What Development? Poverty and the Struggle to Survive in the Fuuta Tooro Region of Southern Mauritania

Dissertation

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Abstract

Like much of Subsaharan Africa, development has been an ever-present aspect to postcolonial life for the Halpulaar populations of the Fuuta Tooro region of southern Mauritania. With the collapse of locally historical modes of production by which the population formerly sustained itself, Fuuta communities recognize the need for change and adaptation to the different political, economic, social, and ecological circumstances in which they find themselves. Development has taken on a particular urgency as people look for effective strategies to adjust to new realities while maintaining their sense of cultural identity. Unfortunately, the initiatives, projects, and partnerships that have come to fruition through development have not been enough to bring improvements to the quality of life in the region. Fuuta communities find their capacity to develop hindered by three macro challenges: climate change, their marginalized status within the Mauritanian national community, and the region's unfavorable integration into the global economy by which the local markets act as backwaters that accumulate the detritus of global trade. Any headway that communities can make against any of these challenges tends to be swallowed up by the forces associated with the other challenges. The upshot is that Fuuta residents feel that life is getting worse instead of better, and there is a sense that their communities do not have a viable future. While they feel frustrated and abandoned by their own government and the international community, they cannot give up trying to
survive and improve the quality of their lives. Fuuta communities remain ready to engage in partnerships through development, with the hope that partners be more willing to listen to the perspectives and expertise that local communities have accumulated through a half-century of development efforts. From their point of view, the institutional infrastructure of development needs to integrate itself with the grassroots to provide better support to local production, economic activity, and social services as communities struggle to overcome the challenges they face. To Fuuta communities, such an integration would embody their notion of communitarian solidarity (jokkere endam), which was the primary historical basis for the survival and flourishing of Halpulaar society in the difficult environment of the region. For the time being, development practices do not align with this ideal, while the international development community operates at a substantial remove from Fuuta populations. This work recommends that development organizations and scholars seriously engage the cultural dimension of local communities to better address the survival and livelihood concerns that arise from persistent underdevelopment.
Dedication

Dedicated to the Adama Moussa Diallo family of Seyenne Gababé and to the Brahim Ould Bilal Ramdhane family of Nouakchott.
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Chapter 1: Grassroots Perspectives and Conceptualizations of Development

A traveler heading to the Fuuta Tooro region of southern Mauritania from the capital city Nouakchott has usually been on the road for four hours before entering the zone. It can feel like it has been an eternity when one has spent this time packed like a sardine into an un-air-conditioned beaten-down Mercedes sedan or Peugeot station wagon. After 250 km of going up and down sand dunes on the treacherous stretch from Nouakchott to Aleg – passing isolated and windswept, treeless villages – a fork in the road heads straight south, another 60 km to the town of Boghè on the Senegal River (See Figure 1). The outskirts of Boghè is where one notices that the landscape becomes quite different, and this feeling grows as one heads southeast towards Kaédi, a city of approximately 60,000 people which is the largest in the Mauritanian Fuuta. The road passes through stretches of open-canopy forest, by fields and gardens, and in a good rainy season there is grass all around. Instead of camels, one begins to see more cattle roaming the countryside. From the Senegal River, which constitutes the southern border of the country, the Fuuta zone does not extend northward very far. At its narrowest, it is only 15 km, while at its widest it is around 40 km.\footnote{The west-central portion of the Gorgol administrative region encompasses the widest expanse of the Fuuta, where the Gorgol Noir River joins the Senegal River from the northeast.} Despite this narrow extent, the Fuuta is the only region of Mauritania that is suitable for extensive agriculture. It is also one of the country's least developed regions.
It is not just the landscape changes that one sees upon entering the Fuuta; there is a noticeable demographic shift as well. In a broad sense, this shift is a transition from Arab North Africa to Black West Africa, but one needs a much more nuanced understanding of the demographic complexity of both the Fuuta region as well as Mauritanian society as a whole. Since it became independent in 1960, the Arabo-Berber Bidhane population has dominated the multiethnic country politically, economically, and socially. Their language, the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic, is the *lingua franca* of the country. Along with the Haratin, with whom the Bidhane share language and culture, Mauritania today has the feel of being a predominantly Arab nation everywhere throughout the country except for the Fuuta, with its concentrations of Halpulaar, Soninke, and Wolof populations (See Appendix B). In the central part of the river valley, including Boghé and Kaédi, Halpulaar communities are the most numerous. The tension amongst Mauritania's different social groupings is quite apparent even to first-time visitors to the Fuuta. While the stretch from Nouakchott to Aleg has police/gendarme checkpoints every 50 km, the 100 km stretch from Boghé to Kaédi has eight separate checkpoints where vehicles stop for passport control. While the state can claim that the extra security is necessary for control of the border area, many residents of the region feel that they are the real targets of these measures.

Six hours or so after leaving Nouakchott, one finally reaches Kaédi, which until very recently was the end of the paved portion of road. Depending on the time of day one arrives (usually in the mid to late afternoon), one might think that one has entered a blast
Figure 1: Mauritania administrative regions and major roadways, source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas
furnace. It is hot in the Fuuta, and Kaédi is its hottest locale owing to the iron deposits in the surrounding buttes. Because of this feature, even the nighttime temperatures remain elevated, unlike the desert regions that see considerable overnight temperature drops. Fuutankoɓe can sympathize with newcomers concerning the climate. Even though they deal with the heat, they understand how oppressive it is and how dangerous it can be to someone who has never experienced it before. Thus, the first order of business when one arrives in Kaédi or any other locale in the region is to find some shade.

As the largest city in the region, Kaédi does not feel very “urban.” Outside of the central market, the ubiquitous “boutique” general stores, a few government buildings, a couple of restaurants, and a futuristic looking hospital, there is not a whole lot to see. There are no streetlights when the sun goes down, and those making their way through the streets must use flashlights or the lights from the various electrified compounds. Motor vehicle traffic is light, leaving the roadways for donkey carts, pedestrians, and troops of cattle to make their way. The runway for the decommissioned airport has turned into an exercise space for walkers and joggers. A couple of impressive mosques with tall minarets dominate the visual landscape, one sitting on higher ground while the other in the lower ground near the river. Also, the Gorgol's regional governor, the wali, has his residence on a high point overlooking the city. Like the mosque minarets, one can see the wali mansion from far away, even outside the city.

It was from outside the city that I would catch glimpses of the two minarets and the wali mansion, 18km to the east in the village of Seyenne Gababé. For two years, I

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2 For many months of the year, daytime temperatures reach 40-45°C (104-113°F), while May and June can have days that approach 50°C (122°F).
lived in this Halpulaar community of about 350 residents, working as a Peace Corps Volunteer, from 2002 to 2004. Seyenne overlooks the floodplain of the Gorgol Noir River, which becomes an expansive seasonal lake during the rainy season months of August-September while drying out again in November. It is maybe half a kilometer from one side of the village to the other, and about 20 different households of extended families comprise the community, with many kinship connections across households as well. Life in this community is quite rugged for a Westerner; running water and electricity are absent, sanitary facilities are an adventure, the livestock animals walk around like they own the place, there is no market, and on top of all this are substantial language and cultural barriers. Just about every day I would see the minarets of Kaédi in the distance and have a momentary longing for the relative comforts that the city had to offer: refrigerated beverages, electric fans, showers, or just the chance to sit in a more private setting while not having to dodge or chase away animals.

Yet, life in Seyenne quickly grew on me, mostly from the welcome and support that I received from the community. From the very start, they treated me as a member of the community, while my host family treated me as one of their own. They gave me a name, Bouli Diallo, after my host father's grandfather, and I immediately acquired a kinship status making me a son, nephew, cousin, brother, even uncle to those around me. To this day, that feeling of kinship has lasted and grown through my subsequent visits to Mauritania. Nowadays, instead of wanting a trip to the city to decompress, I think about the faces of people from the community and wonder how they are doing. This, I have come to realize, was part of the plan as far as Seyennaabe were concerned. Their hope
has been to forge enduring connections with outsiders who will invest themselves in the life of the community, in its growth, its changes, and its struggles.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I was there primarily to assist with development efforts, something of which the community was and continues to be in dire need. As the above paragraphs attempt to illustrate, the material quality of life in the region is not on the level of what one would consider to be developed, while social quality of life lags behind as well. There is no way to sugarcoat the fact that life is tough for them and their future as a community is highly uncertain. It is as if the region has remained untouched by the advancements of industrialization and technologization of the last century. Yet, this is simply and profoundly untrue. Fuuta communities have experienced both large-scale and small-scale development efforts in their midst since the 1970s. But when one looks around today, it is hard to say that these efforts have borne fruit. Meanwhile, Fuutankobe have the feeling that things are getting worse.

I returned to the Fuuta in 2011 with the intention of seeking input from the grassroots concerning development as Fuutankobe have experienced it in their communities. I designed my project to focus on the emic understandings of development among Fuutankobe; how they define the concept in their own language with their own words and terminology, and how they evaluate the level of development they see around them. Additionally, I sought their diagnosis of why development has not worked in their communities as they have hoped. The anthropological and folklore component is, in my
mind, both valuable and necessary to larger discourses of development, including the
critical aspects of inter-disciplinary academic development studies.³ Part of its value
comes from the focus on what Kelly Feltault described as the “human security” of
impoverished and vulnerable populations. Such populations have awareness of the nexus
of forces that contribute to their insecurity, along with some degree of agency to respond
to these forces, although not always in ways that they would prefer (Feltault 92-93). For
impoverished and underdeveloped communities like those in the Fuuta, development is
an existential dilemma where survival is at stake.

But the perspectives that they share can do more than remind the global
community of its ethical commitments. Input and analysis from the grassroots can
contribute to and reshape understandings of development processes and their
relationships with macro forces such as global capitalism, climate change, and
postcolonial governance. This is particularly relevant with respect to Jean and John
Comaroff’s argument that the developing world experiences the manifested effects of
these forces and processes “most graphically” (13). Rather than needing to catch up with
the rest of the world with respect to global processes, the Comaroffs put forth the
provocative suggestion that the developing world is ahead of the curve, showing the rest
of the world what awaits if these processes continue to play out as they are currently.
Anthropological and folkloric investigations of grassroots development can thus
contribute to genealogical critiques of global capitalism, postcolonial governance, and

³ This encompasses disciplines such as economics, sociology, geography, political science, policy studies,
anthropology, cultural studies, and folklore, as well as the applied disciplines that provide professional
training for those wanting to enter the development field.
the shaping of social, political, and economic inequality. Such investigations also have the potential to provide answers to the development problem that the international community has overlooked or ignored, though one must be cautious in one's expectation for pre-existing, ready-made alternatives.

One answer that came to light during my fieldwork was the general attitude of Fuutankőɓe concerning partnerships and their nature within the realm of development. As an oppressed and impoverished subaltern population within Mauritanian national society, Fuutankőɓe are not sure whom they can trust to invest in and assist with their development. For the moment, the most viable strategy seems to be to build strong connections with outsiders – what Pulaar speakers refer to as jokkondiral – that lead to a sense of mutual solidarity, or jokkere endam, where outsiders become part of the life of the community. Mutual benefit is crucial; effective jokkere endam with outsiders means that those outsiders would increase their level of commitment (in terms of resources and expertise) while also gaining access to the knowledge and expertise that exists within local communities. Certain Fuutankőɓe with whom I spoke emphasized the importance of a two-way street of communication and commitment. But, given their current circumstances and the processes through which those circumstances have come to being, even this strategy might not be enough. What follows, in this study, is a broad and comprehensive discussion of the development challenges that the Fuuta faces from the

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4 As Gidwani notes, global capitalism constitutes a “complex whole,” that nonetheless takes distinctive forms in different settings through historical processes that one cannot assume are given (xix).

5 See Wainwright (10).
perspective of the people who live there and who hope that they can one day overcome their struggles with poverty, marginality, and underdevelopment.

*Development and the Grassroots: Failure to Connect*

For seventy years now, the idea of development has been integral to discourses seeking to understand global society and how it works. Development presents itself to the mind at times as a self-explanatory grand narrative of progress,\(^6\) while at other times the idea seems so dense, complex, and convoluted as to defy clear understanding. Use of the term ranges from the realm of philosophy to ethics, from discourses of power to visions of hope, from pragmatics to aspirations, the term acquiring different nuances of meaning in each different situation. Sometimes it refers to a self-unfolding process, other times it is a mission that we must carry out for ourselves or on behalf of others who need assistance in getting the process off the ground (Wainwright 6-7).\(^7\) Development constructs and relates to our notions of the relative prosperity of different parts of the world, whether that be a first-world, second-world, third-world distinction (as was the

\(^6\) Walt Rostow was among the first to articulate development as a universalized, step-by-step journey towards progress whereby a society moves from one stage to another once the necessary "conditions for takeoff" are in place (Sheppard et al. 70-71). More recently, Amartya Sen has helped broaden the scope of the progress grand narrative, connecting development to the liberal ideals of the Western Enlightenment regarding freedom and democracy (31).

\(^7\) Joel Wainwright compares the concept of development and its contradictory meanings to that of nature, "...two of our most entrenched, inherited, ontological signs for indicating essence" (7). The tension in development between self-actualization and the mobilization of will for a purpose comes about through language and has significant consequences for the deployment of the term in discourse. As Wainwright notes, "[w]hen we refer to 'national economic development,' for instance, we at once refer to something that is desirable, that requires willful intervention, and also is a 'natural' thing for the nation to do...it was precisely the promise of 'national economic development' that every state promised its people on the eve of independence, and it is the global and structural failure to deliver on this promise that animates all our discussions of development today...today, 'national economic development' always refers to the deepening of capitalist social relations, even when it is not named as such" (7).
case during the Cold War era) or whether it be the contemporary understanding of a
division between a prosperous Global North and an impoverished Global South.\(^8\) While
one can debate the merits of certain development strategies or outcomes over others, one
cannot debate the desirability of development. One cannot \textit{not} want development for
one's life, for one's community, or one's nation (Wainwright 10).

Notwithstanding this general desirability of development, there is little in the way
of consensus or common ground as to what constitutes development. Every locality
around the world views the possibilities for development through the lenses of their own
history, their values and beliefs, and their own identities. This is the emic dimension of
development which anthropologists and folklorists have the tools to highlight.

Communities do not just want change, they also want continuity. While development
brings potential for change – whether productive, destructive, or transformative – the
people who experience it in the Fuuta and across Africa look to maintain a sense of
continuity to, among other things, keep themselves grounded in their own identities. To
work with this dialectic as an outsider requires active engagement.

\(^8\) Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) provide an instructive meditation on these distinctions as products of
world-historical contexts. As to the Cold War era, “[t]he “first” and “second” worlds were blocs
sedimented around the USA and USSR, respectively, each founded on an ideological paradigm for
configuring the political economy of modernity; each had its third term, its “less developed” others –
and a telos for their futures, which, in turn, shaped their national aspirations, their \textit{realpolitik}, and their
economic objectives” (45, italics in original). The end of this particular ideological conflict entailed a
shift in terminology and conceptualization where the focal indicators were relative success or failure in
the marketplace. “’[T]he south’ has more complex connotations than did the World formerly Known as
the Third . . . like all indexical signs, “\textit{the} global south” assumes meaning by virtue not of its content
but of its context, the way in which it points to other things. Of these, the most significant, obviously, it
is antinomy with “\textit{the} global north,” an opposition that carries a great deal of imaginative baggage
congealed around the contrast between centrality and marginality, capitalist modernity and its absence”
(45, italics in original).
The Halpulaar communities of the Fuuta are a highly instructive case study in this regard. They are not necessarily trying to imitate the lifestyle and cultures of wealthy, developed societies. It is much more complicated in that they wish to incorporate certain aspects of material development while at the same time maintaining aspects of their own knowledge base and experience that they believe contribute fundamentally to their own well-being. Furthermore, their development strategies and objectives allow for a large degree of trial and error, arising from the vicissitudes of survival. Fuutankōɓe use the term *feere*, meaning “strategy” or “method,” denoting an experimental attitude towards development. If they are successful, they can build upon it. If not, they need to try another *feere*.

Given these emic considerations, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to bring all of these different visions and aspirations for development under the rubric of integrated policy planning and coordinated implementation. The small degree to which the national and transnational bodies which guide development policy and practice even attempt to listen to grassroots perspectives can be a good thing. The reality, though, is that the institutional actors do not respond to local perspectives of development that diverge from the grand schemes that emerge from the loci of power. After all, development institutions partner with or are embedded in national governments and private enterprises. Even the non-profits are beholden to powerful interests to fund and

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9 Gayatri Spivak forcefully demonstrates the emptiness of accountability when powerful development players engage in consultation with grassroots populations. The “elaborate and visual structures of public consultation” that are in place serve as window dressing to satisfy the notion that local perspectives get their due, before the institutional actors throw those perspectives out the window (Spivak 52). With due diligence out of the way, development institutions can proceed to implement whatever they propose.
support their activities. As such, a great chasm exists within the development field
between the institutions that plan and enact actions and localities who desire support and
change through assistance. This chasm is of enormous concern to Fuuta communities
today.

On the institutional side, development organizations are also well aware of this
chasm, and there have been numerous good-faith initiatives over the years to try to close
the gap and deliver assistance that aligns more closely with local aspirations. The World
Bank itself has employed the slogan “participatory development” since the 1980s in an
effort to reach out to local communities and gain their input on project planning
(McMillan and Mulder 302, Gow 243). The emergence in the 1980s of NGOs as major
players on the development landscape derived in part from movements toward
decentralization that, in theory, would be more responsive to the grassroots.10 Many of
these organizations utilize a framework of action that requires input from partner
communities as integral to “responsible” development practices. Ideally, every project or
initiative should begin with a conversation with local leaders and stakeholders in order to
identify needs and aspirations. Fuuta communities are well practiced in this approach, but
in my conversations with them, they have grown rather cynical towards the

10 This is, of course, a highly charitable characterization of this trend, which as many have noted,
accompanied the draconian imposition of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) as conditions for IMF
and World Bank loans (Sheppard et al. 583, Ould Mey 15-16). The primary intent of the SAPs was to
weaken the role of the state in orchestrating its own development policy, particularly in the areas of
social spending, support of native industries, and protection of domestic markets from foreign
competition. The insertion of NGOs as mediators for development assistance in effect drove a wedge
between national governments and local communities, weakening the already tenuous bonds of
collaboration and identification between the ruling and the ruled (Ould Mey 144-145). It is not
surprising, though, that NGOs have ignored or been largely oblivious to these circumstances, seeing
themselves more as stepping up to fill the void left by the failure of the state (Ward et al. 471-472).
questionnaires and surveys of development NGOs. On more than one occasion, Fuutankoɓe told me how they feel that *pelle-ongeeji* (NGOs) do nothing but record information.

When planning and information gathering do lead to action, a corollary component to “responsible” participatory development is local contribution to assistance efforts. Development should not be an act of charity, a simple donation of resources with no strings attached. It should spearhead dynamic engagement from the community which seeks to reap the rewards of their own investments of money and labor or risk losing what they have contributed. In short, the notion of participatory development conveys a lofty ideal whereby development organizations carefully listen and faithfully respond to local communities whose members come together to work for their collective well-being ahead of personal interests.

Yet, the admirable underpinnings to the participatory approach to development for the most part fail to generate the kind of results for which local communities are looking. Even when all the relevant actors adhere to the principles of participatory development, the successful results tend to be modest and tenuous at best.¹¹ Too often, the participatory dimensions of any project are just window dressing, as the partner institutions often make their decisions prior to local consultation and ignore on-the-ground reports and realities that might question the wisdom of implementing any particular planned project. Ideas that produced positive results elsewhere have a powerful resonance for development organizations, who then seek to implement those initiatives in other settings regardless of

¹¹ Cf. 114-115
whether or not such solutions would be appropriate in every locality or have appeal to the residents. The networked relationships and organizational hierarchies of the development institutional apparatus serve to pull state agencies and NGOs away from the grassroots (Spivak 53, Riles 10-13). The grassroots essentially becomes the outside to the development encounter, the Other whose helplessness and impoverishment necessitates expert intervention. As such, the very populations who are seeking improvements to the difficult and marginal conditions of their lives become marginal to the development process. The power in development relationships, as is the case with most things in the contemporary world, lies with those who have the most money.

The anthropologist Stephen Reyna described this dynamic in damming detail concerning an agricultural development plan for oases in the Sahara regions (Adrar) of Mauritania funded by the Rome-based, US-financed International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). He served as a consultant to assess the first phase of this multifaceted enterprise and provide support for funding a second phase. His report to IFAD suggested that the first phase of the project failed to improve people's lives while spurring negative ecological and sociological consequences for project communities (Reyna 337-339). Despite his report and recommendation to postpone implementation of the second phase and consider more sustainable alternatives, IFAD went ahead with their proposal anyway and threatened to withhold payment to Reyna for his contracted

Among his findings as a consultant, Reyna noted that the introduction of motorized well pumps through the first phase of the project prompted a rapid depletion and degradation of groundwater resources (336). Furthermore, the gains of the first phase of the IFAD plan primarily wound up in the hands of Mauritanians political elite. Small growers in project oases experienced a deepening impoverishment from being unable to keep up with equipment expenses associated with expanded irrigation practices. Reyna writes that “this impoverishment resulted from the fact that IFAD subordinates in Rome used [project] subordinates throughout Mauritania as its compradors” (354).
services (Reyna 356). Of the lessons one could draw from this story, perhaps the most alarming is the indifference of the experts and professionals to the damage that their activities were causing. According to Reyna, the role of the outside development partners in such settings is to act as a marriage broker between national political elites and “the global organization of capitalism” (359).

Reyna's experience does not even come close to revealing the depth of the failings within development institutions in terms of poor planning, lack of communication with target communities, improper assessments of need, failure to account for or address unintended consequences, and absence of follow-up evaluation. In the three years that I have spent in Mauritania working in the realm of development and researching local perspectives on the quality of development in their communities, I have witnessed or heard many similar stories. Throughout the country, the realities on the ground paint a grim picture that can prompt even the experts to give up hope that development can make a difference and make life better for Mauritanians. Yet, despite everything that has gone wrong – promises that have failed to materialize, unforeseen consequences causing significant harm to the livelihoods of local communities, or a generalized disempowerment of grassroots populations – impoverished populations continue to hold on to the idea of development, hoping that eventually they will see tangible improvements in their material quality of life. They cannot do otherwise, as that would mean the end of their communities, an acceptance of collective death.

Given this sense of resilience – not to be confused with optimism – among populations of underdeveloped nations, the motivation for the current study is to look to
the grassroots of Mauritanian society in the Fuuta Tooro region of the Senegal River valley to examine their conceptualizations of development and their assessments of how they see its processes playing out in their own localities. The gist has been to listen to the perspectives of Fuutankanɓe on how development activities have influenced their lives and the quality of life in their communities while seeking their input on how the assistance they receive could better address the problems and challenges they face. My initial purpose in designing and carrying out my fieldwork activities was to foreground the voices of poor and marginalized Fuutankanɓe as a strategy for improving the participatory dimension of local development activities, helping give the grassroots populations a more prominent role in setting the agenda for development. As I visited various communities and conducted numerous interviews, I quickly found that there is no room for dispassionate observation, investigation, and critique when it comes to conveying the situations in which the people who live in these communities find themselves.

The message that I received everywhere I went was an SOS. Whatever modest improvements that development has brought to these communities pale in comparison to the prevailing sense that their material existence and ability to survive is unraveling before their eyes. It is as if they find themselves on a sinking boat, and development, as it currently manifests itself, is a ladle that cannot possibly bail out enough water fast enough to keep themselves afloat. Kelly Feltault encountered a similar sense of urgency amongst Chesapeake Bay fishermen who had been facing increasing pressures to their livelihood owing to a convergence of factors in the realms of “public policy, culture,
human rights, environmental management, and global capitalist economics” (90).

Without full awareness of careful intervention within this nexus of forces, Feltault argues that the cultural tourism strategy for economic development among this community risks undermining their “human security,” making them more vulnerable to the prevailing forces of global capitalism (92). Similarly, development efforts in the Fuuta need to take into account the environmental factors, the sociopolitical marginalization of Halpulaar populations in the Fuuta, and their high degree of vulnerability to global economic forces. The magnitude of this challenge is considerably daunting.

At the same time, Fuutankoɓe are largely unwilling to give up on the hope that they can overcome their current challenges and transform their lives for the better. They have to believe that one day they can achieve the level of prosperity that they have seen or heard about in Europe, the United States, or even among the wealthy elite of their own country. They hold out hope that there will come a time when they can take pride in themselves and their communities the same way their ancestors did in more prosperous times throughout local history. The unwillingness to give up on the idea of development provides important perspective for the rest of the international community at a time when a certain fatigue has crept in to the minds of those who live in the Global North. Ongoing crises throughout the world have prompted the experts, policymakers, and opinion makers to shift their focus towards other dilemmas that align more strongly with the weltenschauung of Western society, most notably the Global War on Terrorism. With this shift, it can seem like an irresponsible luxury to devote energy and resources towards
“solving” the world's problems. But it is not such a simple matter to tell others to look after their problems on their own.

The interconnected nature of contemporary global society means that problems that exist in one area have origins elsewhere and the consequences do not stop at the border of a region or a country. Certain challenges, like climate change and environmental degradation, transcend national borders, continents, and oceans. In a sense, the perspectives of Mauritanians on the hardships of everyday life for them might be the canary in the coal mine for what awaits populations around the world in both the North and South. The problem of development lies at a crossroads today, and while the Global North may be losing its conviction that it can “save” the world through development, it remains an important player and crucial partner in helping to improve the lives of people around the world. As many of my interview correspondents in Mauritania put it, their communities need more partnership and assistance, not less.

**Emic Understandings of Development and Fieldwork Methods**

“Holko firti développmemt e nder yiyeende mon e holko woni nafoore mudum?”

Every one of my community interviews opened with this broad question: “what is development, in your opinion, and how would you describe its importance?” In retrospect, this question was likely too broad and too conceptual to begin a conversation with strangers. Fortunately for me, my respondents were eager to cooperate and help me carry out my project. With this basic prompt, Fuutankoɓe were able to provide me with a nuanced sense of how they understand and conceptualize development using their own
language. Instead of the French word, *développement*, we used the Pulaar terms *ɓamtaare* and * ylabelitaare* to discuss these emic understandings. While people's responses varied, a consistent framework did emerge conveying that Fuutakoɓe view knowledge (*gandal*) as the foundation for effective development, followed by appropriate actions or work (*gollal*). From this starting point, my successive interview questions addressed what they meant specifically in terms of *gandal* and *gollal*, how those attributes can lead to development. One of the major ramifications for development partners with respect to this conceptualization of development is that Fuuta communities believe they have the knowledge, or the capacity to gain knowledge, along with the will to put knowledge to use effectively. More generally, the emic component to these discussion has potential to produce emergent understandings among all participants.

As a first-time ethnographic researcher, the interview experience was in many ways highly intimidating, while in other ways richly rewarding. It took me a while to shake off the rust of my Pulaar language skills, although I had valuable assistance from my fieldwork assistant, Abdul Majid Diallo, a young man from my Seyenne host family. With time and experience, my speaking and comprehension skills improved, but it was always a major challenge for me to steer the conversation smoothly from one topic to another. Nonetheless, my interviewees always had a lot to say on the subject, and appreciated the fact that I engaged them in their own language. Despite my language limitations and the awkwardness of some of my behaviors, it was clear to people that I had spent a good deal of time in the Fuuta region. This meant something to them, and it helped me gain quick entry to the good graces of the community.
In some communities, people had knowledge of Seyenne, the village where I had served as a Peace Corps volunteer. If they knew the community, they likely knew my host family, and some of them even knew my tokara – my namesake – who was my host father's grandfather. This connection helped to boost my credibility and gain an immediate sense of trust in places I had never been before. This was especially true in the community of Sinthiane Diakary, which had strong connections with Seyenne despite the difficulties in traveling between the two communities. When I made my first visit to Sinthiane with my research assistant Abdul, our host for the day was a relative of his on his mother's side whom he had never met. That same evening we moved on to the neighboring village of Agriis, and on the way there Abdul told me how some men from that village had helped his father after he had injured his ankle while moving with the herds in the bush. Such incidents help to forge bonds between families and communities, as long as there are people alive who remember the deeds.

Even in communities where neither I nor Abdul had any sort of previous contact or connection, we almost always received a warm welcome and found community members happy to cooperate with me. It did not matter if the community was a tiny grouping of families like Lubudu Barrigaal, Dubungu, or Abbaye, or a mid-sized town like Belinaaɓe, Dalhaya, or Thialgu. In fishing communities along the river, farming communities near the waalo, or farming/herding villages in the dieri, people displayed an eagerness to talk about life in their communities as pertains to development. In some

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13 The *waalo* is the broad floodplain of the Senegal River and its tributaries in which Fuuta farmers practice recessional and/or irrigated agriculture. The *dieri* refers to the sandy-soil uplands where rain-fed cultivation takes place. For more discussion of Fuuta geography, cf. 130-131.
cases, some individuals did not clearly understand my purpose, feeling that I myself was there on a mission from an NGO or some kind of development agency.\textsuperscript{14} This could especially be the case when people did not see me arriving either by foot, by horse cart, or by public transportation. NGOs have their fleets of land rovers that they use for official business, allowing their employees to come and go as they please or as their schedule dictates. Abdul and I had less flexibility, as we had two windows for traveling: either in the morning or in the evening hours before sundown. This meant that whenever we arrived in a new village, we would either spend the bulk of the day there or we would spend the night before moving on the following day. This schedule was more conducive to our hosts in that they did not have to immediately drop what they were doing to attend to the business of my visit, and it allowed them to demonstrate proper hospitality.

