a hoped-for better life in Europe. As we shall discuss in the following, lack of employment opportunities, and limited channels for regular migration, compels some to undertake the perilous boat journey across the Atlantic to Europe (Ifekwunigwe, 2013; Zickgraf, 2018). Unemployment has dropped in Senegal from 14% in 2006 to 3.7% in 2021, and youth unemployment is at 5% according to World Bank data (ILO estimate). However, much of this employment relates to low-quality jobs that do not meet expectations or qualifications (Cissokho et. al, 2021). Indeed, Abou draws attention to the fact that young people 'do not have any hope' due to unemployment and/ or lack of opportunities, exacerbated by the climate crisis. We turn now to a brief outline of the methods used.

## **Methods**

The research adopted an action research methodology upholding the belief that it is important to conduct research 'by, with and for people, rather than research on people' (Reason and McArdle, 2004, p. 1). This was embedded within a 'live sociology' (Back, 2012) approach, informed by feminist and postcolonial epistemologies. Together with our two colleagues (see Giacomelli et al., 2022), we travelled to Senegal in May 2021 to conduct fieldwork. We worked with two Senegalese facilitators who worked as language and cultural intermediaries, which made it possible to reflect continuously on the research results as well as certain unique aspects of Senegalese culture, Wolof language expressions, and perceptions of the environment that do not always represent Eurocentric viewpoints, hence reflexivity was essential to improving comprehension. Taking into account our privileged positions of 'whiteness' (Frankenberg, 2000), citizenship, and researcher power, we conducted a combination of 35 in-depth interviews and four focus groups (two in each locality). Focus groups involved between five to ten participants, across a range of ages: in Dakar all were under 30 years old; in St. Louis between 18-50 years old. This was enhanced by a one-month climate diary, involving 30 young individuals, aged between 18 and 30 years old (15 from St. Louis, 15 from Dakar).

Climate diaries (Giacomelli and Walker, 2021) are a visual research tool devised to capture some of the lived realities of the climate crisis on everyday lives. This participatory visual approach includes research participants as co-producers of visual knowledge based on their perceptions, knowledge and experience (Pauwels, 2015; Fairey 2017). We asked participant to share photos and perceptions of the climate crisis on their lives for one month (1 question a week, up to 10 pictures in response to each question) through a WhatsApp group.

In order to capture the spatio-temporal dimensions of the climate crisis, we asked our participants to respond visually to the questions, as seen in Abou Sow's diary above. Visual perspectives of climate change and tactics to resist are captured in the shared pictures. Given the ambiguity of the term 'climate change' and its multiple meanings (Russo and Wodak, 2017), the climate diaries builds on diary-photographs (Latham, 2003) as a means to overcome the limitations of verbal narratives and enable individuals to visually convey the effect of the climate crisis within their own context. For the

purposes of this chapter, we draw on a limited selection of Abou's photos as well as two other participants, whilst making reference to other shared photos in our analysis.

### **Mobility justice and ongoing colonial structure of borders**

In placing our attention on fishing communities and migration dynamics we draw attention to a little researched area (for exceptions see Zickgraf, 2018, 2019, 2022 and Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012). To date, studies in Senegal have focused upon the gendered nature of clandestine migration (Melly, 2011; Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012), and migration linked to youth disillusionment and masculinity (Melly, 2011; Hernández-Carretero and Carling, 2012; Ifekwunigwe, 2013; degli Uberti and Riccio, 2017; Prothmann, 2018 Riccio and Zingari, 2022). Migration is understood then, as a means to contest the status of what Honwana calls 'waithood', where youth are unable to become independent adults (2012). This results in migration as hope, as in the hope of a 'better future' and for social mobility (Hage, 2009). Mobility becomes a platform for allowing escape from 'stuckedness' (Hage, 2009) or a lack of existential mobility, and thus a platform allowing the ability to move forward in life, what Hage (2009) refers to as 'symbolic mobility'. Aspired mobilities are more about a lack of hope for a better future in Senegal, as expressed by Abou, than necessarily imaginaries of Europe, which can be complex and contradictory (degli Uberti and Riccio, 2017). The chapter is attentive to how migration becomes the answer to personal difficulties in the Global South. For Hage, this is owing to 'dysfunctional colonially produced nation states' who cannot provide sufficient hope for a better future to most of their citizens, who consequently migrate in search of this hope' (2003, p. 17). This is evident in Abou Sow's diary, as he reflects that the youth 'no longer have any hope' in Senegal.