When a guest stays in a Fuuta community, he or she becomes attached to the hosting family, what people refer to as \textit{njaatige}. Wherever Fuutankoɓe travel, the expectation is that they have their own \textit{njaatige} with whom they stay, whether it be for an afternoon, a night, a week, or longer. The \textit{njaatige} provides meals for guests and gives them a place to spend the day or night, which also gives both host and guest the chance for socializing, for sharing observations and experiences. When I would discuss my various travels with Fuutankoɓe, the question would always be who my \textit{njaatige} was in

\textsuperscript{14} In one community, the chief's countenance went from warmth and excitement to somewhat surly disappointment when I explained the purpose of my visit. His original thought was that I was coming on behalf of a Spanish NGO that was supposed to help install electrical power in the village. Nevertheless, he consented to holding a community interview, invited some representative individuals, and took care of us for the night. He was much more cordial the following morning, accompanying us on our way out of the village, which is an act of politeness in Fuuta culture (the term is \textit{duusngol}). He even seemed impressed that we were going to our next community on foot.
each community I visited. This person/household would henceforth be my host for any subsequent visits.

Given the nature of my research and my desire to include multiple perspectives from the community, the proper protocol on arrival was to seek out the chief of the village, the *jom wuro*. Either he or one of his deputies (if he was not present) would give me the go ahead to speak with community members. Of all the communities I visited, only in one instance did the chief deny my request, albeit politely. He stated that his community only dealt with official entities when it came to development. Everywhere else I went, the *jom wuro* or his representative seemed well disposed to getting community members together to talk with me about their perspectives on development. Furthermore, the *jom wuro* also became my *njaatige* for the community, except for one instance when the community school director insisted that Abdul and I spend the day at his house. With this aspect of Fuuta hospitality, we had no difficulty finding lodging at any of the stops during our travels, which included stopovers in larger cities like Boghé, Kaédi, and Lexeiba.

After the initial conversation with the chief in which we explained the purpose of my visit and what I was hoping to accomplish, it was largely up to him to organize the community interview. Sometimes this would take place immediately, while other times we would hold off for a few hours or until the next day, depending on what was most conducive to the community members. People had work and business to which they attended during the day, and I had no desire to take people away from these tasks. As a novice fieldwork researcher, I had imagined that I would be able to set the parameters for
the interviews and discussions. I quickly learned however that there was a good deal out of my control, from the interview location to the participant make-up to who responded to my questions and discussion prompts. While my status as a kodo (guest) granted me a degree of honor, it also put me in a position where I had to make do with what was offered me. In retrospect, this power dynamic was still highly favorable for my purposes in some ways. It was less than ideal to hold interviews outdoors in open areas where periodic wind gusts would distort my recordings of the discussions and troops of animals might pass by and create a disturbance. Even indoors, the noise from nearby animals could intrude upon my own focus on the discussion. Furthermore, each newcomer who came by to observe or participate in the discussion would give his or her greetings to the rest of those present, as good manners dictate, causing an interruption to the proceedings. However, since they remained on their own turf in the interview setting, people were very willing to share their point of view with a frankness and openness that might not have been the case had I approached them as a figure of authority. It also helped that my companion Abdul was young enough where people would not feel compelled to interrupt people while they were speaking or challenge their responses.\footnote{For discussion about age and social status in Fuuta society, cf. 87-96.} Furthermore, my language limitations also helped me in a certain way in that my own interruptions or interjections were infrequent.\footnote{Although these limitations did make it harder for me to probe deeper into the various topics of discussions with follow-up questions. Abdul's presence helped offset that limitation, and he was instrumental in clearing up misunderstandings regarding the questions that I posed.} Only when discussion thread seemed nearing its end would I come in with another question.
The interview session would last on average around forty minutes, but in a few communities the discussion went on for over an hour. Like the question concerning the meaning of development and its importance, my prepared questions were extremely broad. With the diversity of communities that I visited in terms of size, lifestyles, infrastructure, and isolation, it was most feasible to come in with general questions and then allow more specific questions to emerge based on the responses I gleaned during the interview. My questions addressed topics such as their access to social services and the quality of those services, the state of local production activities, availability of employment opportunities, and interactions with NGO and/or state development agencies. To get a sense of historical perspective, I would ask people to compare the state of development today with what they remember from the past. I asked each community to discuss their biggest development challenges and what steps should be taken to address those challenges. Finally, I would ask them to consider development in the national context to elicit their commentary on what they see going on around them within Mauritania.

With these broad questions covering different aspects, my intention was to elicit responses that addressed both conceptual and concrete analyses of development from the perspective of Fuuta residents. In many instances, this movement between two layers of analysis did not go as smoothly as I had hoped. For instance, my initial question concerning what development is, how people define it, was intended as a more conceptual/philosophical question, as if we were discussing it in a scholarly setting. Rather than engage the conceptual aspects of the question, many of my respondents
would go straight to concrete experience, identifying the areas of development of greatest concern to their community. In other instances, the responses that I received were more along the lines of description. People would say that development is “njahrungal yeeso” (lit. “moving forward”) or “ɓeydaare” (increase or accumulation) or “ummaade” (getting/waking up). Or as one person put it, “yɛlitaare ko ummaade e noku lees lees o, woni ummaade e base, faade e dow” (Ba, personal interview), (“Development is rising up from a low place, from a foundation, and moving towards a higher [place]”). This characterization came from an interview with a prominent Fuuta intellectual who is a writer, researcher, and radio program host, but I heard similar definitions of development throughout the Fuuta. One village chief used almost the same imagery in defining development, saying “woni ɓamtaare tan ko ummaade e cadelle wonno de hene haa naata e nguurndam ɓurdam seborde do wonno do” (“What development is is rising up from the problems that you faced and entering a life that is much better than what you had previously”). As an expansion upon the chief’s definition, a representative from the community women’s cooperative provided this illustration:

Jooni a danno, a alaa ko ñaan-daa. Hande, a [Before] you are asleep, you have nothing to eat. Today, you cultivate, you are able to feed yourself, you are able to make a little money to buy food for yourself, you get an animal, you milk it, you gain the means to feed yourself, that is development. If you do not have any of this, you have nothing, then if you receive this, you become developed, this in essence is what development is.
The imagery that this illustration uses is immediate and tangible to the everyday experiences of Fuutankoɓe, reflecting the concerns of those dealing with poverty. Development or the absence of it can mean the difference between survival and starvation. Positive results in the different domains of development lead to greater flexibility and an easing (fooftaade) of the burdens of everyday life. The opposite conception of development that people expressed to me also maintains a sense of movement, to regress or move backwards (ruutde caagal). Regression comes about through the persistence of problems (cadelle) and a failure (ronkude) to solve them or rise above them through development.

One significant dimension that emerges from the various definitions of development that I received is that development is a process – similar to the notion of maturation and self-actualization that Wainwright identifies in Western definitions of the concept – one that plays out in many domains within the life of an individual, a community, or a nation. Most of these domains would be familiar to people throughout the world, such as development of the means of subsistence (ɓamtaare to baange nguura), development of knowledge/education (ɓamtaare to bange gandal/jaŋde), or development of production methods (ɓamtaare to bange gollal). But one element that stands out as different, at least from a classical liberal or neoliberal perspective, is the significance of community as both the agent of development and its domain of realization. This should not be surprising given the importance of solidarity (jokkere endam) and unity (dental) to the cultural identity and moral framework of Halpulaar.
As such, the enrichment of an individual without a corresponding improvement to the community does not constitute true development. While this is a departure from the focus on the individual that is the hallmark of liberal rationalism, the ways in which Fuutankoɓe defined and characterized development did not necessarily indicate a Marxist perspective either. The social division of Fuuta society still embodies many of the elements of non-capitalist production, utilizing the terminology of kinship relations and social designations to define in-group and out-group status.

The term *leñol* is a dense and crucial concept for how Fuutankoɓe understand community. The term in many ways embodies the flexibility and tension that pervades the historical modes of living by Halpulaar populations, moving between sedentary and non-sedentary lifestyles with a waxing and waning of political centralization. The anthropologist Riccardo Ciavolella notes that in a general sense *leñol* refers to “the maximal descent group within which its members recognize themselves as part of an independent social unit” (2007). As a limiting factor, descent can be highly expansive to encompass groups of individuals that share no immediate kinship relations, as long as they have a shared language and sense of values. This is particularly the case for pastoral groups, who express a conviction that “they share the same genealogy and thus the same ancestors, even if this can hardly be demonstrated” (Ciavolella 2007). Yet, the idea of *leñol* does not fully embrace the entirety of Halpulaar society, and marriage alliances bring an element of regulation and restriction to establishing who is and who is not part of a community's *leñol*. But the term itself also transcends kinship to a certain degree to

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17 This extends to Halpulaar communities throughout West Africa, not just the Fuuta Tooro region. For full discussion of prevailing social values, cf. 74-81.
include territorial association. This is particularly the case in the Fuuta Tooro region with a long history of sedentarization among farming communities. With these complex layers, the idea of leñol falls somewhere between a tribal designation and an ethnolinguistic one (Leservoisier 988). It carries a sense of danger, though, if the forces surrounding leñol identification promote jealousy and competition between different communities. People refer to this scenario as leñam-leñolmaagu (my people, your people), wherein each group hordes their wealth and resources for themselves while failing to invest in activities that could benefit the collective.

With respect to development, my interview with the musical artist and educator Ndiaye Seydou Amadou in his Nouakchott home helped to illustrate how Fuutankoɓe see leñol in a sense as the substrate for development. Ndiaye Seydou has spent a lifetime in the field of education, working on projects to formulate school curricula in Mauritania's minority languages, Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof while also seeking to revitalize the cultural resources of Fuuta communities in the hopes of finding ways in which communities can use those resources to help address the material and social problems they confront. He is highly respected among Pulaar speakers across Mauritania, especially in the Fuuta, and he is a frequent guest on the Pulaar-language programs of Radio Mauritanie. His definition of development began with a generalized sense of

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18 The ethnolinguist dimension to the concept of leñol is perhaps a more contemporary usage, particularly in the face of postcolonial nation-state communities where Halpulaar communities find themselves as a minority, with no guarantee that the national political class will protect their interests.

19 He is originally from the village Djinguey located on the uplands overlooking the southern edge of the Gorgol Noir floodplain, about halfway between Kaëdi and Lexeiba, approximately 25 km from both of these population centers. For more detail, cf. 116-117.
progress taking place in the multiple domains of community life as it relates to leñol:

Quand on parle de développement, donc, dum woni bamaare walla yelitaare dum firti ko njahrugol yeeso e kala fanu e kala golle, kala fanu e kala golle. E leñol ne wiwete bamiima ko maa daña haakeeji mum fof to bange pinal, to bange renndo, to bange faggudu, e to bange dawrugol . . . so tawi leñol ñakiraama de do gede firti ko leñol ngol bamaaki taw (Ndiaye, personal interview).

In essence, effective development is that which produces benefits for the entire community. The Pulaar language has two words that translate as development, bamaare and yelitaare, but both of them imply collective improvement. Ndiaye Seydou explained to me that the difference between the two terms is essentially a matter of degree. Bamaare refers to lifting up the floor, so to speak, of material quality of life, while yelitaare would be raising the ceiling (Ndiaye, personal interview). But in my discussions in Fuuta communities, people seem to use these two terms interchangeably.

When it comes to how development should proceed i.e. the conditions that need to be in place for it to be effective, Ndiaye Seydou stressed the need for good governance and full community engagement. The grassroots needs support from the government to lay the groundwork for institutional activity, especially in the fields of education and health services. Furthermore, a community needs to embrace the opportunity to work towards a better future through education. He was emphatic that everyone in the community needed to play a role in providing quality education, and that there should be
no gender imbalances when it comes to learning. Any such imbalances hurt the community overall, preventing them from realizing their development potential through education (Ndiaye, personal interview). While he made sure to drive home the point that any form of gender imbalance can be harmful, his implication is that Fuutankōɓe need to do a better job of encouraging their daughters in their studies. Lastly, he spoke of the importance of intergenerational integration in community development.

Thus, in a country, in a leñol, first there needs to be elders, [then there needs to be those with] capable arms, and also the youth. So, the elders are the link between life and death, they are the role models of society. Then, there are the adults, these are those with capable arms who sustain the generation. Then, there are the children whom the community prepares for the future, right? Thus, these are the three elements of society.

Each generation has its own role, its own potential to contribute to the development of the community. In the eyes of Fuutankōɓe, this dynamic should remain intact throughout any changes to community life, or else they would risk losing their sense of collective identity along with the capacity for resilience that they feel that identity brings.

When it comes to analyzing development in practice, the overwhelming tenor of my interview responses was frustration, sadness, and weariness at the lack of results people see from development efforts. For the most part, the ideals of development that Fuutankōɓe expressed to me seem to be completely absent from the terrain. From ill-conceived agricultural projects to understaffed/under-equipped health clinics to failing
schools to a severe lack of income-earning opportunities, people feel that they are missing out on the dynamic potential of development. For instance, many people seem to write off the education system bringing any benefit to their communities, saying that it has *alaa ngaartam* (no benefit). There is also the frustration that comes from seeing other groups of Mauritanians, the Bidhane elite, transform their own lives with their financial capability. Mauritania has always been a difficult environment that takes a toll on even the hardiest individuals, but contemporary wealthy Mauritanians have finally been able to overcome the ecological conditions, constructing air-conditioned environments where they can withdraw from the heat or the dusty, stifling winds of the Harmattan.

Meanwhile, the majority of Fuuta communities remain without electricity, running water, effective sanitation, and some families do not have adequate shelter to withstand the elements. Not that everyone wants all of the trappings of “modernized” existence, but the gap between the haves and have-nots is still galling.

The fact that neither state-led nor NGO-supported development initiatives have contributed to a closing of the gap has prompted a sort of existential dilemma among Fuutankobe. Without clear paths towards improvement, many people would fall back on expressions of hopelessness, saying “*ko miin miskiineebee; miin ngalaa haydara, miin tampi, miin keydi*” (We are poor people; we have nothing, we are tired, we are hungry”).

Thus, the story of development that people shared with me had little in the way of hope.

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20 In one of my village interviews, I learned that the community had asked the national utility company SONELEC to do a feasibility study for bringing electricity to the village. The overhead power lines that supplied Kaédi passed within a kilometer of this community, so some of the community leaders felt that it would not be hard to tap into this supply. But the estimated cost that SONELEC came up with was 112 million ougiyas ($400,000), which is well beyond the means of the community. While they would not likely have to cover all of those costs if they were to go ahead with the project, the sense I got was that there are much better potential uses for their resources.
or optimism. Instead, the story was one of growing challenges that development efforts have been unable to alleviate while people sense a steady erosion in their capacity to live in the Fuuta region. In order to better understand how this has come to be, one must have a sense of how the postcolonial context of development has unfolded in Mauritania.

Postcolonial Development in Mauritania: From Neocolonialism to Neoliberalism

One of the challenges of formulating an overarching postcolonial critique of development has been the tension between singular and common experiences of the various formerly colonized nations, and even amongst different population groups within those nations.21 This is certainly true of Mauritania, whose colonial experience was highly singular compared to other regions of West Africa. Under French colonialism, Mauritania was essentially an afterthought – empty, if not of people, then certainly of potential. While other regions of West Africa generated significant profit for their interests (Mali, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire), Mauritania had no such apparent value and thus failed to attract investment. As further chapters will illustrate, populations of the Fuuta were generally fine with this arrangement, seeing as they were able to maintain their autonomy and increase their productivity.22 This situation changed for Mauritania just prior to independence, when France and other European powers began to take interest in the iron ore deposits in the north of the country. Iron ore became the new nation's chief export as production exploded over the first decade of independence. Fuuta communities

21 Wainwright highlights Qadri Ismail's critique of nationalism as failing to decolonize the world of the lasting influence of colonial modes of knowledge and discourse (15).

22 Colonialism did play a part in this, indirectly, through the prohibition of raiding, which had been one of the limiting factors to sedentary Halpulaar communities in the precolonial era (Marchesin 74).
experienced this change only indirectly, since they were nowhere near the iron ore mines. To them, the biggest change was that their region was split in half with the drawing of national boundaries: half in Mauritania and half in Senegal. Of all the ramifications of this new political arrangement, one of the most relevant aspects is that the Fuuta region in both respective countries has been an afterthought to development. As Fuutankoɓe became more and more aware of this condition, they began to realize that this was a major problem for them.23

To understand Mauritania's postcolonial experience with development, along with how those experiences have played out in the Fuuta, it is necessary to situate that experience within the unfolding contexts of global capitalism and its penetration into the Mauritanian economy primarily through the mining industry. While development discourse following Walt Rostow has always invoked noble and charitable intentions in the way of spreading prosperity and freedom through development, the historical processes under the surface of this rhetoric tell a different story regarding development. The most crucial connection that certain critics of development have brought up is its imbrication with the processes of global capitalist expansion and intensification over the course of the entire twentieth century into the first two decades of the twenty-first.24 This includes the era of colonialism which brought much of the world together under the rubric of capitalist economic relations. This is not to say that capitalist social relations –

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23 Chapter Four will give fuller treatment of this problem.
24 Of note among these critics are Andre Gunder Frank's (1967) work on dependency theory, Samir Amin's (1974) use of world systems theory to demonstrate rising inequality within the sphere of development, Arturo Escobar's (1994) and Ould Mey's (1996) critique of postcolonial imperialism, and more recent work by scholars such as Wainwright (2008), Gidwani (2002 and 2008), and Asher (2009) defining the capitalism as development problematic.
the exchange of labor power for wages – became the norm throughout colonized societies
during this period; rather, capitalism embodied the relationships within the societies of
the colonizing nations as well as between the colonizing nation and the colonial
administrations and/or private enterprises. The French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and
Felix Guattari define capitalist expansion as a mechanism of “capturing” rents, profits,
and taxes operating through the State, which is the domain of realization for capital (440-
443). They draw on the work of the Egyptian economic theorist Samir Amin, who in turn
built upon the ideas of Immanuel Wallerstein, and his center-periphery model for global
exchange relations, noting that “central capitalism needs the periphery constituted by the
Third World, where it locates a large part of its most modern industries; it does not just
invest capital in these industries, but it is also furnished by them” (Deleuze and Guattari
465). Thus, while we talk about development within the framework of individual nation-
states like Mauritania, some of the most influential processes that direct it derive from the
global economic system.

This asymmetrical center-periphery dynamic has its roots in colonialism, and
decolonization did not disrupt or fundamentally alter it, despite the devolution of
sovereignty to national political leaders. In fact, as I hinted above, Mauritania became
more profitable to European powers after independence than it was under colonialism.

Colonialism was lucrative business, but in the face of widespread national independence

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25 Dependency theorists illustrated how the global capitalist system came into being despite the
persistence of non-capitalist production relations at the grassroots level of colonized societies. Frank's
work traces the historical dimension of relationships between Latin American nations and European
nations, noting the dependence on of the former on the latter, economically and militarily. Latin
American political elites maintained their position by responding to the interests of external capitalism,
helping to recruit the other national social classes into a relation with external capitalism that produces
little in the way of local improvements (Sheppard et al. 87).
movements, those who profited from it were still able in a lot of contexts to either maintain or augment their level of profit (Bennoune 56-57). The consequences have been the growing dependency of formerly colonized nations on sources of capital from wealthy countries, while efforts to “modernize” state and society fell flat from an inability to finance these efforts (Amin 349). Despite the fact of national independence, the postcolonial nations were not playing on a level playing field with the former colonizing powers.

One of the biggest systematic advantages that center economies had over those of the periphery, according to a theory proposed by Alain DeJanvry, an agricultural economist, was sectoral articulation whereby the production/consumption circuits of consumer goods (food, clothing, household appliances, etc.) were highly integrated with the production/consumption circuits of capital goods (manufacturing equipment, machine tools, etc) (27). Sectoral articulation in the center fostered an economic dynamism in terms of production output, high demand, and high profits. It also required large amounts of raw materials and resources that peripheral colonies provided, resources such as cotton, palm oil, groundnuts, or minerals. Since colonial economies were oriented towards supplying this demand for center economies, there was no articulation between the various sectors of production or the markets of consumption. Local producers were thus unable to acquire methods and resources to improve their output efficiency, while domestic consumption derived primarily from subsistence production or from imports (DeJanvry 32-33). The Fuuta's situation was perhaps different than the Latin American contexts that DeJanvry analyzed in the sense that precolonial and colonial
production/consumption relations did exhibit a degree of sectoral articulation, albeit without the extraction and (re)circulation of monetary capital. However, the decades since independence have seen a growing disarticulation of production/consumption relations and a greater monetization of daily life. Fuutankoɓe are very much aware of this process and are deeply concerned.

Returning to the particulars of Mauritania's postcolonial development experience, Mahfoud Bennoune argues that the nation underwent a pernicious form of neocolonialism that left the country's population vulnerable to crisis. The biggest crises to occur were the severe droughts of the early 1970s followed by war in Western Sahara that hindered efforts to recover from the effects of the drought. At the center of the “neocolonial” regime was the iron ore industry, which, as mentioned above, did not really take off until the latter years of the colonial period. At the time of independence, iron ore production was basically a trickle, but there were indications that the industry could become quite profitable. In order to keep the iron ore flowing during the transition into independence, the fledgeling Mauritanian state granted majority control of mining operations to a consortium of European governments and private corporations to the tune of a combined 95% stake (Bennoune 54). These foreign interests also maintained operational control of the industry, employing a mostly native workforce who toiled in slave-like conditions.

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26 For discussion of occupational lineages, cf. 91-96.
27 The extraction of ore skyrocketed over the first decade of independence, increasing from 1.678 million metric tons in 1963 to 10.445 million metric tons in 1973 (Bennoune 56). The corresponding revenue increase from this mineral boom resulted in a “...declared rate of profit [of] 18.6 percent for 1968 and 24.1 percent for 1969. By 1972 the dividends distributed officially to the shareholders totalled (sic) 7,084 million F.C.F.A [70.84 million francs]” (Bennoune 57).
28 Bennoune provides salary statistics indicating that the salaries for European expatriate executives averaged 4.35 million francs, annually, whereas mine laborers earned on average 245,000 (56).
with no job security and no safety protocols to guard against occupational injuries or illnesses (Bennoune 56). The remaining five percent share went to the Mauritanian government, which was enough to help enrich specific individuals but did little to contribute to the economic growth and development of the country at large (Bennoune 59).

This was particularly detrimental to the nation in that iron ore production was the only major export industry at that point in history. The amount of control that the state ceded to foreign interests in this strategic sector hamstrung development for the first decade of independence. When ecological disaster hit in the form of a severe and extended drought in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was nothing that the state could do to help cushion the painful effects on the population. The Fuuta region, just like the rest of the country, suffered mightily during this period. With no domestic industries or development initiatives to absorb the potential labor of uprooted rural residents, people had to fend for themselves. As a result, the population of the capital city Nouakchott swelled from around 20,000 residents to over 150,000 in just a few years' time, with most of the newly arrived forming a destitute urban underclass eking out their survival as best they could (Bennoune 59). By this time, the state realized that it would be in their interest to increase their stake in the iron ore production. They moved to nationalize the industry in the early 1970s, but they had already lost virtually a decade of high profit output. In effect, the nationalization process was too little, too late, as internal financial crises,

29 While I did not hear any stories from Fuutankoɓe who worked in the mines during this period, there are many adult men from the Fuuta who seek employment in the gold mines of Tasiast (in Inchiri Region) and face the same level of exploitation and corporeal risk. These individuals are fully aware of the conditions, but yet they seek out this employment because the most likely alternative is starvation.
falling demand due to international concerns of an energy crisis, and military conflict on the northern frontier all combined to hurt the potential for the industry to be an effective cornerstone of Mauritania's economic development (Bennoune 64). It is fair to say that the nation has not fully recovered from the decade and a half of neocolonial exploitation.30

While it is clear that majority foreign control of Mauritania's iron ore industry provided little benefit to ordinary citizens, there is no guarantee that full state control of the industry would have resulted in significant strides towards economic development of the country. After all, most of the other newly independent nations of Africa and Asia unsuccessfully pursued a strategy of state-led development. The idea behind “the development state” was that the state would be the engine for economic growth and prosperity through specialization in select production industries and investment in the education of its citizens. The two main production strategies were import substitution industrialization (ISI) – domestic production of goods that were previously only available through importation – and export orientation (EOS), producing a specific good for export to select foreign markets. Both of these strategies needed strong support from the state to protect producers from foreign competition as well as subsidies to incentivize industrial growth (Wade 2005, 105-106; Amsden 284-285). If development states could see this process through successfully, the thought was that after a decade or so the domestic economies would start to exhibit some sectoral articulation that would be the dynamic basis for national development. By that time, they would also have a workforce of highly

30 It is also fair to say that neocolonialism persists in Mauritania today in the fishing industry (Ould Moctar).
trained and educated citizens with greater skill capacity to keep the economy moving forward.

For a number of reasons, nations that tried to implement a development state failed to achieve the objectives that they laid out for themselves. One of the biggest reasons is the amount of debt these governments accrued while trying to implement their economic growth policies. The start-up of new industries, the subsidization of domestic producers and consumers, and large-scale investment in public education required immense capital inputs. Furthermore, the pursuit of foreign technology for domestic industries put Third World governments in a disadvantaged position relative to nations whose public or private sectors had produced that technology (Sheppard et al. 526-528). The international enforcement of stringent patent laws (laws that originated in American and European contexts) blocked attempts to recreate industrial technologies in the periphery (Sheppard et al. 527). As a result, the lack of sectoral articulation between production of capital goods and consumer goods was a problem that most developmental states were unable to overcome. Another hindrance to Third World state-led development projects was the continued dynamic growth of the center, which depended on greater amounts of cheap raw materials. It was in the interest of these economies to keep the prices of raw materials down, which meant that African nations that exported such materials essentially received pennies on the dollar when it came to terms of exchange (Bennoune 58). While certain individuals were able to accrue enormous material wealth, the overall returns on export-oriented industries were not enough to translate into tangible improvements in infrastructure, domestic production, healthcare, or employment
opportunities. Only two formerly colonized nations of formerly agrarian societies – South Korea and Botswana – were able to achieve a measure of success through the implementation of developmental state strategies, and the success of both of these nations in this regard had as much to do with extenuating circumstances. Of these two nations, South Korea was able to rise to the ranks of global economic powerhouses, while Botswana enjoys a higher standard of living than most Subsaharan African nations (Samatar 42).

Mauritania's move towards implementing a strong developmental state came at a time when many of the nations that adopted this development strategy were experiencing severe financial and budgetary crises. The expansion of foreign debt along with the fears of energy supply shortages and rising costs hamstrung the abilities of developing nations of the Third World to maintain their support of strategic industries and social welfare policies. In an attempt to stay on track with their development targets, many governments turned to the IMF for loans to maintain their balance of payments. However, in order to receive these vital injections of capital from the IMF, each government had to agree to the conditions that the IMF attached to the loans. These conditions tended to work against the

31 For South Korea, one could wonder if they would have become the economic powerhouse that they are today without its status as an important US client state throughout the Cold War years. In many ways, a prosperous South Korea was advantageous to American foreign policy goals. Botswana is a different case, as the developmental state was able to achieve growth in targeted economic sectors and achieve a level of articulation between them. Their key advantage in achieving this success was their diamond resources and the favorable export agreements that they were able to arrange with the DeBeers company (Samatar 29). In essence, they wrested concessions from the monopolistic global diamond supplier that the company was unwilling to grant to governments of other diamond-rich nations, including neighboring South Africa. Without this unique advantage, the Tswana state might not have been able to devote the necessary resources to invest in the growth of their other strategic sectors. Even then, as Samatar notes, the Tswana state has been able to maintain a sense of discipline amongst its elite members to prevent these individuals from profiting from their position in a way that undermined the development goals of the state (42). Among other things, it appears that such discipline has never existed amongst the elite of Mauritanian society.
policies and mechanisms required for a developmental state. In particular, the IMF insisted upon austerity measures for social spending, deregulation and privatization of economic industries, and elimination of trade barriers/protectios (Ould Mey 195). These measures were the core of the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) that implemented a neoliberal prescription for economic growth that reflected the interests of First World capital. The Washington Consensus, as it came to be called, marked a major historical shift in postwar approaches to development, moving from a strong state approach to one where the state had to take a backseat. The state role in this new approach was to promote an environment that attracts foreign investment while letting the invisible hand of the marketplace work its magic.

In effect, the shift to the neoliberal development scheme was a major coup for the governments and large firms of the US and Western Europe. With the support of the Bretton Woods institutions, Western governments were able to expand opportunities for capital interests to multiply their profits. Western manufacturing firms began relocating production facilities to Third World nations where they could operate with minimal to no restrictions – tariffs, worker protection and benefit costs, environmental standards, etc. – while substantially reducing labor costs (Sheppard et al. 522). They were also able to limit the financial risks to their own operations during periods of overproduction or slack consumer demand by dumping their goods in captive Third World markets. Meanwhile,

32 In general, these interests were expansion of markets, liberalization of financial markets, elimination of restrictions on capital mobility, access to cheaper labor markets for production, and reduction of tax burden (Wade 2005, 98; Wade 2006, 117).

33 For example, Mauritanian markets are overflowing with cheap imports from China and Europe, despite the fact that Mauritanian consumers are not clamoring for these goods. As I discuss in Chapter Five, the marketplace dynamics in the Mauritanian context bear strong resemblance to a backwater that passively receives trade flows and does not have the internal socioeconomic forces to translate these flows into
these policies helped to neutralize the concessions that organized labor in the center had wrung from business owners and managers that fueled the emergence of a robust middle class in the US and Western Europe. From the beginning of the neoliberal era in the 1970s, wage growth in societies of the global economic core has stagnated, even as worker productivity has increased continuously from year to year and decade to decade (Brenner). Thus, one of the clearest consequences of neoliberalism has been an enormous increase in economic and social inequality between capital and labor on a scale that encompasses all of humanity. For states and societies of the Third World, and especially those in Africa, it was as if decolonization never happened. They found themselves under the thumb of the West to an even greater degree than they were during the colonial period.

The effects of the SAP regime on Third World economies and societies were quickly apparent to citizens of those nations. Mauritania's first experience with structural adjustment was in the mid-1980s at a time of growing social turmoil between the Arab and non-Arab sections of the population. The austerity policies of structural adjustments served to exacerbate the tension as the public felt that their livelihoods were crumbling underneath them. The SAP regime had direct economic consequences for the population, as Mauritanian political economist Mohamaden Ould Mey describes:

It was a shock program in which budget cuts curtailed government expenditure and recruitment of personnel, the restructuring or downsizing of public enterprises led to massive layoffs of employees, the abolition of subsidies raised

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material benefit. Cf. 292.
prices and tariffs of public services, and the currency devaluation and price policies contributed to a deterioration of the purchasing power of the population in general (201).

Given these negative effects, each new round of implementation or renegotiation of SAPs with the IMF and World Bank in Mauritania and elsewhere brought large displays of public protest (Ould Mey 216-218, Sheppard et al. 584). However, these expressions of anger and opposition did little to alter the policy prescriptions of the international lenders. They negotiated with state leaders and not the public, and they used this lack of accountability to popular sentiment to their advantage.34

In order to mitigate the severe economic and social effects of structural adjustment, the lending institutions did try to implement provisions that would support the needs of the populations. In Mauritania, this social policy dimension became a significant part of the second round of SAPs that began in 1989 (Ould Mey 201). However, the actual policies themselves failed to mitigate the negative effects of the adjustments due to poor policy design and ill-conceived assistance programs. Ould Mey notes how certain programs like Food for Work suffered from a narrow scope whereby a small number of people without income were given a modest quantity of grain per day in exchange for providing manual labor tasks like trash collection and clearing sand from roadways (205). Thus, instead of having the state provide stable income opportunities for

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34 The documentary film *Life and Debt* portrays the IMF’s lack of accountability to popular opposition to their policies through interviews with former Jamaican prime minister Michael Manley who entered into loan agreements with the IMF to help resolve budgetary crises. Manley describes his meetings with IMF officials where he pleaded for concessions in the area of social spending, noting that his citizens would riot otherwise. The officials responded to this by saying that it was his problem, not theirs (Black).
tasks that have a collective public benefit, this type of labor earned a meager handout of food to those who participated, the quantity of which might not even replace the calories expended on the labor itself, particularly when working under the scorching sun and heat of midday. Other components to the social policies of adjustment involved allocation of budget credits for health and education services that failed to account for currency devaluation, meaning that resource allocation actually declined over this period (Ould Mey 205).

Ould Mey's assessment illustrates how the social policy dimensions of the SAPs marked a fundamental change in how the state operates and how it relates to its citizens in terms of development. Essentially, the state moved from engine of economic growth/development to an information aggregator.

Social policy under the PCR [second round of SAPs] was not genuine or serious in terms of either food aid policy or the increase of budget allocation to social sectors. These were mentioned to camouflage the decrease in both food aid distribution and budget allocation to education and health. The real focus of social policy under the PCR was data collection and studies on the social situation in the country. From the poor's perspective, this component of social policy does not make much difference . . . It makes a difference only for government policymakers, who are then able to determine which group might be a source of discontent to plan the appropriate strategies of containment (Ould Mey 206).

The state, then, was able to accrue powers to itself through the social policy dimensions that were nominally supposed to insulate the population from the shocks of structural adjustments. Furthermore, it no longer needed to champion development as its raison d'être; political leaders could maintain their positions of power just through giving lip
service to development while they were actually profiting heavily from their cooperation with the dictates of lending institutions.  

The orchestrated retreat of the state from the realm of economic and social development helped to spark another significant phenomenon of the neoliberal era of development; namely, the appearance and rapid proliferation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) geared towards offering the support and services that the state no longer provided. In Mauritania, three foreign NGOs came onto the scene in the 1970s to help coordinate relief efforts and assist with local development projects. By the 1980s, well over a dozen were operating in-country, and the number has only continued to grow. This mirrors the trends in other countries of the Global South that went through the austerity measures of structural adjustment. These organizations worked primarily at a grassroots level, seeking to assist the poorest of the poor who could no longer reasonably look to their own governments for support. This dimension to their responsibilities helped to recruit Westerners with aspirations of providing charity to come work on behalf of needy and seemingly helpless individuals. NGOs have been a popular vehicle for channeling these altruistic intentions, and in many places local communities have come to rely on the services they provide.

However, the rise of NGOs has been somewhat of a double-edged sword for development practice, as the gap between the haves and have-nots on both the national

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35 One eye-raising anecdote that Ould Mey provides demonstrates the access of the political elite to luxury items while the rest of the population suffered from the fallout of austerity measures. He writes: During the early years of SAPs, the Mauritanian government provided important *fonds spéciaux* (special funds amounting sometimes to 100 percent increase of annual income) and luxury Mercedes cars for high-ranking state officials in response to the declining purchasing power brought about by SAP policies, particularly the devaluation of the national currency. This policy co-opted state officials and made them more inclined to support SAPs anyway (209).
and global scales continues to grow, despite the proliferation of grassroots services. In many ways, that underside of NGO activity derives from its dependence on funding that mostly comes from Western governments, the World Bank, or the United Nations. This connection is crucial to understanding how NGOs have operated and recognizing the ways in which their presence helps to further neoliberal policies of expanding markets, free enterprise, and economic deregulation. As Ould Mey writes concerning the Mauritanian context:

> With the adjustment programs of the 1980s, NGOs became systematically and permanently involved in local development and their political leverage increased as states became denationalized. As public expenditure was dramatically reduced by SAP austerity programs, vulnerable social groups were facing a deterioration in their already low standard of living. It is in this context that NGOs began to champion assistance to these vulnerable groups, especially at the community level where state power is at its lowest. In other words, the growing influence of NGOs indicates the increasing weakness and bankruptcy of peripheral states and their inability to provide relief for a significant proportion of their citizens. […] It can even be argued that NGOs constitute one of the instrumentalities of adjustment and play a crucial role in cushioning the social shock of economic and financial austerity measures (138, emphasis mine).

The influence of NGOs through their grassroots connections has even given outside interests the means to circumvent the state and interact directly with local populations. This can be a particularly welcome situation for minority communities that feel marginalized by the state. Government officials find themselves in a no-win situation
where if they invoke their sovereign authority they can face backlash for depriving their neediest citizens from assistance.\footnote{This has not stopped certain Mauritanian state authorities from intervening in direct foreign assistance programs and demanding a cut of the materials and funds (Dieng, personal interview).}

In my fieldwork, it was clear that many Fuuta residents made a direct association between NGOs and development. Many communities have enjoyed lengthy associations with specific NGOs that have contributed to projects in various sectors of development, while other communities have seen large-scale interventions from a network of partners. The conventional wisdom among Fuutankōɓe is that NGOs operate with greater integrity than state development agencies, that they do what they say they will do and, most importantly, they do not embezzle project funds or resources for themselves. Pretty much anytime someone addressed anything having to do with development and the state, they made strong implication that government officials do not care about the welfare of Fuuta communities. Given the contentious relations that Fuutankōɓe have maintained with the Mauritanian state historically, the increasing wealth gap between rich and poor, and the country's continual shift towards the Arab world and away from Subsaharan Africa, it is easy to see why they would prefer working with foreign development partners. Yet, in many communities, people see little in the way of tangible results from NGO-led development projects that suggest that these organizations are more effective partners. Some communities reported that they had never received help from an NGO, and many others cited brief interventions from an organization without sustained collaboration. Many times people from the same community would disagree over the basic facts of which NGOs worked with the community, what they did, and when the interaction had
happened. Despite all this, many Fuutankoɓe continue to hold out hope that *pelle ong-eeji* (NGOs) can spur local development and attract significant investment in boosting production efforts and improving the quality of social services for the community.

How much hope that people place in NGOs, though, is an interesting question to which my fieldwork interactions did not speak. The antipathy and mistrust towards the state is easy to understand, so that NGOs have greater appeal just by the simple fact that they are not part of the state. At the same time, there is a large degree of opacity to the operations of NGOs, their comings and goings, and to whom they are responsible. Ordinary Mauritanians only have a limited awareness of the structure and hierarchy of these organizations, the origins of their finances, and the extent of their operations.\(^{37}\) This puts the communities at a significant disadvantage when it comes to entering into working relationships with the various NGOs that are present in-country. If an organization comes to a community offering some sort of intervention, the community is not likely to turn it down. But if they have other needs that the intervention does not address, they would be hard-pressed to lobby that NGO to amend or expand the scope of the project. The most that the field extension agents could do would be to pass any community requests along to their immediate superior, who likely would need to consult further up the organizational chain if he or she deemed it viable. The final decisions for what activities receive funding take place far away from Fuuta communities in contexts that are outside of the experience of community members. Thus, the notion that there is any effective participatory dimension to this kind of development activities is a huge

\(^{37}\) See also Ward et al. (480-481) for grassroots perspectives on NGO role in development process.
stretch. Yet, Fuuta communities seem to view the role of NGOs in development to be preferable to that of the state.³⁸

So, while many critics of the neoliberal approach to development lament the dismantling of the developmental state, the unraveling of government-funded social safety nets, and the increasing wealth gap between the rich and poor, it would seem on a certain level that Fuutankoɓe are happier to see the state retreat from this role. This perception would be, in my mind, highly misleading. The distrust of the state arises from specific historical factors and experiences,³⁹ not from any ideological disposition that holds that the state should allow markets and private enterprise to spur development. After all, neoliberal development strategies have helped to personally enrich the political elite who use their wealth to consolidate or expand their positions of privilege. Rather than formulating or espousing a theory of effective development strategy (feere bamtaare), ideas of what constitutes good development derive from historical experience, to be discussed in the following chapters, and the emic social values discussed above and in Chapter Two.

Mauritania, thus, has never been able to address the development needs and potentials of Fuuta communities or the region as a whole. Whether it be unwillingness to do so, inability to do so, or incompetence to do so, the fact of the matter is that

³⁸ One aspect of this preference is that NGOs represent a third-party observer to the patterns of marginalization that Halpulaar communities experience in Mauritanian society. Should conflict arise with the state, Western NGOs could be influential advocates on their behalf to raise awareness about any direct oppression inflicted upon them.

³⁹ Aside from the mostly traumatic postcolonial experience with the Mauritanian state (see Chapter Four), sociocultural factors suggest a generalized antipathy towards centralized political authority among Halpulaar populations of the Fuuta (Ciavolella 2010, 93). These considerations will come up again in much greater detail in Chapters Two and Five.
Fuutankoɓe remain in crisis not just with respect to development, but with respect to their capacity to survive. Mauritania is a bad dream from which it seems that many Fuuta residents wish they could wake up. For this reason, the tenor of my fieldwork interviews and conversations reflected such a strong sense of foreboding and doom. Even if they were to attract steadfast outside development partners, those partners themselves would have to confront the macro challenges that communities in the region face. These challenges menace the region like a hydra, multi-pronged and interconnected. If they give up on development, they will not survive.

Macro Challenges to Fuuta Development and Dissertation Outline

In order to engage with grassroots perspectives on development in any given locality, one must gain familiarity with the broad context of life as those people experience it. This goes well beyond the economic and material facets of life to include cultural identity and expression, as well as local understandings of history and change. The aim of Chapter Two is to provide this important context as it applies to the Halpulaar communities of the Fuuta Tooro region. One needs to understand the relationship between the physical terrain and the systems of production that populations employ within that environment. The volatility of ecological conditions within the Fuuta has meant that Fuutankoɓe have needed to be adaptable in their survival strategies to cope with periodic droughts or other forms of disturbance. The second chapter will trace the outlines of this adaptation historically, according to accounts from my fieldwork interviews regarding their own systems of production. But one cannot separate this
historical perspective from discourses, practices, and performances of cultural identity within the Halpulaar milieu. In many ways, the cultural realm goes hand in hand with the systems of agro-pastoral production, and helps provide a dimension of resiliency to subsistence efforts, particularly in the collectivist ethos of Fuuta communities. The foundation of this ethos is the concept of *pulaaku*, which itself refers to the collection of beliefs, expressions, and behaviors.

The first of the three macro challenges that I discuss is climate and environmental change, the subject of Chapter Three. Through this chapter, I address the historical modes of subsistence production in the region against the backdrop of increased climate volatility since the late 1960s. I also explore a range of development interventions through the lens of the grassroots perspective. The challenge of climate change and the pressure it exerts on agro-pastoral livelihoods has become a familiar story not just in development circles, but within the international community at large. On the one hand, there have long been significant fears in a Malthusian sense that population growth and/or resource demand will eventually outstrip the available resource base or production output, leading to collapse in industrialized systems of production that have been the very basis of recent exponential population growth. On the other hand, environmental discourses over the last half century have highlighted the ways in which industrialization has altered ecological conditions around the globe, degrading the quality of the various elements that sustain life on the planet, i.e. water, air, soil. Agro-pastoral production in the Sahel is particularly susceptible to changes in these elements, given the marginal fertility of the terrain in which systems of production operate (E. Scott 3, Riesman 181-
182, Somerville 17-18, Cross and Barker 50-51). The vulnerability of Sahelian modes of production to environmental shock came into stark relief in the wake of crippling droughts that afflicted the region in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The humanitarian catastrophe that unfolded among the populations of the region drew significant concern from the international community, with eventual large-scale interventions geared towards relief and development (Somerville 31-34). At the forefront of these interventions was the moral imperative to assist those in extreme need, meaning that environmental change is not just a material concern, but also an ethical one.

In many ways, the environmental crises in the early years of postcolonial independence helped to lay the groundwork for ongoing development efforts in the region. Relief efforts helped to forge partnerships and planning for strategies to avoid or cope with the next crisis (Somerville 40). Furthermore, the emerging rhetoric of sustainable development was both a recognition of the Sahel's ecological fragility in supporting agro-pastoral systems of production as well as a framework for development partnership. In supplement to development efforts, ecological research has sought to understand the meteorological dynamics of the region and the processes of desertification, while looking for ways by which local populations can reverse the trends of environmental degradation. Politically, an entire network has sprung up at the intersection between global environmental awareness and development concerns. Through this network, the major institutional actors mobilize public support around the globe while lobbying national governments to enact and enforce measures that seek to mitigate or reverse the pressures of climate change and environmental degradation, but
doing so in a way that can enhance grassroots development opportunities. Other key players in this transnational alliance are human rights organizations, charity/relief organizations, and movements/organizations that promote the interests of indigenous populations.

Yet, despite all that is happening at the national and supranational levels in support of alleviating environmental obstacles to development, people in the Fuuta continue to feel the pressure of recurring severe droughts. Older Fuutankoɓe have seen the landscape change dramatically over the course of their lifetimes, particularly with the rate of deforestation and the disappearance of many types of flora and fauna. The region was in the midst of a drought when I conducted my fieldwork, and the concern over its consequences was quite palpable throughout all my community visits and interviews. People openly wonder if the next drought will be the one that breaks their capacity to carry on and survive. There is an awareness of the international discourses and initiatives for environmentally sustainable development and relief responses to ecological crises. However, in many circumstances the relief does not reach its intended destination, while other environmental measures with legal binding tend to hurt people of the grassroots the most. Impoverished rural Fuutankoɓe are often the ones who receive fines for cutting wood as part of subsistence activities, while wealthy individuals who run large-scale charcoal production operations escape punishment. But while such a situation is clearly

\[40\] See as well the interview accounts from Mauritanians participating in the Sahel Oral History Project in the early 1990s (Cross and Barker 19-54).

\[41\] Several Fuuta residents mentioned to me how they had heard on the radio that billions of ougiyas in drought relief efforts were coming into the country. They would then indicate to the surroundings and ask rhetorically if I could see any of that money reaching their communities.
unjust and a perversion of the intentions of the international conventions, it is not the
greatest threat to the survival of Fuuta communities. And to make matters worse, the
greatest threat they face is one that – as many of my interviewees reminded me – is one
over which humans have no agency.

“Only God can make it rain” was a phrase I heard over and over through my
interviews. All of the systems of production in the region depend on enough rainfall
coming at the right intervals at the right time of year, the rainy season (ndungu) from July
to October. This does not mean, however, that Fuutankoɓe are completely fatalistic in the
matter of climate change. The fact is that the people of the Fuuta region, as well as the
entire Sahel region, have dealt with recurring droughts for centuries. It is part of the
reality of living in the region, where people have long endured the risk of ecological
hardship for the reward of a general sense of autonomy and a strong communal ethic.
What is happening now, with severe droughts hitting the region every decade and lasting
for multiple years, feels unprecedented and it comes at a time when the populations of the
region have been exceptionally vulnerable. They have lost a good deal of their autonomy
since independence, which has hamstrung their production systems through increasing
bureaucratic controls coupled with an absence of meaningful state investment in rural
development. The challenge of climate change, then, goes well beyond the discussion of

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Leservoisier’s writes that the first four-year economic development plan that the Mauritanian state
pursued following independence (covering the years 1963-1966) devoted just a combined 8.6% of its
budgetary investment towards agricultural and pastoral activities, while the mining sector received
33.8% (140). In essence, the state considered the rural agro-pastoral economy to be a “primitive”
economic sector while the mining industry was to be the foundation of a “modernized” sector. Also, see
Bennoune (59) for the resulting social effects of this uneven development.
weather, and the discussion in Chapter Three addresses some of the political and economic factors connected to this development challenge.

In Chapter Four, the political challenges to development come to the foreground, as many Fuutankoɓe believe that the Mauritanian state does not want their communities to thrive. There is a history of animosity and conflict between Halpulaar populations and the state, with violence breaking out in 1989 in what many Black Mauritanians feel was an attempt to eliminate their presence within the national territory. This conflict coincided with reciprocal actions in Senegal with violent campaigns against the Bidhane Mauritanians living there, and culminating with mass expulsions from both countries. While the nature of this conflict helped to strengthen notions of a racial basis for citizenship, some observers have connected the outbreak of violence to crises in development in both countries following the imposition of SAPs (Ould Mey 236-237). The threat of a racialized Other helped both the Mauritanian and Senegalese states to deflect blame from themselves in the midst of worsening socioeconomic misery among their respective citizens. This was especially vital for the Mauritanian president of that time, Ma‘ouïya Ould Ta‘ya, who was able to stabilize his regime and hold office for two decades. His tenure was notable for its decisive orientation towards the Arab world, along with an Arabization of state and society. To Halpulaar Mauritanians in the Fuuta, his reign of power brought a steady campaign of discrimination against their communities and against individuals who sought to work in civil service or the military. While it has been a decade since the coup d'état that deposed Ould Ta‘ya, the practices of discrimination continue.
When it comes to development, Fuuta residents feel that the state has no desire to lend its support and resources to improving the quality of life in the region. This neglect goes back to the early years of Mauritanian independence, when the rural economy received only a small percentage of the state's development budget, with the majority of it going towards the mining and fishing industries. When the state did undertake an initiative, there was little commitment to sustain projects and programs to assist farmers and herders with their production efforts. The quality of social services in the region, in the view of the population, is also quite abysmal, especially education and healthcare. Fuutankoɓe believe in the potential of education to help spur local development efforts, but it is really hard to realize this potential when schools are understaffed and have virtually nothing in the way of resources. The same goes for state-run health clinics. According to my interview correspondents, state-led development in the region is either missing in action or hopelessly flawed in execution. Given the history of animosity and the racialization of Mauritanian society, many people feel that this is more than benign neglect. They feel that the state is sabotaging their ability to make a living and provide for themselves while denying them access to effective avenues to improvement. As such, the sociopolitical marginality of the Halpulaar Fuuta populations is yet another significant obstacle to development.

The third macro challenge, and the focus of Chapter Five, is the way in which forces of economic globalization manifest themselves within the region. Throughout my interviews, this challenge was more nebulous than the other two. People would describe

43 Like the mining industry, European interests dominated the offshore fishing industry in the 1960s, taking in an estimated fifty times more fish per year than local fishers (Bennoune 58).
it by its effects rather than speculate on the nature of the challenge. The effects are what they see and are what give people concern. The collapse of subsistence production lifestyles would not be as troublesome if people had alternative means to make a decent living for themselves. Contrary to neoliberal theories of development, greater integration with the global economy has yet to provide viable alternatives for people of the region. In fact, it has helped turn the region into a socioeconomic backwater where production stagnates while other countries dump their unwanted products and manufactured goods into the local markets. They do this not for the sake of making a profit, but just to get rid of surplus production (Black). Low-quality processed food items have replaced local grains, oils, and protein sources, leading to health and nutrition problems beyond those of undernourishment. Meanwhile, Fuutankoɓe confront the increasing monetization of everyday life with a shrinking pool of income-generating employment opportunities. With all these negative factors, people would just simply state “Fuuta welaani” (“The Fuuta is no good”) and ask me if I could help them get a green card to the United States.

With the nebulousness of the globalization challenge that I gleaned from my interviews and conversations, Chapter Five jumps around between several different facets of socioeconomic life in the Fuuta. It starts out describing the degree of self-reliance and autonomy that Fuuta communities experienced in the past as they remember it today. In many ways, the integrated, autonomous, and collectivist nature of production was a cultural choice, as Halpulaar populations of the region resisted involvement in precolonial and colonial-era patterns of consumption and trade until well into the twentieth century. People today speak fondly of the time when they lived off the gawri
(millet or sorghum) from their own fields, the *kosam* (milk) from their own animals, and *liɗɗi* (fish) from the Senegal River and its tributaries. The transition to a monetized lifestyle whereby people purchase their staples from the market has not gone smoothly. Furthermore, local producers can make little profit from marketing their goods, as imported goods out-compete them in price and availability. Markets are able to absorb some of the local labor, but the opportunities that are available to most individuals will not give them enough income to support themselves.

With little other opportunity to earn significant income, people have been leaving the region en masse seeking to try their fortunes elsewhere. Some are able to find work in the mines of the north, but most Fuutankōɓe head to urban areas, usually Nouakchott or Dakar. If they are able to find employment, these individuals send a significant amount of income back to their families in the Fuuta. For some families, remittance income is the difference between making ends meet and going hungry. As such, Fuuta communities are able to take advantage of their ethic of collective support and solidarity to make the most of a bad situation. Diaspora communities are also able to mobilize resources to productive effect. Such populations are starting to play a greater role in development efforts back in the Fuuta. However, the distance and prolonged separation of long-distance migration places enormous strain on families and communities. Particularly with the fact that it is mostly men living abroad while their wives and children remain in the Fuuta.

While processes of globalization have contributed to social and economic misery of Fuuta communities, there are certain bright spots that have emerged that one could
point to as sources of optimism. Chapter Five concludes with a look at how Fuutankɔɓe are using new and old forms of communications technology to revitalize dental and jokkere endäm among Halpulaar populations in the region. Cell phones and radio are two of the more intriguing forms of communication, given their ubiquity and the degree to which people have incorporated them into their daily lives. It is notable as well that both of these media are oral in nature, given the low rates of literacy in Fuuta communities. Especially with the growth of Pulaar-language local radio programming in the past decade, people are able to gain knowledge, to connect with friends and family, and to stay informed on issues of significant concern regarding development, politics, cultural matters, and more. There is also a vibrant participatory dimension for listeners that emerges through the symmetry of cell phones and radio broadcasts. The prevalence of such media might not produce solutions to the development challenges that people face, but it offers a good starting point for sharing ideas in a language that allows people the full power of their modes of expression.

The final chapter of the dissertation distills the recurring themes of the middle chapters, highlighting the oppositional tensions that pervade the realm of development for Fuuta communities. One of the central tensions revolves around agency versus dependence, as people live with the sense that they have lost much of their agency in being able to provide for themselves and the choices they can make to do so. For many people, development is the best hope for restoring local agencies, although they are also concerned that ineffective interventions could wind up increasing their state of dependency. As such, Fuutankɔɓe grapple with a tension within concepts of self-identity,
swinging between seeing themselves as victims and seeing themselves as resilient. Victimhood can be particularly problematic when people lose hope for improvement and feel resigned to unending poverty. Without the hope of a better future, people of the region might soon embrace their eventual demise and engulf the entire Mauritanian nation in pain and misery.

This work concludes with a discussion of how cultural knowledge can contribute to participatory development reform in the Fuuta or elsewhere. The key is to recognize local expertise and how one can employ that expertise effectively. This entails a holistic approach to local development, enhancing production along with facilitating connections to markets that can benefit the local producers. It also entails engagement with local forms of knowledge and even adoption of specific elements of that knowledge. One example from Halpulaar communities in the Fuuta is their idea of solidarity, jokkere endam, which is the ideal cornerstone for development efforts. They feel that development partnerships would be more effective if outside organizations were able to enmesh themselves with the life of the community, sharing their goals, concerns, and commitments. Given the singular characteristics of each locality, partner organizations would do well to put themselves in a position where they can understand and engage with emic perspectives, as well as take direction from the expertise and vision that local communities possess.
Chapter 2: Halpulaar Society in the Fuuta Tooro: History and Culture

Like much of the African continent, the task of conveying the social and demographic make-up of the Fuuta Tooro region to Western audiences is by no means a straightforward proposition. For starters, there is a legacy of violence and bloodshed stretching back over a hundred years\(^{44}\) that derives in part from outside powers' desire to reshape the continent so that it conformed to the European model of territory defined by ethnicity.\(^{45}\) The postcolonial nation-states across the continent have had to contend with this legacy, many of them having experienced seemingly intractable violence surrounding the issue of ethnic identity vis-a-vis national identity. Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nigeria come to mind in this regard. Other countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Somalia have been going down the road of internal conflict for much of the last two decades. Mauritania has also seen its share of ethnic violence – most notably from 1989-91 – but even without ongoing civil war, ethnic tensions continue to roil throughout the national society, threatening to erupt into bloodshed at any moment.

From the vantage point of the early 21\(^{st}\) century, most Westerners can acknowledge the historical culpability of the colonizing nations in this ongoing tragedy, even if many would be apt to place the largest share of the blame on African rulers or

\(^{44}\) Specifically, the race to colonize Africa in the last two decades of the 19\(^{th}\) century.

\(^{45}\) This was particularly true in French West Africa, where the French sought to relocate populations to what they deemed was their “true” homeland (Ciavollela 2010, 111).
those who led rebellions against them. The colonial powers helped get this ball rolling by carving up the continent according to their own whims and needs, drawing political borders that completely disregarded the people living on the terrain and their own notions of belonging. To use a longer historical lens, there is also the matter of the Transatlantic Slave Trade that turned African societies against each other and destabilized the entire region of West Africa while allowing Europe and the United States to profit enormously. But even with these acknowledgements, there seems to be little impetus to examine the ongoing complexity of African societies, other than to suggest a balkanization of African states to more accurately reflect ethnic distributions.

It is as if the only way that Westerners can understand ethnicity and ethnic relations in Africa is through cartography. The problem is that cartographic representation is not sufficient for conveying the fact that different ethnic communities have lived side-by-side (and continue to do so) in patterns that reflect production activities rather than territorial ownership. Particularly in arid and semiarid climate zones, there has been a strong symbiosis between sedentary agricultural populations and transhumant pastoral populations (Bates 117). Pastoral groups look after not only their own animals, but also those that belong to their sedentary neighbors, while these farmers

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46 A recent social media project sought to portray how the borders of African nations might look had there been no Transatlantic Slave Trade or European colonization of the continent (Strohm). The imagined borders start from what is known about 15th century polities and their territorial distributions while also accounting for internal political developments that have taken place since that time, such as the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate in the early 19th century. On the other hand, the map still portrays the Songhai empire as regionally ascendent, even though the Bambara states and the Fulbe in Maasina had taken over most of their former realm in the 19th century. By that time, Songhai control extended only in the region of Gao in the easternmost region of present-day Mali and the far western corner of present-day Niger (Strohm).
support the pastoralists with the surplus of their production yields (Riesman 174).47 The nature of this relationship does not lend itself easily to fixed territorial boundaries. Even sedentary farmers – unless they cultivate in areas of intensive agricultural production such as the Inner Delta region of the Niger River – have to move their communities periodically according to cycles of soil fertility.48 Aside from the symbiosis between primary producers, there has also been an ethnic division of labor in the realm of commerce and trade. One clear example is the network of commercial trade surrounding the salt mines of the Sahara. Tuareg nomads are the link between the mines and the markets of northern Nigeria, where Hausa merchants purchase the salt in bulk for the local market, or to move it to other markets in their commercial network (Mayer-Hohdahl).

Throughout history, and continuing until the present day, the Fuuta Tooro region of Southern Mauritania and Northern Senegal has exhibited these dimensions of complexity with respect to the ethnic make-up of its inhabitants. The tendency to view this region as a long-time domain of Pulaar speakers is accurate in some respects, but it is also an oversimplification that is subject to contestation. Certainly, the Halpulaar groups that live there consider it to be their homeland, which is evident in emic conceptions of

47 Riesman writes:

...the nomads and the sedentary peoples among whom they move are, in a certain sense, a luxury for one another. The nomad economy does depend absolutely on the products of the agricultural economy, but the nomads are such a small minority of the population that the amount of millet they obtain from the farmers is negligible when compared to their total harvest. In exchange, the milk products that the farmers buy or trade from the nomads are luxuries in their own diet (174).