In Senegal, this youth disillusionment, as expressed by Abou, stems from the double failure of the political elites and the inefficiency of development programmes to address the many challenges facing young people: deepening poverty, lack of job prospects, recurrent disruptions in the education system, especially in universities (numerous strikes, student violence, etc.), and the lack of a clear vision for the future of the country (Dimé, 2022, p. 61). World Bank (2019) data illustrate that West Africa remains one of the poorest regions in the world in terms of income level. Scholarship has shown the difficulties young people in West Africa encounter when trying to find ways to survive in these difficult circumstances (Honwana, 2012). This is exacerbated by the climate crisis which worsens economic prospects. Young participants concurred with Abou Sow, that when the context becomes unbalanced because of the increasing social, economic and environmental vulnerability, people may decide to move elsewhere. Faima Sylla, a young mother and Community Activist in Saint Louis, told us: *"I think that, those who leave, if they found in their countries what they are looking for outside, they wouldn't have emigrated. That's why they leave. In Senegal it's so hard that if you stay here you will never get what you want. This is the reason why."*

Analysing this through a 'mobility justice' lens (Sheller, 2018a; 2018b), demonstrates how the governance and management of movement are influenced by power and inequality, which results in global mobility (in)justice (Sheller, 2018a). Adopting this concept to address the climate crisis allows for the expansion of the notion of climate justice, broadening our understanding to include climate change, unsustainable urbanisation, including pollution and congestion, and unsustainable bordering systems as a combined crisis. Through drawing attention to the interconnections between histories of colonialism

and extractive industries with more immediate problems of urban life and forms of uneven circulation both locally and globally, mobility justice evidences the politics of mobility as an ongoing struggle against the mobility regimes that shape power relations (Sheller, 2018b). Taking a mobility justice stance reveals how societal (in)justices shape, limit, and criminalize some bodies' movements while normalizing and facilitating those of other bodies through discursive and tangible systems of racial, gender, sexual, national, and border-making distinctions (Park and Pellow, 2019). Mobility is intertwined with structural problems, such as human actions which led to the climate crisis (Sheller, 2018a, 2018b), as shown from an image shared by Dioumblack in his climate diary (INSERT FIGURE 3).

The unequal global economy that leads some people in Senegal to feel they have 'no choice' but to leave their homes. But as legal channels to migrate for work or study are extremely limited, people are forced to move often through illegal and increasingly dangerous means. The EU enhanced border controls, restricting the movement of people from the Global South render regular migration an increasingly elusive possibility for Senegalese young people (Cissokho et. al, 2021). Senegal ranks very low in the passport index (in which rankings are based on the number of destinations their holders can access), and the visa system has extremely high costs and is very restrictive (Sow, Marmer, and Scheffran, 2016). This was recognised by participants. As, Sory Sène Fall, a young Community Activist in Saint Louis, told us:

*We also have problems with emigration because it is not easy for us to travel. It is difficult to get a visa from the embassies, so our brothers, uncles, and so on prefer to go abroad by pirogue. They do this in the hope of a better life. We would prefer people to travel the legal way, by taking the plane.*

The current unjust border system creates a unidirectional flow that blocks people in place, or creates difficulties for people to return. However, most did not want to leave, instead they wanted the opportunity to be able to stay still (cf. Gill, 2009) in Senegal, or to go and return. To travel for work and study, just as their young European counterparts do with relative ease. As many participants stated, "Senegal is where my life is." Permanent or temporary return to one's country of origin is (was) an integral part of the migration path of many Senegalese (Sinatti, 2015; Attanasia and Ricci 2018). Returns, whether permanent or temporary (at least one year in duration), are more frequent the further back in time the departures are (Castagnone 2010) as the current unjust border regime holds people in the Global south in place, restricting mobility.

This desire to migrate elsewhere but to return, reflecting the past circular migratory movement to go (to work or study) and to come back, was evident in younger participants. As a young woman stated in the Saint Louis focus group: "I would like to go abroad and travel, but regularly. I would like to go and come back, to take care of my family."