48 The management of land rotations took place in precolonial times under the auspices of local agreements concerning tenure rights (Leservoisier 59-61). The Mauritanian state abolished this local system of tenure in 1983 as a way for laying the groundwork for rural economic development in the Fuuta. This promoted a major shift to private land ownership in the region, with the beneficiaries of this shift those belonging to Bidhane society (Leservoisier 184).
the region. Fuuta-dwelling Halpulaar recognize six different territorial divisions of the
territory that involve geographic features, land use patterns, and leñol distributions. For
instance, the Torodɓe, who tend to be the most sedentary of the different Halpulaar castes
– devoting themselves to farming and religious scholarship49 – established their
communities in the western portion of the Fuuta, primarily in the areas of Dimat and
Tooro. Further to the east, in the environs of Kaédi, there are higher concentrations of
Fulɓe who predominate in the area known as Bossoyo. These territorial divisions and the
populations with them have evolved over time according to historical processes, and new
subdivisions have formed out of larger ones50 (Dieng, personal interview).

The complexity of all these emic distinctions makes it difficult to encapsulate the
majoritarian identity of the region in any terms other than that of the language that is
common to all these divisions and subdivisions. Hence, Halpulaar (which literally means
“Pulaar-speaking”) becomes an umbrella term for outsiders to make sense of the
demographic situation for the region, even though Fuutankɓe are more apt to understand
themselves according to their social division or leñol. To make matters more complicated,
the region has long been home to non-Halpulaar groups. Soninke (to whom Pulaar
speakers refer as “Sarakuleɓe”), Wolof, and Serer communities have existed across the
Fuuta (See Figure 2). These ethnic groups tended to live in sedentary communities, and

49 Many of the Torodɓe religious scholars themselves did not live sedentary lifestyles, as they took it upon
themselves to travel across West Africa in an effort to spread Islamic belief and practice (de Bruijn and
van Dijk 1995, 171).
50 The Halaayɓe subdivision is one such instance, breaking off from the Torodɓe in the 18th century. The
reason for the split is that they were far enough away from the seat of power of Tooro that they were
more vulnerable to attack from the north by raiding Bidhane groups. The Halaayɓe decided to take it
upon themselves to organize the defense of their communities instead of relying on the Deñakoɓe
authority in Tooro (Dieng, personal interview).
transhumant Fulɓe have established partnerships and relationships of exchange with
them. To the north, Bidhane tribal groups have exerted significant pressure and influence
over the centuries. There are no geographical barriers that mark the transition from the
zones of the Bidhane emirates to the Fuuta. As such, the northern frontier of the region
has been a zone of conflict and contestation for as long as anyone can remember. Each
respective group within the region has transmitted their own versions of history through
their own language, tracing the developments and changes over time pertaining to their
ways of life. What follows is a brief sketch of Halpulaar historical memory among those
who live in Fuuta Tooro and how they see themselves in the context of the region.

Figure 2: Fuuta Tooro and neighbors, ca. 1850

CE, source: TL Miles - Own work.

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Ould Mey alludes to reports from early European explorers who named the Senegal River after the
Sanhaja (znaga) Berber tribes (71). These tribes became incorporated into Bidhane society as the Arab
tribes were able to establish hegemony in the region. Ould Mey offers no citation, and the origins of the
word Senegal are subject to contestation. His larger point, though, (also contestable) was that Black
African presence in the river valley came about largely as a consequence of colonialism.
In a general sense, Halpulaar society throughout West Africa is historically notable for two critical elements concerning the predominant economic, social, and political realities across the region. The first of these two elements is that Halpulaar, and more specifically the Fulɓe portion of Pulaar speakers, constitute the pastoral component to the larger agro-pastoral complex that has embodied economic and social relations of production in the arid and semi-arid zones of the region. Pastoralism figures strongly in the embodiment of Halpulaar identity and colors the way outsiders perceive Halpulaar society. When individuals from other ethnic groups think of Pulaar speakers, the first thing that comes to mind is their association with cows and their fondness for milk. The second major element of the historical influence of Halpulaar society is their role in the Islamization of much of West Africa in the 18th and 19th centuries. This process involved significant upheaval and changed the political landscape in many areas, particularly in the interior of the continent. In fact, when one considers the historical memory of the inhabitants of the region, one could conclude that processes of Islamization were more influential than processes of colonization, at least until the middle decades of the 20th century. Both of these elements, pastoralism and Islamic practice, figure strongly within the emic historical consciousness of Halpulaar society in the Fuuta Tooro region, albeit with added complexities that derive from locally contingent factors and events.

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52 There is a further distinction to note in that Fulɓe dieri represent the pastoral nomads, while the Fulɓe waalo practice sedentary cultivation and semi-nomadic pastoralism. Leservoisier notes that Fulɓe does not operate as an ethnic category (as some writers have tried to make it) precisely because it relates to both caste and occupational categories (56).

53 These are also important elements to identity formation. Cf. 74-76.
While the ethnic origins of Halpulaar and their arrival in the Fuuta Tooro region are murky,\textsuperscript{54} it would seem that they have had a significant presence in the region for more than a millennium. The earliest political presence was the kingdom of Takrur, which emerged around 800 CE in the middle and lower valleys of the Senegal River, contemporary with the Soninke empire of Ghana located in what is now southeastern Mauritania and northwest Mali (Marché Tiléne). There is speculation that this polity arose through the migration of Halpulaar populations from the east (Creevey 270), though others suggest that Takrur embodied an amalgamation of Saharan and Serer communities (Fage 484). The rulers adopted Islam in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century CE, but the extent to which the population of the region adhered to the religion is unclear. When Takrur declined in its power, the region came under the hegemony of neighboring powers to the north (Almoravids), to the east (Mali and Songhai), and to the west (Jolof). In the 15\textsuperscript{th} century CE, Fulɓe again rose to political prominence in the region with the emergence of the Deñaŋkoɓe dynasty. The Deñaŋkoɓe rulers were not Muslim, though the Torodɓe castes of sedentary farmers and religious scholars helped to maintain a vibrant Islamic presence within the Halpulaar milieu of Fuuta Tooro. This dynasty endured for almost three centuries, while during this time the watershed Sharr Bubba conflict\textsuperscript{55} (late 17\textsuperscript{th} century CE) among the Bidhane and Berber tribes to the north reshaped the sociopolitical

\textsuperscript{54} Oral historians and anthropological informants have helped to maintain this murkiness of origins. Both Riccardo Ciavolella and Helen Regis (in Cameroon) were stonewalled in their inquiries on this subject (Ciavolella 2010, 56-57; Regis 2-3). It seems that informants feel that the question is a bit imperialistic, as one griot pointed out to Ciavolella that Fuutankoɓe do not go to Europe to ask Europeans where they came from (2010, 57).

\textsuperscript{55} This conflict centered around an opposition between the two dominant castes of Bidhane society, the warriors (\textit{hassan}) and the clerics (\textit{zawaya}), each group looking to claim moral and social legitimacy as the guardians of the Islamic faith (Ould Cheikh 956).
landscape of the Western Sahara up until the 20th century. Pressure from the north along with internal jihad led to the downfall of the Deñancoɓe rulers in 1776 CE and the establishment of the Islamic Almaami dynasty in Fuuta Tooro (Kane and Robinson 15, Leservoisier 49). The Almaamate oversaw a highly decentralized polity while fostering an exclusively Islamic society (Leservoisier 52-54). Their rule depended upon the allegiance of the regional chiefs and nobles whose influence derived from their possessions of land and slave labor (Kane and Robinson 79). With significant internal and external influences during the Almaami period, the dynasty found itself facing challenges shortly after coming to power.

Internally, the Almaami rulers had difficulty managing the rivalries amongst the regional chiefs. One area of the Fuuta that did not fully support the Almaamate was the Tooro district, and it was from there that one of West Africa's most dramatic political figures emerged. El-Hadj Umar Tall was born in Halwar near Podor in the western part of Fuuta Tooro (in modern-day Senegal), and he played a guiding role in the latter stages of the Islamization of the Sahel region, even though he never held political authority in the Fuuta Tooro. He developed a towering reputation for his religious knowledge after completing the hajj pilgrimage and visiting the Muslim Fulɓe states in Sokoto and Macina (See Figure 3). Rather than challenge the local rulers, he established himself in the Fuuta Jallon region where he used his moral authority to spread his vision of jihad.\(^{56}\)

From this base, he recruited an army of followers to go east with him to fight the pagan

\(^{56}\) Umar Tall helped bring about a massive conversion to the Tijānīya Sufi order, which since that time has become the predominant order among Fuuta Halpulaar communities. The Bidhane of Mauritania, by contrast, remain strongly devoted to the Qadariyya order (Leservoisier 216).
Bambara kingdoms of Kaarta and Segu. Large numbers of people from Fuuta Tooro joined in these campaigns to the point where communities in the region suffered from the depleted local labor force (Kane and Robinson 97-98). Many people who left never returned to their homes. Umar Tall was one of these, as he died in a battle near Bandiagara. Division amongst his successors marred the attempt to establish a dynasty based on his vision. However, Umar Tall's legacy continues to loom large in the historical consciousness of present-day Malians, Senegalese, and Mauritanians.

57 De Bruijn and van Dijk suggest that Umar Tall's conquest had other motivations other than the religious ones that the oral tradition commonly attributes to him. They note that one could view his campaign as “a war over resources and the trade routes of the [Niger River] Inner Delta” (de Bruijn and van Dijk 64).

58 This is what the majority of historical accounts claim (de Bruijn and van Dijk 64). However, there are versions within the oral tradition that suggest that this was not the case. These versions attribute a degree of supernatural power to Umar Tall, saying that in reality he merely disappeared during the battle. My research assistant Abdul told me that stories circulate whereby certain individuals claim to have encountered him as an old man years after the battle at Bandiagara.
Aside from these internal developments, various external influences and threats helped shape the political history of Fuuta Tooro. One such threat to Fuuta security was raiding from the north by Bidhane tribes of the Brakna and Trarza emirates, or even armies coming from present-day Morocco (Kane and Robinson 5). The Deñäŋkoɓe regime in particular weathered incursions from the north by armed groups raiding for slaves and tribute, and their downfall resulted in part from their inability to maintain security against these incursions (Kane and Robinson 15). The Almaamate regime which succeeded them also found it a challenge to protect their territory from raiding. One of Kane and Robinson's informants from their oral history study in the late 1960s recounted the vulnerability of the Fuuta in the 18th century:

*Tawi safalbe ummoto rewo tan, ngara, ina nawa jawdeele kowri'en. Mbadaani kowri'en ko yimbe, nawa cukolon, ndaha, nawa na'i, noon tan wooraan* (sic) (36).

At that time the [Bidhane] used to come from the north, they came to plunder the property of the blacks. They did not consider the black people to be human beings, they would kidnap children and enslave them, take away cattle, they simply did that continually.

During my own fieldwork, a friend of mine from Seyenne gave a similar portrayal of local history, connecting such remembered and transmitted incidents with present-day animosities.

Interactions between Fuutankoɓe and Bidhane in those days were not always so adversarial; however, a sense of grievance over past violence persists today in the

59 For instance, one of Kane and Robinson's informants recalls strong relationships, especially business relationships, between Bidhane and Fuuta families (99-101). Also, intermarriage between the two groups has been fairly common historically (Leservoisier 216).
collective memory of Fuutankoɓe. Many are not willing to trust Bidhane individuals and
denigrate their moral integrity, while Bidhane hegemony in Mauritania provides a strong
sense of resentment. Concerning this latter aspect, some Fuutankoɓe ascribe Bidhane
dominance to witchcraft, seeing as they feel that Bidhane despise working for a living.
Their wealth and power, therefore, must have some supernatural force behind it
(Ciavolella 2012, 7). While the two groups both adhere strongly to Islam, having religion
in common is not necessarily a unifying force. Indeed, Fuutankoɓe view Bidhane
religious practice as hypocritical, while Bidhane consider the Islam of Fuutankoɓe to be
mired in superstition and pagan practices.60

Another external threat that grew in importance over the course of the nineteenth
century was French colonial expansion. The French had long been present at the mouth of
the Senegal River, where they built their colonial capital St. Louis. Their initial interest in
the Fuuta Tooro region was commercial, with merchant boats sailing upstream to trade
goods in the communities along the river bank. These merchants needed permission to
bring their goods into the Fuuta, which took the form of tolls paid to local representatives
of the Almaamate regime. These toll collectors were able to profit handsomely from this
form of trade, while a market for imported goods – especially cloth – took hold in Fuuta
communities (Kane and Robinson 43). The French, for their part, looked to acquire gum
arabic (an edible binder consisting of hardened sap from Senegalia senegal trees) and
animal skins (Kane and Robinson 97).

60 See f.n. 58.
Beginning in the 1840s, the French began to ramp up their activity in the region, particularly under the governorship of Louis Faidherbe who held the position through much of the 1850s and 1860s. Umar Tall's military campaigns in the east unsettled relations of production and governance throughout the Senegambia region, including Fuuta Tooro (Kane and Robinson 98). The French were quick to exploit this power vacuum to extend their control from the coast into the interior regions. Rather than shore up the power of local authorities, like the Almaami of the Fuuta, they worked to undermine the already weakened position of the Islamic regime by cutting off customs payments (Kane and Robinson 97). Faidherbe enacted an ambitious project to expand colonial power, increasing French military presence throughout the region and using that presence to put down any challenge or resistance to their power. Faidherbe's leadership left a strong and lasting impression in the region to the point where local oral histories attribute the entirety of French conquest to him, despite the fact that many areas did not come under complete colonial control until well after his term of governor ended (Kane and Robinson 97).

By the late 1880s, the French were fully in control in the Fuuta Tooro, but their colonial expansion continued into neighboring regions. The French used the Fuuta as a base for conducting campaigns to the east (Kane and Robinson 158). There were also forays into the north to take on the Bidhane emirates who still challenged French power in the region. While the French had little economic interest in the southern fringes of the Western Sahara which the Bidhane controlled, they viewed it to be in their strategic interests to prevent any of their European rivals from gaining a territorial foothold that
could drive a wedge between their colonies in Algeria and French West Africa (Ould Mey 76). Under the leadership of Xavier Coppolani, the French conducted a pacification campaign that exploited rivalries between the various tribal leaders to put down resistance. This campaign was able to achieve its objective of territorial control in 1912, although the colonial administration faced local raids and armed skirmishes until the 1930s.62

With a vast contiguous expanse of territory under their control stretching from the Mediterranean coast of Algeria southward into Central Africa, from the Atlantic coast eastward across the Sahel/savanna belt as far as the British Sudan, the French faced a number of practical challenges with respect to the administration of their colonial empire. The major economic production areas were the groundnut plantations of central and southeastern Senegal and the Inner Delta of the Niger River. As such, these regions saw the greatest amount of infrastructural development, including roads and railroads linking these production centers to the administrative capitals on the coast. Meanwhile, the Fuuta Tooro region and the areas to the north received very little interest from the French colonial administration, apart from French efforts to raise revenue through taxation. In order to further this end, the French had to work with local political authorities, needing their cooperation in this endeavor (de Bruijn and van Dijk 75).63 In general, these

61 Coppolani came up with the name Mauritania to refer to this region of the Western Sahara. The Roman province of that name was to the north, and had never had any connection to the territory that was to become the present-day nation (Gereinty 20).
62 Coppolani himself did not live to see the conclusion of his campaign, as a Bidhani resistor assassinated him in 1905 near the city of Tidjikja (Gereinty 108).
63 De Bruijn and van Dijk discuss taxation as the primary duty of local chiefs under colonialism in Macina, one that reduced their status within their own communities. However, chiefs were able to use this position to defraud both the French administration – who did not understand the terrain – as well as their fellow citizens who were not keen to take their grievances to the colonial authorities. Thus, the
colonial-era power structures tended to be segmentary, tribal, and clan-based, to minimize resistance to the French presence in the area without interfering significantly in the lives of the populations who lived in the area (Marchesin 74). One consequence was that the colonial administration had little contact with their subjects and therefore knew very little about their lifestyles and their social structures, particularly the aynaaɓe (pastoral herders) (de Bruijn and van Dijk 75-76). Another consequence is that Fuuta populations were able to maintain a high degree of autonomy during the colonial period, carrying out their production activities with little to no direct interference from French authorities. As such, Fuutankoɓe do not seem to regard colonization as a significant disjuncture in the historical processes of the region. It would not be until after independence that it became clear that a disjuncture had occurred, as the Halpulaar communities of the Fuuta had to contend with their minority and marginal status as citizens of Mauritania.

**Pulaaku and Cultural Identity**

As mentioned above, one of the most critical elements to understanding the social landscape of the Fuuta region is religion. Aside from the historical influence of Islam, religion plays a fundamental role in the constitution of cultural identity among Halpulaar populations. They are not alone in this aspect; all ethnic groups and communities in the region share a devotion to Islam, and processes of Islamization figure prominently in historical memory. Islam has been present in West Africa for over a millennium, though for much of this time it was the purview of a limited number of political elites and

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chefs were able to extract personal wealth from their office (de Bruijn and van Dijk 75-76).
religious scholars. Meanwhile, in the western region of the Sahara, Islam had a strong presence among the Arab and Berber populations that were the forerunners of the Bidhane of Mauritania. These populations were instrumental in the Almoravid conquest of Andalusia, and later on served the Almohad dynasty and its austere interpretations of the faith (Gereinty 30, Ould Mey 68-69). The various trade centers of the region – including Chinquit, Ouadane, Tichit, Oualata (present-day Mauritania), Timbuktu, Gao (present-day Mali), and Kano (present-day Nigeria) – also became centers of religious scholarship and were the main conduits for bringing Islam to Sahelian populations (Cleaveland 22, Ould Moulaye El Hassan 33-34).  

Things changed dramatically in the nineteenth century when populations across the Sahel and savanna regions of West Africa adopted the religion en masse. For Pulaar speakers, both the Fulɓe and the Torodɓe played central roles in these jihads, founding or helping to establish Islamic polities in Sokoto (modern-day Northern Nigeria), Maasina (Niger River Inner Delta), Fuuta Tooro, and Fuuta Jallon (in modern-day Guinea) (de Bruijn and van Dijk 52-53, E. Scott 1984a 58). The jihads also facilitated the adoption of Islam by populations such as the Hausa city-states of Sokoto and the Bambara states of Segu and Kaarta who had previously followed animistic practices (E. Scott 1984a 57). From this point on, Islam has dominated the religious landscape across the region, with animism mostly disappearing or going underground, while Christianity has only gained a limited foothold in urban settings.

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64 See also Bovill (1958) and Lydon (2009).
Modern-day Mauritania's status as an Islamic Republic has generally kept Christianity out of the national territory altogether. There are only two churches in the entire country: a Catholic church in Nouakchott and a Protestant one in the border town of Rosso. In the Fuuta, I have been told that there used to be a church in Kaédi (presumably for French colonial administrators stationed in the town), but that it no longer exists. By law, proselytization of Christianity is illegal, and the state nominally has the power to strip citizenship from a Mauritanian who publicly renounces his or her Muslim faith, while apostasy is a capital offense. However, in my experience throughout the country, including the Fuuta, there is practically no inclination that Mauritanians are eager to turn away from Islam. In fact, Mauritanians across all ethnic groups tend to consider their devotion to Islam as one of their best cultural attributes, one of the things that they do well.

For the Pulaar-speaking groups of Fuuta Tooro, Islam and culture share an intimate linkage with one another, generating the emic concept of pulaaku. The concept pulaaku encompasses all the facets and attributes of ethics, morals, duties, and behaviors that go into being an upstanding individual in Halpulaar society, which in essence means being a good Muslim. In short, this concept valorizes the well-being of the social collective over that of the individual, and Halpulaar develop and employ pulaaku to understand their respective places within society. It is also a significant source of social capital, as well as a potential point of entry for outsiders into Halpulaar society (Regis 21). Helen Regis describes it as “the performance of personhood” that “rests on the

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65 There is a long historical pattern by which individuals from neighboring ethnic groups have assimilated into Fulbe communities via conversion, inter-ethnic marriage, or adoption (Regis 6). Regis writes
concealment of emotionality and feeling. Pain, anger, grief, affection, and happiness are kept private, and *semteende*, the ability to feel shame, is publicly flaunted. Excessive grief, anger, or sensitivity to pain are interpreted as signs of weakness or bad character” (22). Islamic principles are also integral to *pulaaku*, and de Bruijn and van Dijk caution against trying to separate religion from culture, particularly since many Halpulaar groups have followed Islam for centuries (200). They also caution against using the concept as a universal framework operating within a homogenous ethnic milieu. There are stark differences in expression of *pulaaku* from place to place and amongst different rungs of the social hierarchy (199-201). The emic understandings and expressions of the concept adapt and change over time as the circumstances which individuals and communities face change and confront new challenges. Yet, given the geographical extent to which Halpulaar populations have existed across the Sahel and savanna zones of West Africa, it is quite remarkable to note the degree to which there is convergence on the meaning of what it means to be Fulɓe.

It is worth noting as well that the Pulaar language is rich in expressions and terminology pertaining to *pulaaku*, as well as discourses ranging from everyday conversation to religious lecture to intellectual debate. Regis notes that “[*pulaaku*] is a common topic of conversation among Fulɓe, who talk about it with pride and often cite is

“...when non-Fulbes convert to Islam and move into Fulɓe communities, they commonly are encouraged to take on the moral code of *pulaaku* as the precondition for participating in the Fulɓe social world as equals. The seamless performance of *pulaaku* in everyday life by Fulbeized converts erases their pre-Fulɓe past, effectively making them Fulɓe (21).” Her own efforts at understanding *pulaaku* as an emic concept facilitated her acceptance and adoption into a Fulɓe community, along with a challenge for her to extend her knowledge and practice of the codes in everyday life. Her experience in Northern Cameroon resonates quite clearly with my own experiences in the Fuuta region of Mauritania.

See also Breedveld, who notes that many ethnographic studies have focused primarily on Fulɓe nobility (430).
as the basis for their ethnic distinctiveness”\textsuperscript{67} (21). Of interest to development partners, the emic perspectives on development that Fuutankoɓe shared with me throughout my fieldwork frequently employ pulaaku terminology. The various terms for development – yelitaare, bamtaare, beydaare, etc. – refer implicitly to the well-being of the collective, whether it be the household, the community, or the region. Pulaar speakers assess the health of the collective primarily through the concepts of jokkere endam (solidarity) and dental (unity). Strong jokkere endam requires a strong foundation of gandal (knowledge) which people put to use for the good of the community through gollal (work). Individuals contribute to the strength or weakness of social solidarity through their nehdi (manners/behavior) and the degree of hakiile (intelligence) and muñal (patience) that they possess and display. It is important for outsiders to not lose sight of the fact that these concepts are not secular, but that they go hand in hand with understandings of what it means to be a good Muslim.

The performative aspect to pulaaku is just as important to Fuutankoɓe as the idealogical aspect. The actions that each individual exhibits to demonstrate the values of self-restraint and dedication to the well-being of the collective are what constitute nehdi. Community members constantly evaluate the nehdi of their neighbors, their relatives, and even strangers, and they base their comments and judgments on what they observe and what they know about each person's social position. Practices of greetings embody many of the core values of pulaaku concerning community solidarity through performance. In fact, the exchange of greetings is the foundation for all interpersonal interactions,

\textsuperscript{67} One should keep in mind that other ethnic groups of West Africa adhere to many of the components of pulaaku, using their own languages to elaborate their respective understandings.
regardless of the formality of the occasion. Performance is key; the exchange of greetings is more like a verbal dance between individuals than a real inquiry into their respective conditions. The act conveys “membership and participation in the community...” and shows “that they are aware of each other's condition in the world,” even if the responses that people give do not betray any difficulty or suffering that the speakers may actually be experiencing (Regis 30-31). Even the most perfunctory greetings involve four or five exchanges, while formal extended greetings can go on for several minutes.

One instance that sticks in my mind involved my 2012 visit to the village of Gouridiouma, about six kilometers away from Seyenne, where I spent the day with the village chief, Djiby Amar Gangui, a close friend of my host family in Seyenne who remembered me from my Peace Corps service. “Baaba” Djiby is the president of the multi-village Kawral development association which includes Seyenne, and he is in essence a father or grandfather figure for the residents of all of the member villages. He exudes kindness and interest in others' affairs and well-being, and he did not hold back when I arrived in Gouridiouma on a blisteringly hot morning. We spent several minutes going through all of the different exchanges that I knew (he most likely used some that I did not know), and even after we began talking about the purpose of my visit, he would continue to interject with greeting questions inquiring into my health and that of my

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68 In Mauritania, this phenomenon is not exclusive to Pulaar speakers; greeting exchange is also integral to social interaction for Hassaniya, Wolof, and Soninke speakers. In Fuuta communities, I have seen Pulaar speakers exchange greetings with Haratin or Bidhane individuals, with each person speaking in his or her mother tongue.

69 Cf. 114.
family. In essence, he was doing his part to acknowledge my connection to the locality and to encourage me to continue that connection.

While greetings are of utmost importance to social interaction in Halpulaar milieus, the concept of *pulaaku* permeates all aspects of verbal and non-verbal discourse. Concerning the latter, there are many elements to body language and posture that convey self-denial and consideration of the needs and comfort of one's companions (Regis 32). For instance, when eating from a communal plate, where up to a dozen people could be partaking from the same dish simultaneously, each person positions his or her body to minimize the amount of space he or she takes up, which involves balancing on one leg with the other tucked beneath the torso, bearing the weight of the upper body. This contortion is known as *huftaade*, and it conveys politeness, despite the physical discomfort that it entails. In my own experience, I would often get up wobbily from the lunch table, stepping gingerly while waiting for the feeling to return to my legs. Only nobles have permission to sit cross-legged at the communal dish, something that people would point out to me whenever I deigned to take such a liberty.

Another important non-verbal aspect of *pulaaku* is avoidance of eye contact between speakers. This is especially relevant when there is an age difference between two speakers. It is incumbent upon the younger individual to avoid eye contact with someone who is older. Helen Regis relates how she had botched her introduction to her research community in Cameroon by violating this principle in her first audience with the village chief (xvii-xviii). In my own fieldwork, I quickly noticed the ramifications of having a youth as a research assistant after observing Abdul's tendency to look away from
community leaders. While facilitating my introduction to the communities that we visited and explaining the purpose of my visit, his behavior demonstrated clear deference towards community leaders. Whenever we met with a chief or community leader, Abdul would avert his gaze away from these individuals during conversation to demonstrate his respect. This issue is a difficult one for Americans, who feel much more comfortable in face-to-face conversation and interaction if there is a significant degree of eye contact.

Despite the emphasis that *pulaaku* places on self-restraint, modesty, and the value of the collective, Fulɓe society in the Fuuta displays a good deal of inequality with respect to hierarchical social relations. The Pulaar word for equality is *potal*, and while I heard many people bring up this issue in conversation, most of the time they were addressing the external Mauritanian national community. The complaint that people would give voice to in terms of their standing within the national community was “*yo waad potal*” (“[there needs] to be equality”). When it came to Fulɓe society in the Fuuta, this complaint was noticeably absent. There are three prominent axes of inequality among the Halpulaar of Fuuta Tooro that had significant implications for my fieldwork activities: gender, age, and occupational lineage.70

*Gender Relations*

Gender inequality is readily apparent in Fuuta communities, and it manifests itself according to political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and even linguistic considerations. There is a clear division of labor and resources within the institution of

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70 One finds these hierarchies in Bidhane, Wolof, and Soninke society as well. For the Bidhane and Haratin, tribal divisions are also highly significant.
marriage that tilts the balance of power decisively towards men. The terms for husband and wife demonstrate this division, with the word for husband as *jom galle* (lord of the house) and the word for wife *jom suudu* (lord of the room). The implication is that the former is the public face of each household, while the latter attends to internal family responsibilities. Both men and women play significant role in household production activities, but it is the men who claim the status of *ndemoowo* (farmer), *gaynaako* (herder), *cuballo* (fisherman), etc. Despite the fact that women may spend just as much time in the fields as their husbands, that they milk the cows, and that they feed the family's livestock, they do not derive any social standing from this type of work.

Women also have to bear the burden of displacement when they get married, as the bride moves into her husband's family's compound. This often means moving to a new community, and a young wife faces the challenge of gaining acceptance from her husband, her husband's family, and her husband's community. The Pulaar language reflects this imbalance of agency in the marriage relationship, employing the passive verb to describe the woman's role; a man marries (*resde*) a woman, but a woman is married (*reseede*).\footnote{The age difference between husband and wife is often significant, with the husband usually ten to fifteen years older than his bride. Furthermore, following the customary interpretations of Islamic guidelines, a Fulɓe man can marry up to four women, providing that he can take care of all of his wives equally. While I have never encountered a situation where a man had four wives, it is not at all uncommon to see men with two wives. For instance, my host father from Seyenne had two wives who lived...} The ensemble of verbs with infinitives ending in *-eede* gives a passive meaning to active verb infinitives ending in *-de*.\footnote{The ensemble of verbs with infinitives ending in *-eede* gives a passive meaning to active verb infinitives ending in *-de*.}
together in the same compound. This situation apparently arose through the difficulty his first wife had in bearing children, as she had only one daughter who survived infancy. For the most part, there was little discord within this particular arrangement, as the second wife's children all considered the first wife as their mother, and the two wives work together in their contributions to household maintenance and production. With recent trends towards outmigration of adult men from rural communities, practices of polygamy have shifted somewhat whereby men are able to establish families in different localities, sometimes without the families being aware of each other's existence. Since this mode of polygamy does not entail an integration of household production activities, there seems to be greater potential for discord between the husband and his respective wives when the wives discover that there is a second family involved. Yet, given the disparity in power and influence within the community, women run the risk of losing what social standing they have if they leave their husbands for reasons other than neglect or mistreatment.

Discourses and practices of *pulaaku* help to inscribe the gender hierarchy on to Halpulaar society, yet women are by no means powerless. Helen Regis suggests that Halpulaar women and men live in “polarized worlds” that take shape through spatial segregation of social space as well as the “remarkably different ways of talking about their lives, marriage, fortune, scarcity, well-being, and dis-ease” (45). A woman's status and agency comes as a wife, a mother, a grandmother, and aunt and their nurturing roles of cook and caregiver. Women are central role models for the transmission of *pulaaku* values to the younger generations. Mothers constantly remind their children of what constitutes proper behavior, a task which does not stop when their children reach
adulthood. Thus, despite the subordination of female spaces in Halpulaar society, women are able to use this space for their own agency as well as to contest the agency of their husbands. Regis describes how women can be adept at deferring to the authority of their husband while at the same time conveying to him that such deference is “contingent on their own willingness to defer” (67).

The midday meal is a striking illustration of the polarized worlds that Halpulaar men and women inhabit. Men from different households get together with the other men from the community in their age group to eat after prayer, while the women of each household gather together in a separate room for lunch. The types of conversations and the dynamic of interaction differs significantly within these segregated spaces, with the conversations among men revolving more frequently around matters of work, religion, knowledge, or politics. Women who come into this space are typically silent and deferential, seemingly uninterested in contributing to the discussion. The women, on the other hand, eat in close proximity to the children, and are often nursing infants at the same time that they themselves are eating. Their conversation tends to revolve around marriage relationships, either the interior lives of their marriages, the marriages of friends, neighbors, relatives, or they discuss potential marriages among those who are unmarried. Whereas men can often relax and maybe even take a nap after lunch, the women's space is lively and animated throughout the duration of the late afternoon, until the next prayer provides an opportunity to begin attending to evening chores.

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72 This pattern is prevalent in many Fulɓe communities, though it is certainly not universal. In some households, men will eat alone, while in others they will eat with their wives and children.
73 Typically in the capacity of serving tea, as women take the responsibility for preparing the after-lunch tea for all those who are present in the household.
As a researcher in the field, my own gender played a significant role in structuring my fieldwork activities, sometimes in ways that were not productive towards achieving my objectives. In my community visits, my primary intermediary was the village chief, an office exclusively held by men. While I would always ask to speak with a representative from the community's women's cooperative, it was not always feasible to have a woman attend the interview session. Even in cases where a woman from the cooperative did attend, there was often a clear reluctance to lend their voice to a discussion where men were already active participants. There were exceptions to this tendency, where a woman would participate on equal terms or even dominate this discussion, and their contributions were valuable and illuminating. However, most of the time I would receive little direct input from female participants, and it was not appropriate for me to ask to speak with women individually. It was only in my visits to Seyenne where I could engage the women of my host family more candidly concerning their perspectives on development. Even then, opportunities to speak at length on the subject were fairly limited, given the number of tasks to which women attended throughout the course of the day.

There are, however, Fuuta women who work for NGOs and are highly influential in development activities throughout the region. During my time in Peace Corps, the Kaédi branch of the World Lutheran Federation (known by its French acronym FLM)

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74 For example, if the women's cooperative present was not present or was engaged in other tasks, I would not be able to gain their perspective throughout the interview.
75 One notable incident of this occurring was in my very first community interview in the community of Abbaye, where the women's cooperative president wrested control of the discussion away from the village chief, whose own manner was curt and circumspect. I will discuss this particular incident and the matter of discussion in Chapter Four.
played an active role in grassroots development projects in the area, especially in the commune of Ganki where Seyenne is located. They provided assistance to communities in the form of small-scale projects, microfinance lending, public health trainings, and Pulaar literacy courses. All of the officials in this branch were women who had all attained a high level of education and they commanded a noticeable amount of respect within the partner communities. During community visits, they took charge of proceedings and worked on equal footing with community leaders, despite their gender. In a sense, the residents of their partner communities acknowledged the professional training of these women and respected their input and advice.

Another woman I met who worked as a development professional at the grassroots level was Bolo Ba, who lived in the village of Sinthiane Diakary and also served as the field extension agent for *Action Contre la Faim* (ACF) as a point person for that NGO's activities in the community, specifically those that concerned the village women's cooperative. I met her on my second visit to the community, and she explained to me the actions that ACF was facilitating, the role of the cooperative women, and the partnership with outside technical experts who were regionally based. As a local resident, she seemed to carry a high standing in the community given her gender and relative youth. The cooperative women looked to her for knowledge and advice while reporting their questions concerns to her so she could pass them on.

Thus, while Fuuta women generally face limitations in the types of roles and responsibilities they can take on, there are still opportunities for them to expand their sphere of activities beyond the household. Furthermore, it appears that communities have
little problem accepting women working outside the house in certain circumstances, and that development activities often provide such opportunities. In many communities, the women's cooperative is the most active and dynamic actor for local development. However, the men and women of Fuuta communities still employ a logic of gender segregation in many aspects of everyday life, particularly when it comes to observance of religious duties and meal sharing. With the apparent willingness of women to participate in the maintenance of gender segregation, one would misunderstand the gender relations of Fuuta communities and households by employing a simplistic axis of progressive/repressive. It is clear, though, that the limits that women face in terms of their ability to travel keeps them tied more closely to their home communities and the development challenges of those communities. And with the high rate of outmigration of adult males, if women do not take responsibility for the well-being of their families and communities, then no one will.

Age

Aside from gender, the social life of Fuuta communities breaks down significantly according to age. The *fedde*, or age group (plural is *pelle*), is an important social institution within each community, starting from the time of circumcision (for boys)\textsuperscript{76} and lasting until the end of one's life. Throughout one's life, individuals spend much of their time and social interaction with members of their *fedde*. In one's youth, this includes

\textsuperscript{76} The initiation of male Fulɓe children into the social life of the community begins with the ritual context of circumcision (de Bruijn and van Dijk 149). When it comes to female children, the ritual aspect of initiation is missing, and does not really take place until marriage.
household chores, sharing meals, playing games or sports, schoolwork, and even bathing/hygiene. For adults, the *fedde* is important for coordinating community activities, decision-making, and delegation of responsibilities, among other things. For wedding celebrations and holiday observances, the members of each *fedde* get together to share in the festivities and make their own contributions to the expenses. For Fulɓe communities in particular, one is much more familiar and socially intimate with the members of one's *fedde* than with family members of different generations. Along with kinship, the *fedde* is one of the more significant factors giving each individual their place within the community.

The influence that each *fedde* wields depends upon where its members are at in the cycle of life and relative to the other *pelle* of the community. Thus, the *fedde* that is made up of the eldest males of the community (who are still physically and mentally fit) has the most influence, especially when it comes to decision-making. While the village chief (*jom wuro*) represents the highest political and judicial authority within the community (de Bruijn and van Dijk 74-75), he will often work in close consultation with the *fedde* of elders. On the religious side, this particular *fedde* delegates responsibility for maintaining the mosque(s) of the community and selects the imam(s) to lead prayer and give the Friday sermon. The *pelle* for younger generations\(^\text{77}\) will also consult with the elders regarding any provisional decision or activity they undertake. As time passes by, each *fedde* finds itself having more and more influence within the life of the community.

For Fuutankoɓe, getting older is a good thing and deserving of respect and veneration for

\(^\text{77}\) Aside from the *pelle* most communities have a youth association (*la jeunesse*) which plays a strictly civic role in community affairs as opposed to the civic and social nature of *pelle*.
the accumulation of knowledge and experience as a person goes through life (de Bruijn and van Dijk 148). 78

De Bruijn and van Dijk note that the authority that comes with age derives from both a person's age in years as well as the fedde to which he or she belong. “Generational seniority [i.e. the fedde] is most important in the definition of authority relations; seniority based on years comes secondary” (de Bruijn and van Dijk 148). Within each fedde, those who are older command more authority by virtue of their age. In my time among Fuutankobe, it was quite common for me to hear conversations where those present sought to determine the pecking order in a given scenario, figuring out who is older than whom within the context under discussion. There can be scenarios where one individual is older than another, but belongs to a fedde that has less seniority. In such cases, there can be a high degree of ambiguity in relations of authority (de Bruijn and van Dijk 148).

Thus, the institution of the fedde and the significance of age establishes both hierarchies as well as equalities between individuals within a community. It helps to define relations of power and authority, and it gives every individual the possibility of increasing their standing within the community just by staying alive. But, as is sometimes the case with gender, younger individuals who demonstrate high levels of specialized knowledge can command a greater level of respect and authority. This often becomes the case for those who work in development, as the responsibilities of the various positions typically demand more abstract and technocratic understandings. In one remarkable

78 The valued knowledge that elders possess, as de Bruijn and van Dijk write, relates to “medicinal herbs, herd management, and life in general” (148).
instance during my fieldwork (which I shall discuss in detail next chapter), I interviewed a group that included a development professional who was a man in his 40s and was able to provide historical, social, and scientific details to the development challenges of the region. As he spoke, he was unafraid to contradict the other interview participants if he felt what they said was inaccurate. This included his grandfather, who was the chief of the village, a man of approximately ninety years. Despite this man's relative youth, it appeared that the people of the community highly valued his expertise and were willing to defer to his judgment and analysis when it came to matters of development.

Yet, aside from such instances, age was a highly relevant factor within my field interviews in both the composition of the interview group as well as the dynamics of participation within the discussion. As an outsider, my ability to engage community members in my research questions depended upon the approval and mediation of thejom wuro or his deputy if he was not present at the time of my visit. In every community, thejom wuro was amenable to my request to speak with a representative from both the women's cooperative as well as the jeunesse. Typically, he would send a child to go notify the select individuals to come. But while these individuals needed special invitation to take part in the interview session, the elder men of the community required no such invitation, and would come at any point to observe or contribute. The presence of the elders in many cases inhibited both the women's cooperative representative(s) as well as the youth representative(s) beyond whatever other inhibitions these individuals might have harbored when it came to discussing matters of community development with a white male outsider. As such, the predominant perspective that emerged from my
interview discussions was that of the older men of the community. This perspective was extremely valuable, especially when it comes to understanding and evaluating how things have changed over time. However, it leaves out the perspectives of young people and their different experiences with development such as their mass participation in the public education system as well as their engagement with new communication media and technologies. One must keep this in mind when reading my discussion of my fieldwork interview encounters.

**Occupational Lineage**

Another important structuring factor in Halpulaar society is each family's attachment to a caste-like social division that centers on a particular production activity. One finds these divisions in societies all across West Africa, not just Pulaar-speaking communities. In Pulaar, the concept *leñol* that I discussed in Chapter One is one of the ways in which people express a sense of kinship attachment that transcends blood or marriage relationships. These occupational divisions seem to be a powerful embodiment of *leñol*. One notable aspect of these divisions within Halpulaar society is the high status of pastoralists (*aynaabe*) in relation to the other occupational groups. In Fuuta Tooro, the pastoralist groups are the Fulɓe, and they have long occupied the more elite rungs of Halpulaar society, the *rimbe* (nobility, sing. *dimo*). However, the Fulɓe are not the only nobility of the region, as the Torodɓe share in the elevated social distinction. As noted above, the Torodɓe are largely sedentary cultivators, but a large number of Torodɓe
individuals devote themselves to religious scholarship. Their leadership and influence in religious practice allows them to command a wide degree of respect and veneration from the rest of Halpulaar society. Torodɓe preachers (seernaabe, sing. ceerno) travel widely and attract large audiences wherever they go. For those with the highest reputations, their visits to an area become important events which Fuutankəɓe use to help establish chronology. For instance, when someone wants to remember when a specific event happened, he or she is apt to refer to it being before or after Ceerno so and so came to speak in the area.

Thus, in principle, the Fulɓe and Torodɓe share the highest social status in the Fuuta region. In practice, this sharing of nobility entails a certain degree of distrust for one another. At the same time that the Fulɓe respect and venerate the religious knowledge of Torodɓe, they do not think highly of Torodɓe society within the community. They look at the Torodɓe as arrogantly aloof and somewhat miserly when it comes to sharing their wealth and resources. The coolest reception that I received throughout my community visits was in the Torodɓe community of Mbonjeri to the west of Boghé. While it was evident that this particular community was deeply impoverished (and the interview discussion conveyed a high degree of bitterness with respect to their experience with development projects), Abdul attributed their attitude to the fact that this is how Torodɓe are in general, that they are not as welcoming and solicitous of outsiders as the Fulɓe are. This was the clearest example of a sense of dislike or rivalry between Fulɓe and

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79 See de Bruijn and van Dijk (170-173) and Riesman (179-180).

80 It is important to keep in mind that Abdul had little familiarity with the terrain around Boghé. This was effectively his first experience in the area, and he was somewhat an outsider himself.
Torodɓe that I have encountered, but the implication comes up whenever the topic of ethnicity and how to define it comes up.

Aside from these two groups, Halpulaar society comprises several other occupational groups such as the *subaalɓe* (fishers, sing. *cubaalo*), *maabuɓe* (weavers, sing. *maabubo*), *lawɓe* (carpenters, sing. *labbo*), *waylubɓe* (blacksmiths, sing. *baylo*), and *sakeeɓe* (tanners, sing. *sakke*). Each of these occupational groups has its own body of knowledge – some of it kept secret within the group – that helps members perform their tasks effectively (Gereinty 93). When social cohesion is high, the output of each group's specialized production both complements the work of the other castes and helps families meet their subsistence needs collectively. For example, the tools that the *subaalɓe* used for their activities were produced by the carpenters (boats), blacksmiths (spears), and weavers (nets). In return, the *subaalɓe* would provide these laborers with portions of their catch. The mutual dependency involved with this method of production has probably helped historically to build *jokkere endam* in Halpulaar society while also fostering positive attitudes towards the concept.

Other occupational groupings of Halpulaar society do not relate directly to production, but instead provide support for the political leadership. One such group is the *seɓɓe* (soldiers) who played a significant role in the overthrow of the non-Muslim Deñaŋkoɓe rule in the 18th century.81 Today, the *seɓɓe* do not have a military function, but

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81 There is a story how the last Deñaŋkoɓe ruler lost his power by offending the *seɓɓe* who had helped maintain his position. This ruler was in the process of converting to Islam, but his Torodɓe advisors pushed him to divorce one of his wives, because he had five, one more than was permissible under Islam. The ruler decided to divorce a woman who came from a *seɓɓe* family, because, according to him, she did not have as high a status as his other wives. The *seɓɓe* perceived this as an insult and thus withdrew their support from him and joined the Almaami revolution (Dieng, personal interview).
they have maintained their identity in the post-independence era. On the rhetorical/discursive side of the exercise of power, there are the awlube (griots, sing. gawlo) who have used their historical knowledge and linguistic eloquence to curry favor and influence with the nobility. The nobles, in effect, have supported the griots through personal patronage of their services. If they do not take care of griots, they run the risk that the griots will attach themselves to rival leaders.

Lastly, there have been subaltern groups of maccube (slaves, sing. maccudó) and riimaybe (free peasant, sing. diimaajo) who provide a reserve labor force to, in effect, fill in the gaps in the network of production relations. Slaves have also helped to support nobles in times of drought or other local crises (de Bruijn and van Dijk 70). Generally, slaves in Halpulajaran society have been able to own property, sometimes accumulating substantial wealth for themselves and their families. Yet, no matter how wealthy they become, nobility has not been something they can purchase. Intermarriage with noble families is the likeliest means of overcoming the low status of their social identity, but even then noble families have been resistant to intermarriage (de Bruijn and van Dijk 142). Currently, with Mauritania having abolished slavery, maccube do not technically exist anymore; however, the category of riimaybe generally implies a servile position.

While the preceding descriptions present a broad historical overview of the occupational lineage system in Halpulajaran society within the Fuuta Tooro, the current challenges that Fuuta communities face have had some ramifications for these group identities. For one, the integrated productive relations have experienced disruption as the region has become more connected to the market flows of global capitalism. The primary
producers – remoobe, aynaabe, subaalbe – have sought to enhance their productivity with mechanization, replacing the tools that the occupational groups have produced locally. This does not necessarily eliminate the need for carpenters, blacksmiths, etc.; these groups have also been able to incorporate machine tools into their craftwork. However, it appears that the linkages between these castes and the farmers, herders, and fishers have weakened. The toolmaking and artisanal groups have migrated towards the larger market towns where they are close to the merchants who sell imported materials and hardware. Thus, in the villages, the farmers and herders have lost some of the local support base for their production activities.

The significance of this occupational system is also changing with the growing tension between national identity and ethnic identity. As a minority group in Mauritania, Halpulaar communities understand that internal divisions can be highly detrimental to their well-being and their place in the national society. People speak of the danger of leñam-leñolmaagu (my people, your people), and they assert that they will remain weak, impoverished, and susceptible to oppression by the national political elite. In this regard, there is an intellectual current moving towards dissolving the inequalities within the hierarchy of these occupational groupings.82 This issue is not particular to Halpulaar society alone; all of Mauritania's ethnic/linguistic groups are renegotiating and redefining

82 One example comes from a poem written by a Seyenne resident, Adama Samba Ba, extolling the communal society and its history the way current residents want to see it. One of the lines notes that: “to Seyenne, alaa o ko pullo, oya ko torodo, ngalaa ko maccuɓe. Seyennaaɓe fof ko fulɓe rimɓe, reeneeɓe” (“In Seyenne, [we do not say] this person is a Pullo, that person is a Torodo, there are no slaves. Seyenne is Fulɓe, proud and united”) (Cridem).
their sense of identity and belonging, both internally within each respective ethnic group as well as externally with the multiethnic national society.

**Multiethnic Dynamics and Development in the Fuuta**

Much of what I have described above in terms of the internal social relations and hierarchies as well as significant social concepts applies broadly to all the other ethnic groups of Mauritania. There are variations and nuances, for sure, but it is best to not lose sight of the consistencies, particularly when one examines the social tension that pervades Mauritanian society. The threat to national unity is not so much a clash of incompatible cultures; rather, it stems from the fundamental imbalance in the distribution of political, economic, and social power within the structures of state and society. When Mauritania became an independent nation in 1960, the French left administrative control of the country in the hands of Bidhane leaders. In the early years of independence, these leaders relied on a bureaucratic class of individuals who came from the non-Arab ethnic groups: the Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof. As time has gone by, the leadership of the country has remained in the hands of the Bidhane elite who have gradually filled all levels of senior administration with individuals who share their ethnic background. This has been part of the process of Arabization that will come up again in Chapter Four. But despite decades of Arabization, Mauritania remains a multiethnic and multiracial society as the different groups struggle to find a basis for national cohesion. This struggle has arguably loomed largest in the Fuuta region, where contestation over access to land and collective resources has the potential to ignite conflict.
The question of land is of particular significance, given the fact that the Fuuta comprises Mauritania's only extensive cultivable zone. Even then, agricultural production is always a precarious enterprise and risky investment in the region, given the potential for drought, disease, or crop destruction. Owing in large part to these factors, the Fuuta has never been a breadbasket for the nation. Since independence, Mauritania's food production has fallen well short of its consumption needs, making the country a net importer of food (Maïga 102). Nevertheless, Fuuta farmers take great pride in their ability to grow crops in the region's harsh environment. As such, communities of the region continue to hold out hope that development assistance will provide a significant boost to their agricultural activities, making it an enterprise on which they can survive and thrive. Yet, given their marginal position within the power structures of Mauritanian society, there are substantial fears that they themselves will not be the beneficiaries of any breakthroughs in agricultural development. These fears derive in part from the fact that the Mauritanian state has on occasion demonstrated a willingness to expropriate agricultural land in the Fuuta by force. But perhaps an even greater concern today is land privatization, with wealthy government elites and foreign investors laying claim to large expanses of land. As a result, non-Bidhane Fuuta residents face increasing tendencies towards pauperization whereby their only path towards making a living would be to work on land that no longer belongs to them for the benefit of the new owners.

The pastoral economy is another aspect to the contentions surrounding land access or ownership in the Fuuta, as the region is a crucial linchpin for the agro-pastoral

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83 Cf. 323.
production complex within the national territory.\textsuperscript{84} Pastoralists depend heavily upon the seasonal availability of pasture resources in the region, especially during the lengthy dry season. Some level of cooperation and coordination is necessary among farmers and herders to accommodate multiple users of shared resources. Ethnic ties and identities serve to complicate these relationships between different pastoral groups as well as between pastoralists and farmers. Bidhane camel herders from the Assaba, Tagant, and northern Brakna regions come down to the Fuuta with their animals which are allowed to roam freely in search of grazing resources. This puts pressure on both local herders who face competition for pasture as well as farmers whose fields are susceptible to destruction from livestock grazing. Just as is the case for farmers, Halpulaar herders feel that in any interethnic dispute, the Mauritanian state will not intervene on their behalf. They also feel that the state is unwilling to invest in meaningful development efforts for livestock health and production.

Beyond production, Fuutankobe harbor these concerns in almost every domain that relates to development and quality of life.\textsuperscript{85} The state in their eyes is not a trustworthy ally for development because those who run the state represent a different ethnicity and different culture, and are only willing to take care of their own. They have seen how certain individuals and their families have accumulated enormous wealth for themselves through fortunate connections, which they use to make their lives more

\textsuperscript{84} This particular agro-pastoral complex is in effect transnational, comprising southern, central, and southeastern Mauritania, northern Senegal, and western Mali. However, given fluctuations in the level of cooperation and/or conflict amongst the national governments of these three nations, the national borders are only intermittently permeable to transhumant pastoralists. For instance, the escalating tensions between the governments of Mauritania and Senegal in the late 1980s effectively closed the frontier and kept herders within their respective borders.

\textsuperscript{85} A possible exception might be the domain of religious knowledge and understanding.
comfortable and to indulge in various luxuries. While the values of *pulaaku* discourage envy of what others have, the gap between the haves and have-nots is too glaring for people to ignore. They may deplore the means by which others have become wealthy, but the end result of freedom from hunger and access to better health care resources is a tantalizing prospect for people who have been struggling to keep themselves alive for years. In their eyes, it would be better for such improvements to occur according to their own *pulaaku* values of unity, sharing, humility, and moral integrity.

With respect to current political, social, and economic realities, Fuutankoɓe have little inclination to buy into a vision of national development for Mauritania if that vision will not recognize their right to prosperity. At the same time, the vulnerability of their position does not offer them the opportunity to put forth an alternative vision of national development to compete with the one that the state champions. Nor have there been significant attempts to build a collective alternative vision with the other marginalized groups of the region, the Soninke, Wolof, and Haratin communities.\footnote{The major exception is FLAM, which sought to unify Mauritania's non-Arab ethnic groups as a defensive strategy against Arabization of state and society. The Haratin were not part of this movement, and they played a large role in suppressing it during the latter half of the 1980s, something that Halpulaar communities have not forgotten.} Thus, the Halpulaar communities of the Mauritanian Fuuta do not seriously envision breaking away to form their own independent nation. And despite a more favorable disposition towards Senegal, those who live on the Mauritania side of the river also recognize that the Senegalese Fuuta has suffered a good deal of neglect when it comes to development. The best hope, in the conversations that I had during my fieldwork, is for strong partnerships with the international community to emerge. Yet, in cases where this has happened, the results
have been too modest to overcome the sense of doom that people have with regard to
their prospects for survival and prosperity. What follows is an overview of one such effort
to build a strong grassroots organization for community development that works with
outside partners only when those partners are willing to buy in to the notion of *jokkere
endam* that Fuuta communities seek to put into practice.

*Inter-communal Planning and Cooperation: The Seven-village Kawral Association*

The commune of Ganki lies to the east of Kaëdi (See Figure 4), on the north side
of the Gorgol Noir floodplain, with the majority of its communities overlooking the
*waalo* or further upland in the *dieri*. Other than the low plateau outcroppings, the remains
of ancient volcanoes, the landscape ascends much more gradually from the *waalo* than it
does on the southern side of the floodplain with its fixed sand dunes marking a clear
boundary for the tributary valley. For someone standing at the top of one of the plateaus,
the land stretches out expansively in all directions. Remnants of greater forests dot the
landscape, giving a feeling of life holding on in the midst of the large swathes of barren
sand and gravel where the only vegetation that grows is the desert weed *Calitropis
procera* and the spiny *Balanites aegyptica* (desert date). Even when adequate rainfall
allows for pasture growth, many patches of land do not have the soil to support plant life.
However, some localities do still have open canopy forests of *Zizyphus mauritania*
(jujube), and different *Acacia* species such as the *Senegalia senegal* that is the source of
the gum arabic that was the region's primary export in precolonial and early colonial
times. The further north one gets from the *waalo*, the less likely one is to find such spots
of vegetation; it is just about the northern limit for rain-fed agriculture in this part of the
country. But with the proximity to the waalo, cultivators have had the option of
conducting two planting campaigns in one calendar year. Despite the arid landscape and
conditions, communities of this commune have been able to thrive historically under the
agro-pastoral economic production system, as Abdoulaye Toure related to me when I
spoke with him in Ganki.87

Prior to the twentieth century, it was a challenge to establish permanent
agricultural communities within the zone. Raids from Bidhane tribes from the north or
from the west were frequent in precolonial times, especially during times of weak
political authority in the region (Leservoisier 117). As such, Fulɓe or Torodɓe farmers
sought out cultivation terrains closer to the Senegal River that were more defensible
during the floods of the rainy season, especially localities that would become surrounded
on all sides by the seasonal floods (Leservoisier 115). With the colonial period bringing a
definitive end to raiding, these farmers felt emboldened to move to the north side of the

87 Cf. 128-129.
waalo and settle down in that area. Abdoulaye Toure's account of the establishment of Ganki in the early twentieth century coincides with the shift in the regional security situation.88 Similarly, the community of Seyenne Gababé was founded at its current location by farmers who had previously lived along the Senegal River downstream of

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88 See also Leservoisier's discussion of land tenure rights in the region. Due to the fact that the communities of this zone only recently settled in their current locales, land tenure is less of a contentious issue (Leservoisier 128-129). Essentially, there has not been enough generational turnover to necessitate a strict system of land right management for resolving claim disputes.
Kaédi. Aside from these two villages, Seyenne Ouoro Molo, Gouridiouma, and Dar Salaam grew on the north side of the waalo, with the villages of Ouadio Bossoyo, Ouadio Bokê, and Mbidene further north into the dieri. As they no longer faced the threat of attack, the communities that sprang up in the zone were able to thrive through collective subsistence production up until the droughts of the 1970s. These communities are predominantly Fulɓe, meaning that the pastoral economy (ngaynaaka) is just as important to production as cultivation (ndema).

The ability of communities in this zone to support themselves began to erode with the severe droughts of the 1970s and 1980s, while the political tensions and violence at the end of the 80s brought significant disruption to their livelihoods. It was not surprising, then, that many people with whom I spoke in my fieldwork encounters identified the 1970s as the time when things started to go wrong for them. It is also when people began to associate the idea of development with large-scale efforts to modernize production methods to make labor more efficient. Yet, conflict with the state meant that the Fulɓe communities of the commune of Ganki had difficulty trusting state-led development projects to target their own interests in improving production methods to increase their yields. Even for those who were able to escape personal harm from the violence, repressive policies from the state compounded the shock to production systems that climate volatility was inflicting on the region. Western NGOs left the region en masse during the height of the ethnic violence, leaving the Fulɓe communities with even less

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89 Cf. 128-129.
support as their world crumbled around them. Furthermore, the area experienced an influx of Haratin families that either established themselves in the pre-existing communities or formed new ones. Dar Salaam and Mbidene were two of the communities that became split between Fulɓe and Haratin segments.

It was in this context of environmental and political crises that the _Kawral_ community development association came into being amongst the western villages of the commune of Ganki. These communities were the two Seyennes, the two Ouadios, Gouridiouma, Dar Salaam, and Mbidene. The individual who spearheaded the association in the mid-1990s and has been its primary backbone for two decades and counting is a now-retired regional functionary of the Ministry of Rural Development and the Environment (MRDE), Ba Samba Sandigui. Ba Samba's primary technical expertise is in the treatment of insect and diseases that attack crops, especially potatoes. But beyond this fairly narrow specialization, he has a tremendously comprehensive understanding of the Fuuta's rural economy coupled with a deep familiarity with development actors in the region, be they state agencies or NGOs. He does not believe in quick fixes to the development challenges that the communities of the region face, but instead prefers to view development as an emergent process, a negotiation and accommodation amongst local communities and outside partners who respect and value the culturally shaped knowledge base that exists on the ground within Fuuta communities. At the same time, he expects a level of discipline amongst the rural communities in terms of maintaining a collectivist ethos – keeping _jokkere endam_ alive – in the face of both internal and external

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104 Indeed, Fuutankɔbe look to foreign NGOs as a sort of protection against state oppression. The feeling is that these organizations would be able to publicize any violence that the state directs against them.
pressures to abandon it for a more individualistic spirit. This does not mean, though, that he is against adopting technologically enhanced production methods or new development strategies. He holds progressive views on gender equality, the value of education, and the potential of youth to be leading participants in local development. Above all this, he has earned enormous respect and admiration from all those who have had the chance to work with him.

His involvement with the Kawral association has been one that has arisen out of his professional mission, rather than having a personal connection to the communities of the commune. He is actually from the town of Foondu, 15 km west of Kaédi and just outside of the Gorgol region, while he currently resides in Kaédi with his family. The seven villages that comprised the Kawral association from the beginning were in close enough proximity to Kaédi to allow him to travel to and from the communities without too much difficulty. Since they were all in the same size range (200-400 residents each), performed the same economic production activities, and had mostly the same cultural make-up, Ba Samba felt that they could all benefit from inter-community coordination of activities and distribution of resources. His inspiration for establishing the association

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91 Foondu is on the eastern edge of what Pulaar speakers refer to as Hirnaange Bossoyo, or West Bossoyo, which is the area to the west of Kaédi and north of the river. Most of this region is in the territory of the Brakna administrative region. The commune of Ganki is in Bossoyo, which is the region east of Kaédi that comprises the Gorgol Noir floodplain. All of Bossoyo lies within the Gorgol administrative region.