However, the border system holds these young people in place and pushes them to make perilous crossings of the Atlantic, well aware of the risks. Despite a condition of increasing "involuntary immobility" (Carling 2002), some Senegalese still try to migrate, as the Wolof motto says: "Barca wala barsakh" – "either we get to Barcelona or we die trying". This illegalized journey is seen as a life and death challenge as other, legal, routes are closed and made impossible (Ifekwunigwe, 2013). The

restrictive nature of the visa system has created a class of 'excluded people' (Sow, Marmer, and Scheffran, 2016, p. 239). The issue of visas led to animated discussions in both focus groups, where all agreed how hard it was. As one focus group young participant put it, getting a visa is "*like trying to climb a mountain. It's too difficult and expensive.*" Van Hear refers to this capacity to choose between moving and staying as 'moving power' (2017, p. 222). It is this moving power, embedded within the right to work, to a healthy environment, and to stay still, that is missing from the lives of these young people.

Awareness of the unfair mobility possibilities was evident in many participants, such as the climate diary of Abou Sow above. Samba Sarr, an environmental activist in Saint Louis working with youth and schools expressed what many people told us, revealing the complex link between migration and the climate crisis:

*So the link between climate change and the lack of work is simply the damage caused by the rising waters at Guet Ndar for example which has destroyed all the fishermen's houses, and the scarcity of fish, which has caused a lack of work for some young fishermen, who now prefer to go to Europe by pirogue. So the lack of work has also pushed other young people, who are not even fishermen, to leave for Europe. So that's the problem we can see between climate change and the lack of work. And on the other hand, I can say that what the Africans have done, and particularly the young Senegalese, to take the pirogue and go to Europe. I see it as a discovery as the Europeans did when they discovered Africa.*

These sentiments were also recognised by young participants in the Dakar focus group, where the impact of colonialism on socio-economic structures, perceptions and aspirations was keenly felt. Young Senegalese abroad maintain very strong ties with their country of origin, which are manifested first and foremost by the sending of remittances: more than 900 billion CFA francs each year, or over 1.3 billion euros. This is one of the highest figures in all of sub-Saharan Africa, both in absolute terms and calculated as a percentage of GDP (13.6%) (Bernardini, 2018). Entire families invest in the migration of some of their members, which requires considerable resources, and subsequently depend on their remittances to diversify their sources of income (Buggenhagen 2002; Kane 2002; Tall 2012). As underlined by many interviews: "*The young people go to other countries both to succeed but also to help the ones that stay here. It's the only reason*" Faima Sylla, young mother and Community Activist (Saint Louis)

*If a young man is unable to support his dad and mum, then he is forced to migrate. If the sea were full of fish nobody would be interested to leave because nobody wants to kill his own country. If you are here and you are not able to feed your family and take care of their health, it becomes a problem that is difficult to withstand.*

Mamadou, Fisherman (Rufisque, Dakar)

The interviews and climate diaries portray mobility (in)justice (Sheller, 2018a), where unjust border regimes intermingle with other socionatural factors which render livelihoods in these urban coastal areas

difficult, reducing hope. However, many young people do stay. Many are engaged in climate activism to render their communities more habitable, as we shall now discuss.

### **Artivists- everyday actions to resist the climate crisis**

Whilst youth climate activism, particularly in the form of large protests such as the School Strikes for Climate, is often in the spotlight (Nissen, Wong and Carlton, 2021; Skovdal and Benwell, 2021; Trott, 2021), young people – particularly those in the global South – have long been taking action to respond to environmental degradation in their everyday lives (Walker, 2017; Trott, 2021). Such everyday climate actions may take place outside of the spotlight (Trott, 2021) but make important contributions to young people’s place in the world and understanding of living more sustainably. Whilst FridaysForFuture is active in Senegal<sup>3</sup>, the young people in our study were not involved in the movement. They were focused upon everyday activism in their local communities, seeking to overcome and resist some of the devastation of the climate crisis on their societal and ecological systems. Catherine Walker, drawing on Joan Tronto’s (1993) feminist ethics of care observes, ‘activism is grounded theoretically in an ethic of care, premised on understandings of interdependence between humans (and non-humans) across times and spaces’ (2017, p. 14). This is practised by the young people in our research who sought to render their environments more habitable through their everyday climate crisis activism.