92 In the beginning years of his work with the Kawral association, he owned a motorcycle that allowed him to get around on his own without relying on public transportation. This made quite an impression on the residents of the Kawral communities, and they still talk about how he just used to show up on his motorcycle wearing goggles and wrapped up in a turban to protect his eyes and head from the elements.

93 The biggest marker of social separation between the communities is that Ouadio Boké and Mbidene are primarily of the Fulɓe dieri division of Halpulaar society, which does not have the same social standing as the Fulɓe rimɓe populations of the other communities. My own experience working with the Kawral association suggests that this division does have influence in the inner workings of the association. For instance, Ouadio Boké actively sought to have a Peace Corps volunteer for their community, but they were passed over in favor of Seyenne Gababé and Gouridiouma.
came from none other than the World Bank and the participatory development methodology they were championing in the 1990s, partially in response to the criticism and backlash they received following the structural adjustment regimes of the 1980s and 1990s (Sandigui Ba, personal interview). While one could argue that this initiative from the World Bank was more lip service than an actual paradigm shift, the strategy certainly has significant appeal to impoverished communities that are looking to improve their prospects for development without completely abandoning their values and sense of identity. Given the right context where a local population has a commitment to collective action and enough patience to stick to their sustainable development vision, then the strategy of participatory development can pay tangible dividends. Over twenty years, residents of the Kawral communities largely feel that their efforts have been beneficial, even if it takes a while for the benefits to materialize.

When Ba Samba helped spearhead the Kawral association in the mid-1990s, there were three long-term activities for the organization to manage. Later on, as the association was able to establish continuity and growth, it has been able to take on new dimensions to its activities. The first of the activities was to hold a monthly meeting (baatu gure, or the “meeting of the villages”) with at least two representatives from each community in attendance. The site for the baatu gure rotates amongst the member communities each month, which not only distributed the burden of hosting, but also gave host community members the chance to observe the proceedings and contribute their perspectives. On the first Saturday of every calendar month, the representatives from each community converge on the meeting site in the late morning, begin the proceedings
around 11 am, and continue through the late afternoon prayer (*takusaan*), usually between 5 and 6 pm. Throughout the *baatu gure*, the community representatives engage in spirited discussion while Ba Samba makes sure that they address their regular business and any important news that needs to be shared. The meeting in and of itself is an embodiment of *jokkere endam*, with the exchange of ideas and information amongst the participants, who in turn convey the discussions that took place to their own families and communities.

The other two long-term activities of the *Kawral* involve the management of the association's shared assets. One of those assets is the monetary account – essentially a savings account – which grows through monthly contributions from each member community. This contribution comes out to 500 UM (about $1.79) per community per month, or 20 UM per household. Even with the crippling poverty that these communities experience, this amount is not especially burdensome to the collective financial resources. Ba Samba does insist that the contribution come from the pooled resources of each community, and not out of the pocket of one individual. In 2012, the balance of this account had grown to around 400,000 UM (about $1430), which gives the association some financial clout within the context of the local economy. This fund also allows the association to offer credit to community members who need start-up capital to undertake a small-scale business venture.

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94 Each community has its own monetary accounts to support local organizations and activities, such as the mosque, the school, cooperative organizations/ventures, and youth activities. Typically, the monthly *Kawral* contributions will come from these funds.
Aside from monetary assets, the *Kawral* association manages a cereal bank (located in Seyenne Gababê) and a seed bank (located in Ouadio Bossoyo) which supports the food security of the community residents and their livestock while also making sure that farmers have access to seeds at the start of each planting season. Ba Samba points to the cereal bank and the seed bank as models for the kind of development he envisions for the *Kawral* association, particularly because the project brought together outside contributors – The Peace Corps and the World Food Program (PAM) – to play supportive roles\(^95\) while the community members themselves undertook management of the inventory and distribution. While these assets do not necessarily augment the quality of life in these communities, they do provide a solid floor for helping residents get through difficult times. It also helps lessen their dependence on food aid supplies that come from the international community. The distribution system for these supplies is not very reliable for the residents of the commune of Ganki, as much of the food aid does not reach the rural population. Instead, it gets diverted into the hands of national, regional, and local authorities who use it to support their own dependents or they sell it to make a profit.\(^96\) Thus, the cereal bank is a critical reserve for the *Kawral* communities in years of inadequate rainfall, when food shortages afflict the region.

In addition to these three dimensions of the *Kawral* association's activities that have been ongoing from the beginning, new projects and activities have come to fruition over the years. Some of these emergent projects have managed to sustain themselves

\(^95\) The Peace Corps contributed to the construction of the two facilities, while PAM helped out with initial inventory stocking.

\(^96\) During a 2003 visit to the Gorgol region, a top official from PAM became apoplectic when he observed donated food for sale in market boutiques in Kaëdi.
through to the present. One of these projects was the startup of cooperative-run boutiques for each community of the association for selling staple food items and common household supplies to community members. Prior to this initiative, there were no formal commercial operations in any of these communities. People would buy in bulk from Kaédi and sell small portions to their neighbors if they were in need of a specific item. While this system worked fine in terms of people able to access items of need without having to make a special trip to Kaédi, it did not provide a viable source of income. The cooperative boutique project got off the ground in 2003, when Peace Corps and the Fédération Luthérienne Mondiale (FLM) came in to provide micro-loans to each village cooperative as well as training sessions for inventory and account management.

FLM's terms for providing microfinance loans was that each cooperative had to provide half of the loan principle, while the NGO would provide the other half to be repaid over term with a flat fee added to the repaid principle.97 With an 80,000 UM loan (about $285), this meant that each cooperative needed to come up with 40,000 UM up front. At first, the women's cooperatives of each respective village were a bit reticent to enter into such an arrangement, especially with the up-front contribution. After discussions at a baatu gure with representatives from each community's cooperative along with regional officers of FLM (two Halpulaar Mauritanian women and one Serer woman from Senegal), cooperatives from three villages (Seyenne Gababé, Ouadio Bossoyo, and Ouadio Boké) decided to go ahead with the venture. Representatives from each cooperative met at the FLM regional office in Kaédi to pay their initial contribution

97 Since Islamic tenets prohibit charging interest, it is quite common in Muslim communities for loans to come with a flat fee (Rahman 136, Moaddel and Talattof 132).
and sign the loan agreement. FLM then provided their half of the loan and took the women to the Kaédi market to purchase the start-up goods and used one of their vehicles to deliver the goods to each village. Later on, Peace Corps volunteers met with each cooperative to teach basic bookkeeping principles. FLM also later helped each cooperative improve the boutique facility, providing construction materials for a more durable structure.

The success of this operation was quickly apparent to each cooperative, as the women that took charge of running the boutique were able to earn substantial income for their efforts. At the beginning, there was a rotation of women who would spend a month or so working the boutique. At the end of each turn, the woman would cash out her share of the operating profit as well as the loan repayment amount. Furthermore, cooperative representatives would attend each subsequent baatu gure to go over the books with FLM and the Kawral association, which provided an element of transparency to each operation. Within the first few months, each boutique was profitable enough that repaying the remaining portion of the loan was not at all burdensome. Meanwhile, the cooperatives that had not gone forward with the venture at the beginning decided in view of the success of the first boutiques to enter into loan agreements to start their own boutique operations. Thus, in half a year's time all of the member communities of the Kawral association had their own cooperative-run boutiques. These boutiques were still operational when I returned in 2011 with a greater range of products for sale.

Aside from the boost to local economic activity that the boutiques generated, this project helped to get the women of the Kawral communities more involved with the
associations activities. Such an outcome is a positive sign, but the fact that adult women significantly outnumber adult men in these communities makes their involvement particularly crucial. Since that time, cooperative representatives from each village have attended the monthly baatu gure, where they contribute funds to a separate monetary account for the collection of cooperatives. This account is a local source of credit for individual members who wish to undertake their own business venture, such as cloth dyeing or yogurt production. Each woman who takes a microloan from the account is responsible for repaying the funds that she borrowed. With the transparency of the cooperative account, its inputs and withdrawals, everyone can feel confident that the collective resources are working on behalf of the common good and not going to the benefit of one individual. With the Kawral, people feel safer than they do with state agencies, and even more than they do with international NGOs.

The boutique venture also helped to bring FLM into the fold as a solid development partner. Their regional office in Kaédi was mostly geared towards helping with projects that addressed the needs of women and children, and the communities of the Kawral zone were a natural fit for their activities. Beyond the boutique, FLM worked with community members in numerous areas, including gardening, adult literacy programs for women, and regular doctor visits. The women who worked in the regional office – Miriam Diallo, Fatimata Dia, and Amie Sarr – became well-known and well-respected individuals within the Kawral communities. At least one of them would attend the baatu gure, contributing to the discussion and helping the association strategize.

Again, Ba Samba was pleased by the level of commitment that FLM provided as it was in
line with the development trajectory that he promoted within the association. Rather than working with partners that swoop in and make a one-time delivery of funds, materials, or equipment, FLM – and to a lesser extent the Peace Corps – became part of the fabric of community life, embodying the values of jokkere endam that Fuutankoɓe consider so vital (Sandigui Ba, personal interview). Through the ongoing work of the Kawral association, the communities of the zone have been better able to ride out the macro challenges to development than other communities of the Fuuta like Gure Cuucci, Awoynot, or Maraysi that do not have any similar organizational structures to support local development.

But despite the resilient structure of the Kawral association, it has experienced its share of challenges and setbacks over the two decades of its existence, while its future very much remains in doubt. One such setback occurred in 2002 when the communities of Dar Salaam and Mbidene ended their participation in the association. At the time, both of these communities were behind on their monthly dues. The bigger issue, though, was that participation in the Kawral association did not have the full support from the respective communities. Since both of these communities have a sizable Haratin presence in their midst, Ba Samba and the Kawral leadership were adamant that the Fulɓe portion of the community could not be part of the association on their own. This would violate both the spirit of the association, but more importantly, it might attract unwanted intervention from state authorities who might object to Halpulaar households taking the lead in community affairs when the population is ethnically mixed. The condition for the reinstatement of both of these communities into the Kawral association was that they pay
their outstanding dues, which continued to grow with each passing month. At this point, it would take considerable resolve on the part of each of these communities to generate the funds to rejoin the association.\textsuperscript{98} A few years after this subtraction from the association, Ouadio Boké also temporarily withdrew, as they felt marginalized within the structure of the organization and its activities. However, they decided to rejoin after an absence of several months, repaying their accumulated dues in full to achieve reinstatement.

Aside from losing member communities, another major setback has been the withdrawal of outside partners in the last few years. First, the Peace Corps left Mauritania in 2009 in light of security concerns within the country. The organization has not returned since, closing down all of its administrative operations in 2011. At the time of the evacuation, Gouridiouma was hosting a volunteer in their community, while Seyenne Ouoro Molo and Ouadio Bossoyo were each hoping to host a volunteer from the next influx of arrivals. FLM also closed down its regional office in Kaédi (unrelated to security concerns), relocating its staff to new offices in Boghé, 100 km to the west along the Senegal River, and Mbout, 100 km to the east. As such, the NGO can no longer work closely with the communities in the commune of Ganki. The boutique operations have been able to continue through the management of the Kawral association, along with the internal lending activities, but other initiatives such as the literacy courses have fallen by the wayside. Since this time, the communities have not been able to find new outside

\textsuperscript{98} While neither of the communities have been able to gain full reinstatement thus far, their women's cooperatives do take part in the association under the rubric of inter-communal cooperative activities. The women of Dar Salaam and Mbidene received financing from FLM to start their own cooperative-run boutiques. Additionally, women's cooperatives from two other communities of the \textit{dieri} have also joined the association, despite the fact that their community leaders do not participate.
partners that provide the same level of engagement. This state of affairs has led to some frustration within the association, as they do not feel as optimistic without reliable partnership.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the continued existence of the Kawral association is that new blood has not emerged within the leadership to effect a generational transition. Already, key members of the leadership have passed away, including the long-time vice president (and my Peace Corps host father) Adama Moussa Diallo. At the time of my fieldwork, the president Djiby Amar Gange was still alive and active in his role, but very advanced in age and dealing with diabetes. As he possesses charisma and warmth to an exceptional degree, it will be hard to find someone who could assume his position as capably as he has held it for twenty years. And finally, there is the question of what will happen when Ba Samba himself passes away or steps away to look to his own household in his later years. He is long retired from his work in the MRDE, and has also taken on new projects that demand his attention. Plus, his wife recently passed away, leaving him to support his children that are all at various levels of schooling, from middle school (college) to university. When it comes to replacing the leadership of two singularly effective individuals like Baaba Djiby and Ba Samba, there is real concern that the work that they have helped facilitate for so many years will continue in their absence.

Thus, the work that the Kawral association has been able to accomplish over two decades has been valuable, yet fragile. The image of a sand castle seems apt, given the care and attention to structure that Ba Samba and the association's leadership have established. While the organization stands today, strong forces external to the locality can
sweep in suddenly like the rushing tide and break down the *jokkere endam*, the
collectivist ethos that holds the association together. These macro forces and their
influence on development efforts in the Fuuta are the subject of the subsequent chapters.
The first of these forces that I will address is the one that people often referenced first in
my community interviews: the destructive pressure of drought and climate change on
local production and the subsistence economy.
Chapter 3: Drought, Climate Change, and Development

So mi yeewi Fuuta hande tigirigi
When I gaze upon Fuuta today

Ndaw baasal tigirigi
I find poverty entrenched.

Baasal keccol, keccol wayri
Lack of rain, the rains are overdue,

Keccol, kecce maayi
Rain and laughter have died

Kolce ngaasi, kocele majji
Our herds are finished, they've been lost

Alaa ko hedi ko koceeeje.
All that remains of the land is dead wood.

Ndiaye Seydou Amadou is a man of many talents, accomplishments, and experiences for which he has earned recognition and admiration from people all over the Fuuta. Among other things, he teaches, he writes poetry and essays, he gives lectures on Radio Mauritanie programs, and he writes and performs music. When I met with him in his Nouakchott home, he was entertaining a prominent Fuuta singer, Ndèye Coumba Dia. I had not been aware of this singer previously, but Abdul greeted him with a reverence that I never saw him display towards anyone else throughout our travels. Aside from exchanging greetings and graciously accepting Abdul's compliments, Ndèye Coumba sat quietly and respectfully while I conducted my interview with Ndiaye Seydou.

99 For discussion of his involvement with educational curriculum development in the early 1980s, cf. 232-233.

100 When I spoke to him, he told me that he had been invited by the Columbus, Ohio diaspora community to perform at a cultural festival that they were organizing. Unfortunately, he was unable to obtain a travel visa in time to attend the festival (Ndiaye, personal interview).
concerning his perspectives on development. Ndiaye Seydou is an accomplished musician in his own right, and he writes many songs that promote development—particularly through education and building knowledge—within the cultural framework of *pulaaku*, appealing to the sense of identity and values that Fuutankoɓe desire to uphold.

The above lyrics are the opening lines of one of his songs that addresses development from the standpoint of crisis. On the surface, these lyrics point to crisis arising through the effects of climate change that the region has been experiencing in recent times. While this imagery can point to development challenges and social struggles beyond environmental concerns, the choice of these particular images of drought, desertification, and decay allows the lyrics to resonate powerfully among Fuuta listeners. They themselves are witnessing the effects of climate change unfold around them, and its consequences for their livelihood loom large in the minds of the people who live there today. In fact, the first thing on the minds of Fuutankoɓe when I asked them about the most difficult development problems they face is the issue of drought and climate change. Before their eyes, the land is turning into *koceeje* (dead wood).

Rain is the lifeblood of the region, but it is a highly capricious phenomenon, prone to yearly fluctuations that can make or break the production efforts of those who live off the land. The annual rainy season comprises two months out of the year, although maybe three months in a better year. Some years can be quite wet, with frequent precipitation events throughout August and September, bringing forth the annual

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101 Cf. 74-81.
vegetation and turning the baked, barren ground into a verdant grassland. The rainy season of 2003 was one such year, bringing to an end a severe cycle of drought that had afflicted the region for a few years prior. Yet, even with wet years rejuvenating the parched flora, fauna, and human economic activity, those whose memories extend forty, fifty, or sixty years clearly perceive the long-term trends – the Fuuta is turning into a desert, directly threatening systems of production and livelihoods practiced by communities for as long as anyone can remember.

The rainy season of 2011 was not a good year for Mauritania. I arrived in mid-September in Nouakchott, unaware of this fact. I had been in Nouakchott the previous year in July and August when it rained seemingly every day. Most of the roads of the capital are unpaved with no sewer drainage system in place, meaning that each significant rainfall event gives rise to giant pools of water in every low point to the extent where motor vehicles are obliged to drive across two or three foot deep puddles or find an alternate route around the standing water. After my arrival in 2011, my ride from the airport passed through such an area of standing water. I said to the driver, “Maataw on kebi ndungu hikka” (“It looks like you have had a rainy season this year”). The driver did not realize at first what had prompted my remark, but when I pointed to the water in the road, he understood my thinking. No, this was not a result of rainfall; rather, it was from a broken waterline. No, ndungu this year had not brought much rain.

Nouakchott, regardless, does not need rain, according to conventional wisdom. There is no agriculture to support, nor is the area around the capital city expected to provide pasture for animals. For those who live in Nouakchott, rain is largely an
inconvenience that disrupts transportation throughout the city and promotes the spread of diseases. At best, rainfall events provide temporary relief to the oppressive humid heat that invades the coastal city during the months of August and September. During my first month in Nouakchott in 2011, residents were not troubled by the lack of rains that year. My visits to the Fuuta revealed a different attitude.

I visited Seyenne in November of that year, which is the month in which the air dries out again, losing all trace of the moisture which it held throughout the rainy season. In a good year, farmers spend the month guarding their maturing crops from birds and grazing animals while households keep their animals close by, taking advantage of the temporary availability of local pasture. This year, however, many fields did not receive enough rain for many farmers to get anything out of the planting season. Seyenne had been fortunate compared to many areas in the region as they received a larger share of the sporadic and spotty precipitation than many other communities had. Farmers who had planted their fields in August or September expected some harvest, even if it was going to be relatively meager.

Herders were not as fortunate; isolated patterns of rainfall means that pasture growth will be restricted to localized areas. With many barren stretches of countryside, animals had to travel longer distances between grazing areas. In addition to local herders who have to try to balance collective needs for pasture, herders come down from the north in dry years. A bad year in the Fuuta means that it will also be bad in the Assaba, Brakna, and Tagant regions which lie on the desert fringe. Pressure to move herds south into Senegal and Mali comes early in drought years. In November of 2011, herders were
already preparing for that possibility while also holding out hope that they could get some government assistance for subsidized animal feed. What little grass that did grow that year had already dried out, and productive grazing resources were dwindling rapidly. Fresh milk, the hallmark of a good rainy season, was not to be had, as cows were not healthy and strong enough to reproduce that year. My hosts in Seyenne apologized to me throughout my stay with them, as they felt that they were unable to provide their best hospitality to a visitor.

The next rainy season was eight to nine months away, and one could not have any certainty that things would get better then. Households and communities would do what they could to tighten their belts over the upcoming months, stretching their limited and strained resources even further. No one wanted to think that the drought could continue through 2012, but everyone knew that possibility was real. The last severe drought cycle had ended ten years earlier, which meant that a new cycle could be setting in for the next few years.

When I first came to Mauritania in 2002, the previous years had not been good. On top of the scant rainfall amounts of the rainy season, a freak January storm had come up and soaked the region for two or three days. This storm brought periods of hail with it, something that no one could ever remember happening before in the Fuuta. Rain at that time of the year is unwelcome, with temperatures in the region at their coldest annual extreme. Many animals died of hypothermia, unable to obtain shelter from the precipitation. The extent of livestock loss was to such a great extent that this event
constituted a natural disaster for Fuuta communities. To this day, Fuutankôɓe recall this occurrence and are fearful of the possibility that it will happen again.

To make matters worse, August arrived that year without any significant rainfall. The chief of Seyenne had his animals completely wiped out that year, prompting him to abandon herding altogether. By mid-September, rain had still been insufficient for crop growth. In a mood of desperation, the village proclaimed a four-day fast, despite the fact that it was not Ramadan. The first three nights of the fast brought strong dust storms, but no more than a trace of precipitation. The final night, as if in answer to their prayers, the skies finally opened with heavy downpours. Over the following two to three weeks, local rainfall events provided enough moisture to keep the fields of sorghum, cowpeas, and melons alive, allowing for a harvest to take place in December. Even then, the returns were meager while households had to move their grazing animals much earlier than they normally would.

While dry years threaten production in the Fuuta, higher than average amounts of rainfall can also cause problems. Ndungu of 2003 was quite wet, and the contrast with the prior year was unmistakable and readily apparent. The countryside flourished with vegetation whose seeds had lain mostly dormant through the dry years. However, the excess surface water at that time also prompted desert locusts to enter a gregarious phase of their life cycle, breeding in astronomical numbers throughout the Sahel region. Some Mauritanian agricultural/environmental experts were fearful of this possibility, but by the time this generation of locusts had emerged as adults, it was too late. The following summer, swarms of locusts began moving about the country, devouring everything in
their path. Each swarm contained millions or maybe billions of individuals, darkening the sky to the point where their approach was sometimes mistaken for a dust storm. Satellites could track the locusts' movements, but there was virtually nothing to be done to control them other than to wait for them to stop swarming – something that would only happen once they had consumed all the available vegetation.

From my own perspective, it had seemed that I was witnessing the Biblical plagues unfold in the Fuuta. However, those who have lived there their whole lives understand the volatility of the climate of the region. As one elderly man put it to me,

Miinen ni emin njogi leydi, tobo ine manka. We have land, [but] rain is lacking. This year
Hikka wonaa mankude, ko wodaani. Andi rain is not lacking, it is nonexistent.
fuutankobe be soono e soono yoolo ko deu. Fuutankobe know two types [of drought],
Sooño ine wodi tobi seeda, ili seeda. Ine wodi sooño and sooño yoolo. Sooño is when it
tobaani ilaani. Hikka ko sooño yoolo. rains a little and floods a little. There [are times] when it does not rain or flood...this

In the face of fluctuations in annual rainfall, there would still be enough vegetation to support their animals. If farming was bad one year, then people could rely more on the meat and milk products of their herds, or, as a last resort, sell an animal for cash. Communities with access to fishing could base their diets around resources that were available year-round.

However, over time, such flexibility has encountered constraints and limitations. Many areas of the land used to support dense forest, according to what elderly residents
told me. The chief of Belinaɓê remarked that in the past, when one stood at the edge of
the village and looked out towards the dieri, one would only be able to see for about 100
meters before the trees cutoff any view of what lay in the distance. Villages themselves
were often well-hidden within the forests. People were fearful of the forests and the
dangers they might hide, particularly lions and hyenas which were present until recent
decades. Today, though, the forests have disappeared in most places, including Belinaɓê.
When I stood on the road that skirts the edge of the village, I could see the horizon in
every direction except to the north where low-relief buttes break up the landscape in the
distance. From such a vantage point, it was hard to believe what the village chief had told
me, and how the area has experienced such rapid deforestation over the course of his
lifetime. One can feel the weight of Ndiaye Seydou's lyrics, “All that remains of the land
is dead wood.”

Yeewe ladde serte cudari miskiineeɓê The countryside has lost its beauty and poor
Te weltaare sidari people
Jawde kolidum maayi Have lost their livelihood
Ko hedi heen ko raayi. All their animals have died
What is left is useless.

For Fuutankofɓe, drought-influenced climate change has been one of the principal factors
disrupting customary modes of production. Other environmental factors such as crop
diseases, livestock diseases, local declines in fish populations have also contributed to
collapses in productive activities. The prolonged periods of drought and the food

102 Rain's study in Niger offers a similar perspective from living memory, quoting an elderly chief who
recalled a sense of darkness and closeness from the thickness of the vegetation (74).
shortages that accompany them have captured global attention periodically over the last half century. But even in productive years, climate change presents major challenges to regional economic development efforts. In effect, all rural development projects and initiatives – whether they are large-scale or small – must contend with this problem and strategize ways to overcome the climate constraints. Yet, Fuutankoɓe understand that the forces at work are largely beyond the influence of human planning and control.

*Drought and Local Economy*

It was evening when I arrived in the village of Ganki along the newly paved road from Kaédi to Selibaby. Our hosts from earlier in the day in Cuuci brought us there by horse cart, giving us a lift since we were going against the flow of traffic at that time of day; we might not have been able to find a motor vehicle traveling our direction that would be willing to take us. The seven kilometers from Cuuci to Ganki was not too far to walk, but I was happy for the assistance. After having walked significant distances going from village to village, I had developed a large painful blister on the bottom of my foot that was starting to make getting around uncomfortable for me. As Ganki was to be my last stop on my circuit of village visits, I was eager to conduct my interview and take a break. I was to visit my Peace Corps host family the following day, and was looking forward to being in a more familiar setting and to catch up with the family and with community members. Along with the fact that this was to be my thirteenth village interview in the previous ten days, I was not immediately prepared for what turned out to be my most informative, wide-ranging, and in-depth conversation of all my visits to the
Fuuta (which is saying a lot, considering the thoughts, insights, and perspective people shared with me at all of my stops). By the end, I was reminded yet again of the fact that the most qualified experts concerning development in the Fuuta are themselves from the region, particularly those who have been able to combine their first-hand familiarity with the land and its uses along with a more technocratic knowledge of production processes and market forces. Abdoulaye Toure, grandson to the chief of Ganki, was a strong example of such an individual, as I was about to learn.

When we arrived at Ganki, our hosts from Cuuci dropped us off and bade us farewell as they returned home. Normally, the first thing we would do when arriving in a community was to seek out the village chief. This would both ensure contact with some of the influential and active members of the community and was proper protocol for anybody with official business. However, Abdul thought we might not need to see the chief here, and suggested that we might be able to talk to an uncle of his. Seyenne is in the same administrative commune as Ganki, and the two communities share a lot of familiarity with one another as well as many family connections. Nonetheless, Abdul had only been to Ganki once before, as young people in the Fuuta do not travel independently. We came to his relative's house and greeted his uncle, who welcomed us enthusiastically. But when we told him the purpose of our visit, he pointed out that we needed to inform the chief because it was his prerogative to be aware of such business. At any rate, he said, the chief would know a great deal more about the life and business of the community. Since Ganki was a decent-sized village, he sent one of his grandsons with us to show us the way to the chief's compound.
It so happened that the chief's compound that evening was filled with mourners who had come to pay respects for the passing of an elderly woman. No one paid us much attention as we wandered into the compound, looking around for someone to address concerning the purpose of our visit. We went to the largest of the buildings in the compound where we found one of the sons and daughters-in-law of the chief. They welcomed us and directed us to have a seat on the stoop outside, quickly bringing out a leeso\textsuperscript{103} and some pillows to make us comfortable while waiting for the chief to come out and greet us. It would take a few minutes, they told us, as the chief was very old, almost ninety. When he appeared, he was dressed in a purple tunic that went down to his knees, worn over black chaiya pants. On his head, he wore a conical hat of the style that Fulɓe wear all over West Africa, a style strongly associated with their identity. He approached us slowly; frail, but still able to walk across the compound without the help of a cane. Despite his age, he was quick to surmise the situation and happy to indulge me in my request for an interview. As we began our discussion, his daughter-in-law gently mocked him as he explained that the only work he does nowadays is eating. She chimed in, saying that he does not even do that. Even so, with the long decades he had witnessed and the lingering sharpness of his mental faculties, it was clear that the chief's family and the entire community had tremendous respect for him and his leadership. I had never encountered him in my two years in Seyenne, but he knew my host family well, and was familiar with Peace Corps.

\textsuperscript{103} A thin mat to cover the bare ground.
There had been a volunteer in Ganki prior to Peace Corps' evacuation from the country in 2009, and the chief spoke highly of this person while inquiring about the Peace Corps staff with whom he had become acquainted. Aside from the obvious relationship that develops between a volunteer and his or her community, people also come to know the program coordinators, the trainers, and even the drivers who visit from time to time in support of the volunteer. The village of Ganki has worked with multiple outside actors in the arena of development and has achieved a largely positive reputation among international NGOs who have collaborated with the community. Successful projects include the adoption of fruit production and the installation of a solar-powered water pump. While these projects may be modest in scale, many of the surrounding communities have tried similar initiatives without any tangible results. But while Ganki has more going for it than other nearby communities like Cuuci, people are concerned about the difficulties facing them and wondering if they will be able to adapt to the significant and rapid changes going on all around them. They understand that the factors that had made Ganki a prosperous community in the past have shifted, leaving them with questions concerning how they will be able to provide for themselves.

We began the interview according to the routines to which I had become accustomed over the previous two months. As we began to discuss my questions and interview prompts, others came by to the stoop where we all were sitting, giving their greetings, and some of them sat down to observe the proceedings possibly interested in taking part. Daylight was waning fast and the stillness of the evening suggested that the

104 For instance, a fruit tree production project was unable to take hold in Seyenne, cf. 159-160.
The oncoming night would be one of the chilliest of the year in the Fuuta. About fifteen minutes in, two other men came to join us – one older who was dressed in a tunic and skull cap, and the other middle-aged dressed in Western-style slacks and button-down shirt – and the chief felt it appropriate to make a special introduction for these two newcomers. These men, he told us, can answer our questions as well as anyone in the village and they have extensive knowledge and experience in the various areas of community development.