In Dakar, we met with local artivists. Artivists, as defined by the participants, are artists who engage in activism through “*creative actions which seek to change behaviour and build climate justice*” Marie H  l  ne. Arts based actions can support critical reflection and creative expression, allowing young people to envision alternative futures, to allow them to imagine ‘what if?’ (Trott, Even and Frame, 2020). Participants are engaged and active in seeking to improve their environment and raise awareness of the detrimental impacts of pollution and waste, as well as the wider global climate challenges. For example, the Africans Rising Project<sup>4</sup>, or the African Creative Action Network (ACAN)<sup>5</sup>, as explained by Marie H  l  ne, one of the artivists in Dakar:

*As activists, we take actions through awareness raising and advocacy; awareness raising about climate change and its negative effects on the environment and on people; advocacy targeting government authorities for a climatic justice by educating populations on the responses and approaches to be taken to address climate change (such as, reducing the use of plastic bags, recycling plastic materials, tree planting...). We intervene mainly through artistic activism.*

As discussed in the preceding, the environment in which these young people live is increasingly difficult. Complicated by the climate crisis and worsening impacts, as well as socio-political problems and the legacies of structural adjustment programmes in the 90s (Cissikho et al., 2021). Floods are one of the most serious hazards in Senegal. Dakar is particularly vulnerable to flooding, predominantly due to high urban density and lack of planning (Gueye, Fall and Tall, 2015). Flooding was a common discussion point

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/fff\\_sn/](https://www.instagram.com/fff_sn/)

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.africansrising.org/>

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.facebook.com/WACAT/>

in the climate diaries from both Dakar and Saint Louis, with many photos depicting flooding. The images shared reveal the wider impacts and causes of the climate crisis and the interconnections between urbanisation and climate vulnerability. A combination of extra intense and heavy rainfalls caused by the climate crisis, but also poor drainage and sewage systems in a city of rapid and unplanned urbanisation, partly based upon colonial histories (Bernards, 2019). This rapid urbanisation is also leading to and exacerbating waste problems.

Waste is a critical issue in Senegal, along the chain from producer to dumping/waste management. Waste management is both a behavioural and structural issue. Most of the waste is household waste and people lack waste infrastructures, but management also requires a top down approach (Hutson, 2021). Waste, predominantly plastic, but also clothing, is visible everywhere in the localities we visit. Plastic and other detritus carpeting the beach, sometimes the streets. This causes health and sanitation issues, and is also problematic for ocean biodiversity. Indeed, plastic pollution has long been documented as severely damaging to marine life (Nelms *et al.*, 2020). Waste is also present further inland, as is visible in Abou's photo [figure 2]. Whilst he does not mention it, plastic detritus is visibly present in the vegetation in the rural area in the photo.

Many photos young people shared via their climate diaries were of rubbish and pollution littering the local environment, of the change over time from beaches that "*used to rank second on the classification of the nicest bays of the world*" (Fakalè, Hann Bay, Dakar), to a place where it is no longer possible to swim due to water pollution. Hann Bay's pollution is caused by wastewater from many industrial sources, including chemical companies, an abattoir, and an oil refinery (Lewis, 2016). Additionally, as with other areas in Senegal, Dakar's sanitation infrastructure has not kept up with its rapid growth. As a result, some Hann Bay residents have little choice but to dump rubbish and sanitary waste directly into the canals that feed into the bay (Lewis, 2016). Hann Bay is now among the most polluted in West Africa and is the first industrial zone in West Africa, accommodating about 70 - 80% of Senegal's industries (Lewis, 20216). Young people, however, also shared images of their numerous 'clean up' activities and awareness raising activities to try and stem the flow of rubbish littering their beaches and streets. This excerpt from Diogomaye's climate diary:

*Hello everyone my name is Diogomaye artist- rapper, I am engaged in the fight against climate change.*

*Climate change impacts all of us because we killed nature and we are all responsible. [...] Global warming is worse than corona; it is like a world war and we can consider car pollution as its chemical weapon.*

*[INSERT FIGURE 4]*

*This is picture of channel #6 with all the rubbish, particularly plastic containers. Later, with the engagement of local youth associations, the support of the waste water company and other partners, we built a grid to stop all the rubbish that otherwise would get into the sea*

*As a solution, this is a grid that we proposed to the municipality in order to clean channel #6. This is an example of a solution but it is not complete, particularly the de-pollution of the Hann Bay [in Dakar]. As youth, we are striving to improve our local area.*