The younger of the two was Abdoulaye Toure, who very quickly impressed me with his knowledge and understanding of the region, along with his ability to convey and explain that knowledge. As he joined our discussion, it was clear to me that Abdoulaye Toure is someone who has spent a lot of time contemplating and engaging with development issues in the region. He has a keen awareness of history that informs his understanding of local development and the challenges Fuutankobe face. He started out by explaining the system of collective subsistence production in the Fuuta, and how this system had brought a level of prosperity in the first half of the twentieth century:

*Do por yélttaaare diiwaan o do, sa yiy, sada faama dum tigirigi haa paama diiwaan o tigirigi, o do diiwaan hodbe do-be fof ko arbe sabu noku o do nganndu-daay aan ine waadi leydi waalo e leydi jeeri, kadi ine moyýá e gaynaka, ine waadi ndiyam lelidam, yimbe ine ngawa, ine ndaña liddi, ine nguura heen.*

If you want to really understand development in this region, you need to know that the people who live here, what brought them here was that this is an area with *waalo*, and *dieri*, and it is good for herding, and there is good water where people can fish and make a living [from these resources].
He spoke as if he were anticipating my questions, shifting from one topic to another without really needing a prompt. By the end of the formal interview discussion, about two hours later, he had given me a comprehensive and in-depth description of life in the Fuuta, how it was in the past and how it is changing today.

*Ngo do wuro, wuro Ganki, ngo ummi Belinaaɓe*  This village, Ganki, [its people] came here from *hedde des années 1900, 1910, ari do. Addi be*  Belinaaɓe (due west, about 40 km) during the *noon ko remde . . . yëewde leydi*  1900s and 1910s. What brought them here was farming . . . looking for land.

For those who came to the area that was to become Ganki about a century ago, the locale had a number of advantages to exploit. Dense forests covered the area, so the first step was to clear out spaces for fields. Farmers could plant their crops in the *dieri* in the rainy season and in the *waalo* during the cold season, while herders and fishers were able to prosper from the local abundance of resources. Such an elaborated and complementary system of economic production has been rather prevalent throughout the Sahel and savanna regions of Africa south of the Sahara, both historically and in the present (E. Scott 1984a 49-50). Pastoralist practices of grazing agricultural areas during fallow periods helped to maintain soil fertility, while the presence of animals near villages made dairy products available for farming households (Riesman 174).

As Abdoulaye described, this way of life was successful:

*Yimɓe keydaani, ko diiwaan mo ngannduno*- People were not hungry, this region was known

*daa yimɓe noon ine nguurno, on est très developpé adana*  by the people as productive, and they were highly developed.
For someone like myself, never having seen this region when it was so productive, it is hard to picture it the way Abdoulaye and some of the elders described it to me. Yet, much of this region of Africa prior to independence experienced this relative prosperity. There was even a certain degree of flexibility and resilience in the production system in times of drought. Earl Scott writes:

During periods of unusually severe drought, farmers and herders would migrate to more bountiful areas where migrants engaged in wage employment or temporary cultivation of marketable crops. This kind of response to drought, called cin rani in Hausaland [Northern Nigeria], is quite common throughout the Savanna-Sahel zones. The essential point is that these cultural adjustments even out food supply problems from periodic food shortages, and droughts were far less destructive in the past than they are now (4).

But the drought cycles that affected the Sahel region starting in the 1960s, including the Fuuta, overwhelmed even the flexible capacity of the production systems to absorb environmental stresses. As I sat listening to Abdoulaye sketch out the challenges of life in Ganki today, he explained how the droughts over the last half century have disrupted each of the production activities, undermining the community's ability to support itself.

_Drought and Local Economy: Agriculture_

In Ganki (as well as much of that zone of the Fuuta), agriculture is the most important pillar of the local economy, and that was the first activity that Abdoulaye discussed. The dieri and the waalo are two distinct zones of the Fuuta which farmers
have long been able to exploit for cultivation in back-to-back planting campaigns.

Cultivation and planting of the *dieri* takes places during *ndungu*, the rainy season (August), and the harvest takes place in December. The principal crops are *gawri* (which refers to the various varieties of millet and sorghum), *ñeňbe* (cowpeas), *haako* (cowpea leaves), and *podde* (melon seeds). The word *dieri* means high ground, and land that is designated as *dieri* lies above the floodplain of the Senegal River and its tributaries. This area constitutes a broad plain of mostly sandy soil that supports acacia trees and other drought-hardy vegetation. The *waalo* is a completely different landscape feature, defined by its seasonal inundation during *ndungu*. When the flood waters recede in November, farmers can take advantage of the remaining soil moisture to grow crops during *dabuunde* (December-February). As a floodplain, *waalo* soils contain significantly higher amounts of clay and silt, which slows water drainage. Whereas *dieri* soils drain rapidly after each rainfall event, *waalo* soils hold moisture for a long time following the drying up of surface waters. *Gawri* again is the principal crop of the *waalo* season, but farmers also grow *maaka* (corn), *folere* (hibiscus), *patayse* (sweet potato), and *kaňje* (okra).

Until recent decades, neither of these agricultural campaigns involved any mechanical or technological inputs beyond basic hand tools.\(^{105}\) As such, a high input of physical labor from each household was required in order to prepare the ground for planting. When Fuutankoɓe talk about their *cossan to bange ndema* i.e. their traditional modes of agricultural production, they are referring to cultivating the *dieri* and *waalo*.

\(^{105}\) There is an element of pride among Fuutankoɓe farmers regarding their ability to grow crops without the help of machines or even animal plowing. “Miin nguuri ko e jalo e jambere” (“We live by the hoe and axe”) is an often-used, almost proverb-like, description of their industry.
and the collective effort of individual households/families (jokkondiral) was an integral component to its success. People who have memories of the Fuuta around the time of Mauritania's independence recall the physically strenuous rigors of farming by hand. Their recollections convey a sense of pride at having been able to make the land yield its produce without any help from animal labor or machinery. People consider this to be their inheritance, and many feel that they would squander it if they abandoned the lifestyle. One Fuuta resident explained to me:

Miinen ine waadi miin do henene ko jokondire amen e faamondire amen ngonka amen do e leydi muritani e miin toppiti ko baabiraabe amen mbaadano, ndema e gaynaka . . . Ko baabiraabe amen mbaadano, miin nguppotaa, ko dum woni bamtaare amen, woni yêlitaare amen, ine nawri amen yeeso.

We, what we do [in our approach to development] is to work together and [build] mutual understanding, and we undertake that which are ancestors did, farming and herding . . . What are ancestors did, we will not let go of it, this is our development, that which will move us forward.

According to people's memories, this lifestyle proved highly productive for Fuutankobe. As Abdoulaye Toure described, the entire waalo of the Gorgol Noir River – from Kaédi to Lexeiba – was taken up by fields during the cold season: “Adana, tuugi Kaédi haa do fof ko kolongal gootal. Fof ko ko jaggondiri, ko ngesa-ngesa-ngesa-ngesa-jaggondiri” (“In the past, everything from here to Kaédi was fields. Every [part of the waalo] was planted, one field next to another, next to another”). The extensiveness

106 People do appreciate the capacity for technological farming inputs and methods to reduce the amount of backbreaking labor that goes into production. Some of my informants hinted to me that people have been able to work longer and to live longer than in the past in part due to the incorporation of labor-saving techniques in agriculture.
and the collective nature of the production allowed for farmers to overcome some of the challenges they faced. The largest of these was livestock entering fields to graze. With the entire expanse of the waalo under cultivation, farmers could share the task of keeping animals out of the field. According to Abdoulaye, the strength in numbers made these livestock control measures effective. Animals were afraid to enter the fields. Thus, the success of these productive endeavors depended on effective jokkondiral.

The flip side is that while drought and disease have made it tough on all farmers to produce, perhaps the most disastrous effect has been the disruption of jokkondiral, as individuals have had to look out for themselves and the well-being of their households. This has been true of both dieri and waalo cultivation. During years of drought, the dieri fields produce little to nothing in the way of harvest. With such years becoming more frequent, Fuuta farmers have less and less confidence that their efforts to plant the dieri will be worthwhile. Every year becomes a waiting game to see if it will rain early enough, often enough, and sufficiently to bring about a good harvest.

As farmers drop out to look for other means of securing their livelihoods, the collective effort of protecting the fields from animals suffers. Nowadays, for cultivation of the dieri to take place, there needs to be effective enclosures to keep out the livestock. There are two types of enclosures that Fuuta farmers use, and each type has its disadvantages. The first is to construct an enclosure from local vegetation, particularly from the thorny branches of acacia trees, as well as Zizyphus mauritania (jujube) and Balenites aegyptiaca (desert date). With deforestation and the general stress on regional forest resources, this method is sometimes impractical given the distances some
communities need to travel to find adequate materials for these enclosures. Farmers also face stiff punishments from government authorities when it comes to cutting wood for fencing material. Agents from the division of *Eaux et Forêts* patrol the countryside and impose onerous fines on anyone they catch cutting down trees for such purpose. On top of these disadvantages, these enclosures are not completely effective, as goats are highly adept at making their way through these barriers, undeterred by the sharp thorns.

The second type of enclosure is chain-link fencing, referred to by the French word *grillage*. People greatly prefer this type of enclosure, yet it poses a problem for Fuuta farmers in terms of their ability to afford the materials for constructing such a fence. Aside from the chain-link fencing, one needs to purchase the angle-iron posts for every 3-4 meters of fence, cement mix to hold the posts in place,\(^\text{107}\) and tension wire. Thus, while rural communities prefer *grillage* enclosures, the material costs are beyond what many are willing to incur. Most people with whom I spoke seemed to consider *grillage* a luxury, though one which is critical to any chance of success they might have when it comes to farming.

Abdoulaye Toure indicated as much in my conversation with him:

\(^\text{107}\) The sand and gravel to mix with the cement are often obtained locally. If not, these are further cost inputs in constructing a chain-link fence.

Me: “Eey, miin naani dum e nder...”

Abdoulaye: “To njah-daa fof ko dum be kaalat.” they say.”

Me: “...gure fof.”

Abdoulaye: “Gure fof ko dum kaalata...fof-fof to Abdoulaye: “Every community will tell you that, njah-daa fof ko dum be kaalat.” everywhere you go, that is what they will say.”

Me: “...every community.”

Just the previous day, I had been in Lexeiba, a semi-urban community, taking a break from the interview circuit while catching up on my field notes and doing some much needed laundry. While spending the day there, a few local women, hearing that I was traveling through the area talking with people about their development concerns, approached me to ask for assistance in obtaining the necessary materials for starting their own gardens. Chief among their requests was grillage, without which there would be no point to their efforts. In Gure Cuuci, the women's cooperative was able to obtain grillage, but not the material for fence posts. Instead, they used dead limbs and branches, a solution which proved to be completely ineffective. With the relatively small quantity of materials for constructing an effective enclosure for a garden – typically around half a
hectare in area, and rarely larger than one hectare – beyond the purchasing means of many communities, there is no question at all of purchasing *grillage* to enclose a community's *dieri* or *waalo* fields, which maybe comprise 40 hectares.

*Drought and Local Economy: Agriculture: Rice-farming*

While *dieri* and *waalo* cultivation began to fall off with extended droughts, for the former, and crop disease, for the latter, a new type of agricultural production, irrigated rice-farming, came to the Fuuta in the middle of the 20\(^{th}\) century. At the time of independence, agricultural development of the Senegal River valley focused on converting much of the *waalo* to rice cultivation. When it comes to the possibility of producing a surplus, riziculture has much greater potential, and both colonial agronomists and the postcolonial technocrats hoped that this new method of farming would boost the agricultural production of the Senegal River valley beyond subsistence yields to export levels. It was not until the 1970s with the implementation of the multilateral *l'Organisation de Mise en Valuer du Sénégal* (OMVS) that irrigated rice production in Mauritania was able to gain a strong foothold (Leservoisier 139). Expansion of production took place over the 1970s and 1980s to the point where 24,149 ha of land in 1990 fell under irrigation management schemes (Maïga 179). Just about half of this land derived from small communal holdings, known as *périmètres irrigués villageois* (PIV), of which 404 existed in Mauritania in 1988 (Maïga 186). PIVs were a development strategy to grant local control over the planning and direction of irrigated farming while boosting the income potential of the endeavor (Maïga 185). As such, riziculture has brought many
changes to the region and has become the foundation for agricultural production in many communities.

Despite the intention of devolving irrigation management onto local communities, the production process involves a good deal of centralization and technical expertise, not to mention the infrastructural inputs that go into moving water around in a timely and efficient manner (Bates 118-120). One needs to have specialized engineers and technical experts to ensure that water delivery takes place at the critical points of the planting/growing season, and that drainage occurs at the proper times. Beyond the localities, rice irrigation schemes involved the construction of dams along the river and its tributaries108 along with the introduction of mechanical inputs (mainly motor pumps to divert water from the river to the rice fields), chemical fertilizers and pesticides, and a more hierarchical system of rationalized management directed by government or development professionals. Regardless of the need for hierarchy, many Fuuta farmers were eager to take up rice farming in hopes of offsetting the declines in dieri and waalo cultivation during drought years. As Abdoulaye noted,

\[ Eeywa, \text{ duubi caakiti di noon, hankadi dam \hspace{2cm} So, with these difficult years, all of Mauritania } \]
\[ \text{wayliima kadi muritani fof walla o do diiwaan} \hspace{2cm} \text{changed, and this region, with the decrease in rain, drought entered the region. Then, when the } \]
\[ \text{so tobo ustiima, secheresse woni naatde} \hspace{2cm} \text{drought came, many places began to establish } \]
\[ \text{diiwaan. Ndeen, secheresse wone naatde,} \hspace{2cm} \text{rice fields.} \]
\[ \text{nokuujui keewdi mbaati waade gese maaro} \]

108 The OMVS provided for the construction of two upriver dams on the Senegal River in Mali at Diama and Manantali, which were completed in 1978 and 1979, respectively, and involved considerable assistance from foreign governments (Maïga 225). A dam at Foum Gleita near the headwaters of the Gorgol Noir river allows for irrigation in the valley of this tributary to the Senegal River, particularly between Lexeiba and Kaëdi.
Not every locale in the Fuuta is suitable for riziculture, and many communities are unable to establish fields close-by. Rice fields (parselaaji) must be relatively extensive, flat terrains adjacent to the water source, and water delivery to each parsel takes place through a combination of pumping, canals/drainage, and gravity. According to Abdoulaye, most rice cultivation in the Fuuta is limited to the Senegal River, and is not practiced extensively by communities along the floodplain of the Gorgol Noir. A few communities do have rice fields in this zone, but they are less able to incorporate high-tech irrigation systems than communities on the river, particularly those near Boghé or Kaédi. Individual households/families take responsibility for one or more quarter-hectare or half-hectare sections. The amount of labor for riziculture is comparable to that demanded by dieri or waalo farming, with particularly concentrated inputs needed during transplanting (loorngol) as well as protection from birds during the ripening/grain filling stage of development.

Rice (maaro) grows in any season as long as there is means for irrigation. In practice, though, cultivation depends on the means of the farmers and their access to credit, though maaro ndungu requires the existence of strong, surrounding dykes to keep the fields from being completely submerged by floods. Two of the biggest challenges that

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109 “Do fof tuugi Kaédi haa fando lexeiba ... o do diiwaan a yiyataa gese maaro so wonaa Kaédi, on njiyataa gese maaro ko o ga bange.” (“Here, everything from Kaédi to Lexeiba...[in] this area, you do not see rice fields, except for Kaédi, you do not see rice fields on this side”). However, some communities in this zone do in fact have rice fields that they cultivate. It seems to be the case, though, that such fields receive little capital investment from the government or from international development projects compared with communities along the Senegal River.

110 Maaro ndungu can only occur if a perimeter has a secure dyke system that keeps out the seasonal flood waters. Not every rice-farming community has this protection in place. During a dry season visit to one rice field perimeter in the middle valley of the Gorgol Noir, a dyke breach occurred and the farmers used hands and shovels to try to patch it up. Such a structure is not adequate to withstand ndungu floods.
rice-farming communities face on a year-to-year basis are 1) covering the costs of the inputs (which can fluctuate significantly from year to year depending on fuel and electrical costs) without access to agricultural credit, and 2) ineffective coordination of the time-sensitive aspects of planting, particularly with delivery of water through the irrigation scheme. As a result, many rice farmers also feel substantial frustration that they are not able to make a consistent living for themselves through their efforts. Meanwhile, the prevailing sentiment is that the state is no longer willing to invest in this mode of agriculture, leaving their communities twisting in the wind, exposed to the capricious fluctuations in prices of inputs and fuel/energy costs.

Rice Farming and Local Development

It is not hard to notice the relative advantages that rice-farming provides for Fuuta communities compared to dieri and waalo cultivation in terms of development. Thialgu is a community that has sprung up just a few kilometers from Boghé, about 1 km from the rice fields that extend through the waalo to the west of Boghé. With around two thousand inhabitants, Thialgu supports a larger and denser population than towns like Ganki, Mafondou, or Dalhaya along the Gorgol Noir floodplain, or even Belinaâbe and Rinjao, adjacent to Kaédi along the Senegal River. It is also connected to the electrical grid.

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111 The OMVS dams themselves produce and supply hydroelectric power which is supposed to be a revenue generator for the three governments involved in the project – Mauritania, Mali, and Senegal (Maïga 229). The revenues then go towards repaying the loans they incurred in constructing the dams as well as the other infrastructural inputs towards getting the development plan off the ground. However, as Maïga pointed out, each of the member states had to reevaluate their commitments to interstate cooperation through their individual adoption of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s (235).
Which is exceedingly rare for Fuuta communities outside of the large towns and cities – even some neighborhoods in Boghé and Kaédi do not have electricity.

When Abdul and I arrived in Thialgu, in the last hour of daylight, it took us some time to locate the chief's house. After several inquiries, we ventured with uncertainty into the paved courtyard of a compound, flanked by ceramic tile porches, and stately buildings on either side – more reminiscent of the wealthy Tevragh Zeina district of Nouakchott than anything I had previously experienced in the Fuuta. There was only one person present, an elderly woman who was in the midst of prayer. We briefly greeted her and sat down, waiting for her to take a break from her devotions to answer our inquiries. There was a television that was on, a satellite channel broadcasting a sports commentary program from France. A little while later, a man came in wearing a Los Angeles Dodgers jacket, greeted us, and let us know that we were indeed at the village chief's house. Although the chief was not present, the man wearing the Dodgers jacket was his brother. He told us that he was busy that evening, but that he would be happy to sit down and talk with us in the morning. In the meantime, he directed us to a guest room where we would spend the night.

In light of the fact that we had spent the day in rustic accommodations between two other villages, it seemed that we would spend an evening in relative relaxation and comfort. But then the sun went down, and the mosquitoes descended upon us en masse. With the rice fields in such close proximity, Thialgu becomes overrun with mosquitoes during the growing season, as the irrigated rice fields provide ample breeding habitat for the insects. The windows to our room had no screens, and the light of the room served as
a beacon, enticing nearby mosquitoes to enter. I was frantically and futilely swatting at the air while Abdul laughed and told me that killing mosquitoes would only attract more. The whole room was humming, and there was nothing that we could do about it.

As we sat, the hour grew late and our host had still not returned. This was not typical Fuuta hospitality, particularly outside the larger communities of Boghé and Kaédi. No one had come by to serve us tea, which is generally the first thing that a host would provide for a guest, after the initial offering of water and/or *tufam*. Unsure of what to expect from our accommodations, Abdul went out to look for something to eat, something one would not even think to do in most circumstances. For one, it is rude to the host who is supposed to attend to the needs of his or her guests. Secondly, in most Fuuta villages, there is no food service of which to speak. Thialgu seemed different from most Fuuta communities, so Abdul decided to take matters into his own hands, quickly coming back with a pair of sandwiches. As we were eating, our host finally returned, causing some embarrassment on all sides. Dinner was almost ready, and sandwich or no, I was not prepared to risk any more offense.

The dinner turned to be an appetizing spread of fried fish, salad, fries, and vegetables. Again, this is more of an upscale urban type of meal than what one typically encounters in the Fuuta. Over dinner, our host had the chance to explain what had kept him away all evening. He had been at a cooperative meeting with the rice farmers of the community. One of his roles in the community was as a representative for the farmers in their dealings with outside entities, such as the State, NGOs, and private partners. The topic of that evening's meeting was the bill the community had received from the national
electricity provider, SONELEC (*Société Nationale de l'Electricité*), for the energy costs the farmers had incurred pumping water to irrigate their fields. The combination of circumstances of high energy costs along with below normal rainfall totals meant that the electric bill burst through the roof of what farmers could afford to pay with no outside assistance. At 1.5 million UM (about $5,350), there was no way the community could come up with the money to pay off this bill on their own. Our host told us that they would do what they could, but there was no way they could pay all of it.

While Thialgu appears to benefit from riziculture, along with some other communities in the Brakna region, many rice-farming communities in the Gorgol region are not as well off. The reasons that farmers shared with me had to do primarily with ineffective management of planting operations or lack of government support for planting activities. In my conversations with them, they spoke in a range of emotions conveying their frustration with the situation, running a gamut from sardonic humor to stupefaction to outrage. The government is the target of many of their complaints as these farmers feel that the state is either neglectful of their needs and concerns or even actively undermining their operations. Regional government agencies involved in agricultural support and coordination tend to receive the majority of the farmers' ire. Meanwhile, the communities see little to no infrastructural development and do not hold out much hope that they will ever get electricity or running water.

The tiny village of Lubudu Barrigaal stands at a marked contrast from Thialgu. It is located on a fixed sand dune overlooking the floodplain of the Gorgol Noir River, about 20 km east of Kaédi, and is some distance from the bumpy, unpaved two-track that
serves as their only transportation link with the regional capital. The surrounding highland terrain supports one of the densest areas of remaining forest in this part of the Fuuta, a relic to the region's more verdant past. In fact, Abdul remarked with a sense of approval as we entered the village close to sundown that he felt that we had gone back in time. There were no cement houses to be seen, only mud houses with thatched roofs, while young herding boys dressed in short tunics and chaiyas – the short baggy pants that extend just below the knee worn by nomads and transhumants all over Mauritania – brought their herds of sheep in to the village for the night. Abdul said that these were the “vrai Peuls” who lived here, invoking a claim of authenticity that had been missing or corrupted in the other communities that we visited. As darkness descended and the chill of cold season nights settled in, it was easy to think that we had traveled back in time. The kindness and good-nature of our hosts and of those with whom we spoke that evening came with an effortlessness that hearkened back to a more idyllic time. Yet, the concerns they voiced addressed the present situation.

Despite the village's remoteness and relative isolation, its location and topography does offer the possibility of rice farming. At the moment of our visit, in mid January of 2012, the rice fields were their primary concern, as they were getting ready to harvest. These fields were located about seven kilometers away from the village, and most of the farmers went back and forth by horse cart. At that time, the fields needed protection from the ravenous flocks of birds that were looking to feast upon the ripening grain. Anyone from the village who is able – young, old, male, female – has to set out well before dawn and spend the entire duration of the daylight hours in the fields, chasing the birds away
by yelling or throwing stones at them. This dance goes on until the sun has gone down, as
the antagonistic partners break for the night. One farmer joked about this daily battle,
saying that the birds are so plentiful that when people say “ayaa” – the vocalization that
people shout at the birds – they have to quickly cover their mouths with their hands to
keep a bird from flying in.

With the required collective effort on the part of farmers, it can feel that the life of
the village has moved away from the houses and relocated to the fields. A few people
remarked to me that at times when one goes out to the fields, one could think that that is
where the village is. However, as one farmer noted, mosquitoes keep people from
spending the night there. According to people's accounts, malaria has become a much
larger problem in recent times. In the past, mosquitoes appeared only during the rainy
season. But with rice fields providing ample potential breeding grounds pretty much year-
round, malaria can strike anytime.¹¹²

Aside from these concerns surrounding rice farming, the two biggest problems
that farmers deal with on a season to season basis are (1) the financial risk that they incur
each planting campaign and (2) their dependence on the state, which is both the primary
creditor for rice farming and the main coordinator for planting and irrigating activities. As
such, these problems are interrelated and place the farmers in a vulnerable position vis-a-
vis the state. For rice farming to be successful, farmers need the local government
agencies responsible for the various aspects of agricultural activities to extend generous

¹¹² One person speculated that pit latrines might be providing mosquitoes with another year-round breeding
ground. Such locations would not produce the numbers that the standing water of the rice fields do, but
it would create populations of mosquitoes in greater proximity to people's dwellings.
credit, they need quality inputs i.e. seeds, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and they need timely and competent irrigation management. For communities in the Gorgol region, none of these factors can be taken for granted, particularly the latter.

One of the farmers from Lubudu Barrigaal explained the nature of their dependence on the state for material and logistic support:

*Maaro . . . njey tobo mum ko laamu. Laamu jogi* Rice . . . the government owns the water for it.

*masiinaaji addata ndiyam, so miin ndemi, so* The government has the machines that bring
tawi laamu udditi masiinaaji mudum, addi water. When we plant, if the government starts
ndiyam, miin ndemi. *Ada yiya sahaa ebe ngadda* their machines and brings water, we plant [our
heen awdi . . . ŋamaande, ebe ngaddani miin fields]. You see a time when they bring seeds . . .
engrais, ebe ngadda produit mbaarowo huudo-
Bon, ebe ngadda masiinaaji ndemooji. Fof with credit, they bring fertilizer, they bring
heewi wonde kam so tawi ada yidi, be ŋamulu herbicides. They also bring plowing and planting
ma haa cooña, woon heen ko yöga, a andataa machines. Everything can be made available to
ko jaaraata, ada anda demal, ada haalane ko you, if you like; they will loan it to you until the
masiiin remirta par hectare...ada haalane sac harvest. There is the pumping, you do not know
engrais ko jaaraata, awdi, sa yetti, ada haalane what it costs [exactly]. You know farming, you
kilo ko jaaraata. Ndiyam noon, a annndaa ko are told how much it costs to plow an acre. You
jaaraata, so wonaa noon nande campaign o are told how much a sack of fertilizer costs;
fuudi haa nde o daari. Bon, redevance ine wodi, seeds, if you need them, you are told how much
place leydi ndi, hectare o to joodi do, dum tan a kilo costs. With water, though, you do not
ine yoba.

As he indicates, there are some material inputs that farmers might be able to forgo or to provide for themselves, such as seeds, fertilizers, tractors, while other inputs are unavoidable costs. The *redevance* is one of these unavoidable costs as well as the bill for irrigation. Furthermore, the irrigation costs for each planting season will not be known
until the harvest, meaning that farmers are unable to calculate how much of their yield they will have to devote towards covering their financial obligations. They are on the hook for these costs no matter how well or how poor their yields turn out. It is one thing to be dependent on creditors for equipment rental and for material inputs; Fuuta rice farmers, though, also need the state to perform its role in the planting process in order for there to be any hope of success. For many communities in the Gorgol, recent experience has shown them that they cannot count on the state to be an effective partner in this operation.

Several hours before Abdul and I arrived in Lubudu Barrigaal at sunset, we visited the community about 5 km to the west, Awoynot. This was a much larger town, also situated on the dunes overlooking the Gorgol Noir floodplain. Awoynot is in much closer proximity to the rice fields in this zone, and enjoys regular transportation to and from Kaédi. The households for the community spread out along the ridge of the dunes and comprised a mix of simple mud-brick structures along with both modest and ornate cement buildings. With our late morning arrival in the town, we found that many people were busy working in the fields. Our search for the chief’s house led us through the whole length of the town.

The chief’s compound contained one of the newer terrace cement houses, so named for the concrete roof on which people can sleep during the hot season. This house, like many in the Fuuta of this style, was not completely finished, although it was still livable. The interior walls still needed sealing and painting, while several rooms had no floors, only a graded mixture of gravel and broken concrete shards. The grand salon,
however, contained the typical furnishing of floor coverings and *mattelas* (mattresses) and pillows arranged along the walls of the room. The room also had electricity, thanks to a solar panel. As we waited throughout the day for people to return to the village from the fields or from whatever business occupied their attention, we sat in the salon and were able to watch satellite television, including *France 24, Al Jazeera*, and the Abu Dhabi affiliate of *National Geographic*, which was airing a program on astronomy. Our host, a man in his mid 30's who was educated in Arabic – albeit only through *college* – sat with us during this time, making tea and conversing with us, and asking Abdul how much he understood of the program.

After a couple hours, the afternoon prayer sounded and Abdul and our host left to go to the mosque. When they came back, a number of men – all in the same age range as our host – began to show up as well, joining us for lunch. As is the case in many (but not all) Fuuta communities, lunch is an inter-household affair, where people do not eat with their immediate family, but with their *fedde*, the other individuals of the village of the same gender and age group. The *fedde* is an important aspect to village social life, not just for everyday meal sharing, but also for holiday observances and celebrations (de Bruijn and van Dijk 149). Along with each newcomer, a dish of food arrived from his household, brought by one of the women or one of the children. As was customary, we went through each plate of food, one by one, until we had had a chance to at least sample from every dish. Sometimes, only a bite or two would be taken from some of the plates, but that was better than leaving it untouched. The etiquette of this daily occurrence serves

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113 Cf. 87-91.
as one of the more crucial performances of jokkondiral for Fuuta communities. On this day in particular, I lost track of how many men joined us for lunch (at least ten) and of how many plates of food were set before us, not to mention how much time passed until we got to the last dish (probably close to a half hour) when it was possible to stop eating without being rude, even though the others will still enjoin whomever stops to keep eating and suggest that he has not eaten enough.

After lunch was over, we moved back into the salon to begin my interview with them. Other than this group of young men, a representative from the community's women's cooperative took part in the discussion. While some of those present made no verbal contributions to the discussion, this interview was a very balanced discussion in terms of multiple people sharing their points of view and jumping in with their commentary. With no elders present, the young men and the cooperative woman did not need to defer speaking and sharing their opinion, and throughout the discussion they vented considerable anger and frustration towards the government, essentially accusing it of undermining their efforts to grow rice, either through incompetence or outright sabotage.