These are just some examples of young people's everyday engagements with the climate crisis, engagements which herald not only from material impacts, but also emotional and psychological impacts. Diogomaye refers to the climate crisis as *"like a world war"*, and indeed the devastating effects, particularly of coastal erosion, present powerful images of the devastation and havoc wrought by the powerful sea storms and sea level advance that is destroying not just physical buildings and eating away at the land, but also lives and memories. The image Abou shares [figure 1] of coastal erosion in Guet-Ndar, Saint Louis, of the dilapidated building, crumbling walls without any roof, surrounded by rubble, could indeed be an image from a war zone. The devastation only appears to be the product of a natural occurrence but is actually the outcome of what Baucom refers to as 'a historically natural (or alternatured) process of violence' (2020, p. 75) in which the tentacles of global capitalism and the extractivist economy heat the world, with devastating results in climate fragile zones (Baucom, 2020). Abou's image, a similar image that was shared by most of the young people in Saint Louis, reveals the wounds caused by the climate crisis, both physical and emotional. The precariousness of life in spaces at the frontline of the climate crisis. Tree planting activities were cited as a means to combat the impact of the climate crisis, not just to protect against sea level advance, but also as a means to improve the aesthetics of the local area, as this excerpt from Djoumblack's climate diary shows:

[INSERT figure 5]

*These photos show a tree planting activity on the beach of Hann Bel Air [in Dakar]. It is the result of a discussion we had with some researchers who explained that our beach used to have lots of trees. As such, the sea was under control and never went inland. Then all the trees were cut down. Currently, there are less than 40 trees left within a 3-kilometer distance along the beach. This is shocking, as shown in the image below. [...] So, planting trees along the beach is part of the solution that enables us to make the beach more beautiful, provide safety by protecting against the sea advance, and providing recreational areas for the local population.*

Similarly, in Saint Louis in response to the question of how they cope with changes in the environment, many young people spoke of their tree planting activities, both as a micro and macro-action, as Papa explains: *"this is the reforestation of Filaos to fight against coastal erosion in the Hydrobase area and the reforestation of trees to fight against greenhouse pollution."*

These young people are working towards modes of being and seeing that support the functioning – and flourishing – of their societal and ecological systems (Trott, 2021, p. 304). Their everyday activism portends a more just and sustainable world by enacting change in the present moment (Trott, 2021, p. 305) to improve hope for the future.

## **Conclusion**

As this chapter demonstrates through these young people's lived experiences and perceptions of the climate crisis, and the ways in which it is intertwined with socio-political factors, their environments may be rendered uninhabitable or 'hostile' for young people living there. The climate crisis is frequently described as a future threat, but as the photographs from the climate diaries show, for these young people, it is a tremendous force in the here and now of their daily lives. However, a force that is not merely 'natural' but is entangled with fundamental political, economic, and cultural elements. From this 'angle of inspection', to paraphrase Baucom (2020), the pictures of these collapsing walls and doors only appear to be the product of a natural occurrence but are actually the outcome of 'a historically natural (or alternatured) process of violence.'. A process embedded in the unequal impacts of the climate crisis, which are historically and spatially produced via capitalist extractivism and climate colonialism (Sultana, 2021). The climate crisis then includes a broadened set of civil rights issues, with far-reaching implications beyond the environmental, directly understood.

Through research conducted for *ClimateOfChange*, we evidenced multiple forms of mobilities at play in these two sites. Many people wanted simply to stay, or the option to go (to work or study) and return (Giacomelli et al., 2022; Walker & Giacomelli 2021; Walker & Giacomelli, forthcoming), yet the restrictive nature of the visa system meant many are unable to access legal pathways to the EU. This leads some Senegalese young people to risk their lives to make the dangerous crossing over the Atlantic Ocean, evidencing how these movements are a symptom of the very real and interconnected crises of capitalism and colonialism. Yet, this action is often seen as the only means for some to have 'hope', given that the climate crisis is exacerbating already complicated lives of young people in these fishing communities in Senegal. Placing attention on these two complex sites can aid in critiquing some of the more simplistic monocausal narratives around so-called climate migrants, and instead highlight the mobility (in)justices, the socio-spatial inequalities at their heart. Despite the difficulties, young people in Senegal engage in everyday actions, from the practical tree planting to more creative expressions of advocacy and awareness raising, to resist the climate crisis and the socio-spatial inequalities to which they are exposed, to maintain some hope in societal and ecological systems that may flourish in future for all that live there.

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