As the interview moved from semi-structured questions to more open-ended discussion, our host for the afternoon brought up this concern, naming the state's Périmètre Pilote du Gorgol de Djowol (PPGD) agency as an ineffective partner for them in their rice campaigns. This agency is in charge of irrigation control for the rice fields in the zone surrounding Kaëdi, but according to the farmers of Awoynot, they do not
perform their critical role in a timely manner. And when it comes to growing rice, timing is everything. As our host put it:

*Toujours, so campaign ummiima, be calorto ndognude ndiyam haa wonaa rétard. Be poti dognude ndiyam ko e sixième mois, be njoodo haa woni neuvième mois, be mbiya kadi maa ndemira campaign par la force. So njehi campaign par la force, bon, hebataake recolte; alaa natiija tan, hebataake hay batte.*

Always, when the campaign begins, they do not run the irrigation until it is too late. They should irrigate in the sixth month, [but] they do nothing until the ninth month, and they tell us we must grow our rice then. If we do that, we will not get any harvest; there is no point, we will not produce anything.

He did not indicate whether he felt the ineffectiveness of the local PPGD was intentional, but someone else with whom I spoke suggested that it was likely that they were actively undermining the efforts of these farmers for political reasons. Communities in the Gorgol region do not tend to vote for ruling party candidates – particularly with the history of violence and mistrust with the Mauritanian state – and there is a strong suspicion that the government uses its power to punish communities that do not fall in line with their support. The women's cooperative representative mentioned that it was not just Awoynot which had this problem, but all of the other nearby rice-farming communities: Djowol, Gouridiouma, Lubudu Barrigaal, Arifunda, and Djingue.

Whether or not the PPGD is intentionally sabotaging their agricultural efforts, the farmers are still on the hook for the costs of land, energy, fertilizers, and pesticides/herbicides.
Again, the debt comes back on top of the poor people. The PPGD this year, you know, the harvest has not come yet and people will not gain anything, they paid 84,000 UM ($300) for each hectare, [the farmers] must pay it . . .

Because now, if you harvest [your fields] and you get ten sacks [of rice], two gendarmes and an agent of the PPGD will show up at your house and tell you that you have to pay up. [If] people did not gain anything [from the campaign], how are they going to pay this? They are the ones who caused this, this is our problem.

As our host explained this problem, he made repeated emphasis to me that they want the world to know about these circumstances. They are stuck in a position of dependence on the PPGD's effectiveness in management and coordination. No matter the reason for the ineffectiveness which the farmers described to me, the end result is that they face ruination. There was a sense throughout this discussion that this issue was one that could reach a breaking point if nothing changes.

Troubled Partnerships in Riziculture

While the communities near Kaédi struggle with the failure of the state to perform its role in rice farming activities, one community just to the west of the regional capital has fared no better working with a foreign contractor. Belinaaɓe overlooks the waalo, about eight kilometers from Kaédi, and has a somewhat successful history of rice farming, at least in the eyes of people throughout the region. The community has
benefitted from its accessibility, as well as the nearby agricultural research facility at Rinjao. As such, Belinaaɓe has been a testing site for innovations in irrigation, pest management, or any other facet of the planting process (Maïga 177). In recent years, the community rice fields have been outfitted with the semi California irrigation system which involves gravity flow through buried PVC tiles, with above-ground spigots at regular intervals (International Finance Corporation and World Bank Group, 52). This system has become widely popular throughout the Sahel region in the last decade as a lower-cost and more efficient mode of irrigation. But despite the improvements in equipment and system components, Belinaaɓe's collaboration with Chinese Overseas Engineering Group (COVEC), a Fortune 500 contracting company which came in 2004 to manage the rice fields, has been just as fruitless as it has been for those who collaborate with state agencies.

The subject of COVEC's activities came up midway through my interview with the village chief, a community elder, and a women's cooperative member. The chief had been entertaining these two visitors when Abdul and I showed up at his door late in the afternoon. When we explained our purpose and our desire to speak with community members about their perspectives on development, they suggested that we could sit down and start right away. As such, the interview that I conducted was partially an extension of the conversations and social dynamic that had been present before our arrival. While the chief was the primary respondent to the questions I posed, the other two chimed in frequently to add to or underscore the points being made.
The chief, a man of 63 years, was a teacher throughout his professional life, but he is now retired. As a teacher, he went from post to post around the country, but he considers Belinaaɓe to be the place where he has always lived. Aside from his work as an educator, he has also been a farmer. The elder who was present was also a farmer, and he had had the chance to travel to Côte d'Ivoire when he was younger where he became acquainted with agricultural techniques in a more humid environment. The woman (it turned out that I knew her mother very well; she lived in Seyenne in a compound adjacent to my host family) had also traveled abroad recently, participating in an exchange program that took her to Burkina Faso, an opportunity which greatly broadened her perspective of rural development possibilities. Thus, all three of my interlocutors had lengthy experience in agriculture, and they had exposure to agricultural systems other than the ones practiced in the Fuuta. When they began to recount the interventions that COVEC has put in place, their tone conveyed a sense of disbelief and astonishment at how incompetent the Chinese company seemed to be when it came to managing the rice fields. As the chief remarked, “Miinen kay cadelle amen doon, so kaala to ngon-den do, fiusat, waadat exploser!” (“If we start talking about our problems here [with the rice fields], we will [keep going until] we burst, [until] we explode!”).

When COVEC came to Belinaaɓe, their first activity was to conduct a sociological study of the community, as is typically the case when NGOs begin to work with a new community.\(^{114}\) As the chief recounted,

\(^{114}\) Fuutankoɓe are very familiar with these initial comprehensive studies, and many people saw what I was doing as a similar preliminary evaluation, despite my repeated explanations that that was not the goal of my visit.
They told us to show them the problems we had with our fields. We told them that the problem we had was that the management was not good. They indicated to COVEC that some of the parcels did not receive any water because they were higher than the irrigation canal. Despite the initial study and consultation, the implementation of the new field management did not seem to incorporate any of the input provided by the farmers. The goal that COVEC set was to increase the amount of land being farmed from 33 hectares – the amount of land under cultivation at the outset – to 110 hectares. By the time they finished with their interventions, the community was only using 39 hectares. In the eyes of the chief, this tiny increase was pointless.

Moreover, there were numerous logistical problems in the way COVEC designed and managed the fields. Poorly constructed dykes caused flooding at the access points to the fields, meaning that farmers could only get to the field by boat or by swimming. The chief quipped sardonically, that the lack of rain in 2011 was fortunate for them in that they did not have to deal with dyke breaches. But even when there was no flooding, one accessed the fields by crossing the length of the dyke which is only wide enough for one wheeled vehicle to pass. This means that a farmer driving a horse cart could have to wait several minutes to enter or leave the fields if there happens to be another horse cart going in the opposite direction crossing the dyke.

On top of these problems, COVEC was unsuccessful when it came to correcting the original problems of irrigation and drainage. Many hectares were still above the level
of the canal, meaning these areas do not receive irrigation flow, rendering them useless. Pumps bring water into the canal, and the water moves through the canals and into the drainage system without ever entering the fields. Furthermore, the pumps have to bring water up from the river into the top of the canal basin, an elevation difference which he said was thirty meters, putting enormous stress on the machines. As the village elder pointed out about this setup, “ine yahwi warde machine kay haa maay” (“This will quickly kill the machines until they burnout”).

The maintenance of the motorpumps is yet another issue, as the chief continued to explain:

*Be ngaddani miin do une groupe électrogène, un* They brought an electric-powered motorpump, a pumping station...we do not have an electrician for this pumping station, we do not know how to maintain and repair it. They brought cables that did not match. They brought a box, a control box that was not the right one for the machine because they had brought us the pump #11, they brought these pumps with a box. We hooked up the box and the pump #11 could not pump water at all. They came and took it away, and they brought us the pump #15 without changing the box and without changing the cables. When you turn them on, if you turn on just three machines, it overheats, but if you turn on two machines, there is not enough [power].

The situation was so hopeless with COVEC that the farmers went to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) that has been active for decades with riziculture
development in the Fuuta to ask for help getting back on track with their fields.

According to the chief, the FAO brought in three diesel-powered, 2-cylinder pumps, two of which have already broken down, while he expects that the third would not last through the following year. At this point, the community feels that it does not matter who comes in to assist them; whether it be an NGO, a state agency, or an international agency, each new development partner will repeat the same things. As Abdoulaye Toure told me a couple weeks later when I visited Ganki, the river valley had become a graveyard for motorpumps. It did seem that this was indeed the case for the rice fields of Belinaaɓe.

With over a half a century of rice farming projects throughout the Fuuta, there is little optimism that this mode of agriculture can bring sustainable prosperity to farmers and their communities. Even among state officials and technicians, there seems to be a sense of resignation that large-scale, export-oriented agriculture will never be feasible for this part of the country. One person working for the government expressed as much, saying that what farmers needed was basic assistance to support subsistence-level production. However, this is not good enough for farmers who understand that just because they were able to prosper from such a system of production in the past, it does not mean that they would be able to do the same today with more mouths to feed, greater integration with global markets, and the decline and inconsistency of rainfall from year to year. In the face of these pressures, rice farming still seems like a better bet to Fuuta farmers than a return to dieri and waalo production.

What is lacking is effective partnership with those entities charged with designing and implementing irrigation systems while managing and coordinating planting activities.
Whether it is the state or an NGO (national or international), the performance of these roles has been ineffective in many locales. Development actors approach their activities with a sense of process, but the lack of results that Fuutankôbe perceive suggests that there is something wrong with the process. Despite attempts to design projects with the input of those who live in the region – utilizing their experience and expertise with the terrain – the development process is imported and imposed from the outside. This outside could be industrial countries, state ministries, or even local extension offices. As my host from Lubudu Barrigaal pointed out, partner NGOs have not been visiting their community. Rather, they invite community representatives to workshops in Kaédi or in Djowol. This is more efficient from the external partner perspective, but operating at a remove from the local terrain does not foster jokkondiral amongst the community and development partners. The logic of training select individuals to be the trainers of the community may seem like sound strategy from the standpoint of development institutions, but it does not seem to impress Fuutankôbe. With the alphabet soup of NGOs and state agencies active in the region and focused primarily on agricultural, many of my correspondents expressed the sense that they were on their own.

_Drought and Local Economy: Agriculture: Cooperative Gardening_

There is another mode of agriculture practiced in the Fuuta that differs from those discussed above, one that had been a major target for agricultural development projects in recent decades. This mode is intensive cooperative gardening, an activity that Fuutankôbe regard as the purview of women. While the current practices of gardening are fairly new
to the region, women have long had their own domain within agriculture, terrains that they themselves cultivated and tended in addition to their supportive efforts in dieri, waalo, and maaro cultivation. These terrains are known as paale, and are located along the banks of the Senegal River and its tributaries. Like the waalo, paale agriculture relied on seasonal flooding to provide the soil moisture needed for plant growth and maturation. The main distinction from the waalo is the fact that the terrain is much smaller along with the fact that women are the primary cultivators. The yield from paale belongs to women independently from their husbands, and they have the discretion over whether to sell it for income or contribute it to the household food supply.

Today, cooperative gardening has largely supplanted paale cultivation throughout the Fuuta. The most crucial variable that this new mode brings into play is the method of irrigation which utilizes groundwater resources rather than surface waters. This gives communities a good deal of flexibility when it comes to choosing the location of their garden terrain. While some communities maintain their garden site in the transition zone between dieri and waalo – in the same locations where they had farmed paale terrains – many have opted to move to higher ground, provided that they can dig a well of reasonable depth to access groundwater. Once a well is in place, gardening can occur year-round, although the soaring temperatures and blast furnace winds of ceedu (April-June) make that period much less suitable for gardening. Wells also dry out more quickly in ceedu and take longer to replenish. As such, the period of September to March (encompassing the seasons of ndungu and dabuunde) is the most active time of year for gardening. Women can get in two rotations of crops during this period, provided that they
can balance this activity with their household responsibilities as well as their labor inputs in *dieri* and *waalo* fields. While a few local crops are grown in these gardens (*folere, haako-ñebbe, kañje*¹¹⁵), many are ones introduced from more northerly climes (tomatoes, cabbage, eggplant, carrot, lettuce, etc.) that do not stand up very well to the extreme conditions of the hot season.

Gardens hold a distinct advantage for communities struggling to cope with drought conditions. Each woman who works in the garden will typically take responsibility for two or three plots, which vary in size but do not often exceed the dimensions of 2x5 meters.¹¹⁶ Plots need watering twice a day, a task that requires about half an hour per day per individual, leaving plenty of time to attend to other responsibilities. What often happens, though, is that a woman will often water the plots of her close relatives and neighbors, saving those individuals the need to make a special trip to the garden. If there is a strong sense of *jokkondiral* among the cooperative women, then they can derive a significant collective benefit through relatively limited and efficient labor inputs and relatively minimal material inputs.¹¹⁷ Through attentive watering, low rainfall totals are not a problem. With all these factors in mind, cooperative

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¹¹⁵ Hibiscus (leaves and young flowers), cowpeas (leaves and legumes), and okra, respectively.

¹¹⁶ This is most applicable to situations where women must water their plots by hand. Communities that have a system of pumping and drip irrigation in place can dig their plots in a way to take advantage of the capacity of the system. However, cooperatives have difficulty relying completely on these systems functioning as designed. Women often must revert to watering by hand when any component of the system is not functioning properly or at all.

¹¹⁷ Usually, cooperatives will have a store of hand tools – shovels, spades, hoes, picks, rakes, wheelbarrows – that women can use when they need them. Seeds are cheap and easily available, while composted animal manure provides a ready soil fertilizer at no cost. The only potentially significant monetary cost throughout the gardening campaign is chemical pesticides; but again, the amounts required to treat a plot (if necessary) are fairly minimal, especially compared to pesticides for *dieri* and *waalo* fields which are often require crop dusters for application.
gardens have become a significant vector of development assistance in Fuuta communities, big and small.

My own Peace Corps experience suggests the high degree of attention development organizations devote to gardening. As a volunteer in the Agroforestry sector, the very first skills I acquired through the Pre Service Training program were how to prepare and seed garden plots. Those of us working in this sector had to maintain our own demonstration plots throughout the training period, despite the fact that the season was not ideal for gardening. While the training program did highlight the need for skills in other areas, such as reforestation and converting animal manure into biogas fuel, gardening was the predominant focus for the Agroforestry sector as well as the Environmental Education sector. A large part of this direction of focus concerned the needs and desires of Mauritanian communities who wanted to improve the productivity of their gardens. But another reason for this focus is that as a small-scale activity, it made it very easy for an individual volunteer without extensive experience in agriculture to gain an entry into the economic life of the community.

Indeed, gardening was a significant component to my two years in Seyenne, particularly the second year. The first year involved an unsuccessful attempt to establish fruit trees seedlings in the cooperative garden, which was located to the south of the village, just above the waalo. Since citrus trees and mango trees are not particularly drought tolerant, they require a good deal more care and attention than the more endemic crops. The women's cooperative had hoped that an irrigation system would accompany this project, but the development partners involved (Peace Corps and the Centre National
de Recherche et Développement Agricole (CNRADA)) were not inclined to mobilize the funds or resources for such an improvement. It is much more of an undertaking to water a number of isolated fruit trees by hand than it is to water a 2x10 meter plot. As weeks went by, many of the trees went unwatered for days at a time. This was particularly detrimental to the survival chances of these trees in 2002 when ndungu brought extremely infrequent rainfall events. After the first couple of months, many of the trees had died or were showing signs that they were not going to flourish in that location.

There was another problem that cooperative women brought up with me several times that revealed a sense of pessimism regarding the potential for the fruit tree project to be successful. They told me that the soil in the garden was infested with nematodes that attacked the roots of anything they planted there, killing the crops before they had the chance to reach maturity. I never did see direct evidence of nematodes, and the technicians with whom I spoke from CNRADA downplayed that possibility. In my Pre Service Training, we had discussed the fact that many villagers blame nematodes for crop failure, even when that is not the cause. Our trainers cited a belief among rural Mauritanians that the mesquite tree (*Prosopis juniflora*) – a nonnative species used in many rural development and reforestation projects – attracted nematodes and should be kept away from gardens and fields. Seyenne's cooperative garden was surrounded by a windbreak of mesquite trees, and the cooperative women were indeed suspicious of them. Even some of the men from the village stated their assessment that the garden was doomed in that location because of the pests brought by the mesquite trees. Whether this
was the case or not, only a few trees survived the first year, and those that were still alive did not seem likely to reach maturity. As it turned out, they never had the chance to do so, as the locust plague of 2004 brought an end to the cooperative's attempt at growing fruit trees for their community.

While my first year in Seyenne did not produce any tangible improvements to the cooperative garden in equipment/infrastructure nor in gardening practices, a new project came into my lap in the second year that renewed my focus on gardening. This project came from outside the community, from the Nouakchott headquarters of the World Food Program (PAM) which happened to have a budget surplus for that particular fiscal year. They decided to use that surplus to provide materials and equipment to select communities for the construction of a school garden. This project idea did not really originate from stated community needs or priorities; PAM selected communities that had Peace Corps volunteers, feeling that this was a project well-suited for the volunteers' skills to organize and coordinate community activity. PAM would purchase the materials necessary for building the fencing enclosure (0.5 ha), gardening tools, seeds, and enough cement and rebar for the construction of a well if there was not one already in place or if a pre-existing well did not have the capacity to provide for the additional daily water usage. Communities would supply the labor for all construction activities, either through collective effort or contracted specialists. The only stipulation that PAM gave at the outset was that the garden had to be located in close proximity to the village school, and that the produce should be used first and foremost to supplement the diet of the

118 From the French name for the organization, Programme Alimentaire Mondiale.
schoolchildren. If the school served lunch to the students, they could use any locally grown produce to provide those meals; otherwise, the yield would go to the students' families.

Even though this project idea did not originate from the community, everyone was happy to receive these new materials. Shortly after PAM informed Seyenne and the other target communities of this project, a semi truck arrived in the village bringing all the purchased materials, including two hundred 50-kg sacks of cement.\(^\text{119}\) Once all of the materials arrived onsite, PAM's involvement in the project was effectively over. For them, this was a one-time deal, above and beyond their normal operations and activities. I was able to keep their regional representative in Kaédi informed of the progress of the garden installation, planting activities, and well construction, but only because I was friends with this person. We would talk about it on an informal basis, and she mentioned that no one in the Nouakchott office was concerned with the project after they had played their part.

As it turned out, Seyenne was the only community associated with this project that used the donated materials in the manner indicated by PAM. PAM selected communities with Peace Corps volunteers because they figured that the volunteers would be able to coordinate and facilitate community activity for a project of such scale. However, the volunteers in the other communities were all in their first couple of months of service, still trying to get a feel for the dynamics of their host communities. In some of

\(^\text{119}\) Cement powder is one of the very few manufactured goods produced in Mauritania. The production facility is located by the Port in Nouakchott, as the constituent components are imported and delivered via ship.
the communities, the materials sat in storage for months with no action taken. In at least one community, a single household appropriated the materials for their own private use.

There was another community in the Gorgol region, Moït, without a Peace Corps volunteer yet slated to receive school garden materials. As I was the closest volunteer to this community, PAM asked me to oversee the installation of the project. Forty-five km away and not easily accessible by public transport, Moït was located in a different ecological zone than that which prevails in the Fuuta, and had a Hassaniya-speaking majority, limiting my ability to communicate with the people of the community. On the surface, this was a poor choice for PAM's project, but they wanted to include Moït because of another event involving the community, facilitated by the vice president of PAM in Mauritania. This event was the delivery of school materials that a New Jersey school (the home state of PAM's vice president) shipped as a donation to Moït. The school garden project seemed like a good way to increase the level of collaboration with the community.

Upon visiting the community, however, it was clear that a school garden would not be feasible, as the school building was not near a suitable water source for such an endeavor. The town was spread out over a wide area, but the majority of it was on higher ground. The water table was not easily accessible and could not supply enough water to irrigate a garden that was a half-hectare in size. There was one well not too far from the school, but the water was at a depth of 60 meters (three to four times the depth of Seyenne's wells). Furthermore, the well dried out during the dry months of the year, meaning that it could not even provide water for household use. Moït did have a
community garden, but it was several kilometers away where the water table was much closer to the surface. In PAM's view, it would have been unacceptable to put a school garden at that location, since that would pretty much guarantee that the school would not make any use of it.

After the pomp and celebration of the school supply delivery (an occasion attended by an upper-level official from the Ministry of Education, along with regional dignitaries), the vice president of PAM lost his temper and made a scene while arguing with the community on this point. He felt the existence of the well (which happened to contain water that day) close to the school meant that they could put the garden there. As the afternoon of the day dragged on, it became clear to me that nothing would get resolved. Even as the visiting delegation of dignitaries began to pile back into the 4x4 land cruisers that brought them there, the vice president continued to argue with Moït's school director and other community leaders. In the end, PAM decided not to carry out the material donation to Moït, since it was apparent at the outset that the school garden project was not appropriate for the community, given the terrain. A few months later, I encountered the school director at the taxi garage in Kaédi, and he asked me if they were ever going to receive the materials that PAM had promised. They had heard nothing since the day that we had been there. With a sense of embarrassment, I said that I did not know, even though I knew that the project had been abandoned.

Meanwhile, in Seyenne, the community got together to decide the location of the garden, arranged the purchase of sand and gravel needed for mixing with the cement

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120 In the car ride returning from Moït, a Ministry of Education official said to me that the vice president should not have lost his temper, that it was bad form.
powder, and put up the fence enclosure within a month of receiving the materials. They chose a location near the school on the opposite side of the village from the original cooperative garden. Since the area they chose was in the dieri zone – about 1 km away from the edge of the waalo – people felt that there would not be a problem with nematodes or other subterranean pests. The school director did not have much experience in gardening, but he was able to use his authority to get the kids to work in the garden. Every evening, the children would arrive at the garden to water, using the opportunity to be away from adults to play and horse around. Whenever they saw the school director approaching, they would immediately calm down and do the watering without a word.  

The other teacher, a younger man from Boghé who was much more urbane and modern than the majority of Seyenne's residents (but was nonetheless respectful of the community's more conservative social dynamics), also played a role in organizing the garden labor. He would wander by the garden with a radio in tow, and keep the kids in line when necessary. For both him and the school director, the garden project seemed to be a way for them to extend the patterns of relationships engendered within the school to situations outside the classroom.

When I finished my Peace Corps service in September 2004, the schoolchildren of Seyenne were using the garden, while outside laborers were engaged in digging the well, a project that my successor was able to see to completion. But by the time I

121 The director, for his part, maintained a quietly stern authoritative countenance that inspired fear and obedience among the children, at least in his presence. A very devoutly religious individual, he was also the imam of the village mosque and ran the Quranic school from his own compound. Even the adults of the community treated him with an attitude of deference of a nature that I never saw displayed towards anyone else.

122 The season for well construction is the latter part of ceedu, when the water table is at its lowest annual depth. This ensures that the well will be deep enough to hold water year-round. Once the rains arrived in
returned in 2010, the women's cooperative were the ones using this newer garden, not the schoolchildren. In the intervening years, the cooperative had pretty much abandoned the original garden terrain. In fact, the women were much more active in exploiting the garden space during my visits between 2010 and 2012 than they had been during my volunteer service period. They still had no mechanized irrigation system and watered their plots by hand from the well. The quantity of water supplied by the well limited them to using half of the enclosed terrain. Some of the women mentioned that they would need to deepen the well to be able to use more of the garden space. Without a partner to provide financial assistance, it is unlikely that this will happen in the near future. The community as a whole has other more pressing priorities and the cooperative has other activities and initiatives that are tying up their available funds.

Even with the modest success of the school garden in Seyenne, there were still many troubling tendencies surrounding the nature of this project partnership. From the genesis of the project within the national PAM office in Nouakchott to their selection of target communities without knowledge of on-the-ground realities or social dynamics to their lack of interest and follow-up once they had delivered the garden materials, this initiative runs counter to the ethos of participatory development. PAM was able to perform its role and not have to deal with the actual outcomes, even while it could claim this project as an activity they conducted on their annual reports. To be fair, the school garden project was additional to PAM's normal operations in Mauritania, and the organization does play an active role in making food available to communities. Yet, in the early July in 2004, there was no point in continuing on with the well digging, since the diggers would have to stop once they reached the rising water table.
eyes of Fuutankoɓe, this project is an instance of *jokkondiral* without *jokkere endam*. As such, it is hard to blame the other communities that received materials for a school garden for not following through with the intent of the donation.

Despite the development focus on cooperative gardening, there are limits to its potential benefits in overcoming the climate change factors in the Fuuta. I had the chance to visit two communities in the Gorgol region – Mafondou and Sinthiane Diakary – that had relatively productive gardening operations and enjoyed close partnership and support from regional and international development organizations which maintained a regular presence in those communities. While I will discuss their garden projects at greater length in subsequent chapters, it should be noted that the yield from the cooperative's activities does not provide enough for the dietary needs of individual families, nor will it generate a large enough income through sale to significantly contribute to the household budget.

Abdoulaye Toure, in my lengthy discussion with him, pointed out that gardens alone cannot be the basis for feeding a family or a community:

*Adә waawi danje heen seeda, ko ŋaam-daa seeda, kono ɓurataa doon. Ine waawi ni yottotaako hay balde diɗi. Ko dʊm woni tan buri waawde yɛlitaade ko woonɓe maayo, taw ine mbaawa waade sardiŋŋaji.*

You can get a little bit [from gardening], a little bit to eat, but not more than that. It is possible what you produce will not last two days. Those who live near the river can do more with developing it, if it is possible for them to garden.

Nonetheless, everywhere I visited in the Fuuta, people see gardening as an important component to community development and ensuring their food security.
Aside from agriculture, herding (ngaynaaka) is a significant element of the Fuuta economy, and enjoys a high status among Pulaar speakers who consider it to be part of their way of life and their cultural identity. Indeed, all throughout the Sahel belt as far east as Chad and northern Cameroon, Fulɓe are known for their knowledge of herding cattle and sheep and their devotion towards caring for their animals. In some localities, Fulɓe consider themselves to be herders first and farmers second. But regardless of whether or not farming comes first, one will find livestock in every Fuuta community. Even in Kaédi, a town of 60,000, animals roam through the streets and compounds of every neighborhood and certain roads are difficult to pass when herds of cattle are moving along them. Various rituals help to strengthen the association between Fulɓe and their cows. For instance, Gelongal Ba told me how when a male child is born in a herding family, he is taken to where the cattle sleep at night. The child's adult relatives will locate the dominant bull in the herd, and move him from the place where it was sleeping, and place the newborn infant in the vacated spot (Ba, personal interview). The child thus becomes the dominant individual of the herd, preparing him for the mastery he must assume as he grows up. As soon as infants are able to walk, they are liable to pick up a herding stick and use it to chase animals around the family compound, while eight to ten year-old boys begin to take herds out to pasture or to drink. Animals can feed on the grass that grows in the dieri during the rainy season and they are also let into fields to graze.

123 These are the Fulɓe dieri or Fulaaɓe (see f.n. 52) who live primarily in the northern part of the Gorgol region (Department of Monguel) and the Assaba region. This area (which also includes the northeastern part of the Brakna region), incidentally, is also known as the triangle of poverty, being fairly remote and isolated from any major economic center.
after harvest. During the dry season, when local pastures are no longer sufficient, adult men assume the responsibility of seasonal transhumance, taking their herds to Senegal or as far as Mali.

Like other pastoral societies in Subsaharan Africa, Fulɓe see their animals not only as an asset for production (meat, milk, etc.), but also as a source of wealth (Riesman 184). Individual prestige and social capital came through owning large numbers of animals, and the exchange of animals is a critical component to marriage arrangements. Furthermore, much of pulaaku (the moral code for Fulɓe) centers around the importance of milk (kosam) in the diet. Today, powdered milk (Celia is the most common brand and the word used to refer to any type of powdered milk) is widely available for the times when the cows are not producing milk or when the herds are on the move. However, this is only an imitation and not a satisfying substitute for many people. My Peace Corps host father could barely conceal his disgust one night when we were served Celia and couscous for dinner, muttering as he tasted the milk to verify his suspicion.

But while Fuutankoɓe derive a major sense of identity through their association with animals, one thing that just about anyone can agree on today is that there are too many animals in the Fuuta. Grazing animals are the biggest problem for subsistence production in the Fuuta, in Abdoulaye's words: “Adana, jawdi ine ŋaamina yimɓe, kono haande yimɓe ine ŋaamina jawdi mabɓe” (“In the past, animals sustained people, but today people have to sustain their animals”). Herd numbers in the region continue to increase over the years, which includes the animals that belong to Bidhane owners.

I did witness some women taking part in transhumance as well, particularly widowed women without any available adult sons or other close male relatives.
coming down from the north. Camels roam freely through the countryside and cause major headaches for local farmers who have to guard their fields day and night to keep them out. Since the Bidhane have a complete monopoly on state power in Mauritania, the laws that mediate conflict between farmers and herders tend to favor those who own camels. It is the responsibility of the farmers to keep animals out of their own fields, and if they catch a camel grazing there, they can only detain it and take care of it until the owner comes to claim it. If any harm comes to the animal, the farmers will incur a heavy fine. Needless to say, Fuutankobe greatly resent this imbalance and many people cite these codes as evidence of their own marginalization.

Overpopulation of livestock is also a major factor in the ecological degradation of the Fuuta region in the last half century. With more of the land exposed to regular grazing, vegetation patterns have shifted in favor of the preferred species of grazing fodder. As such, many plants that provided medicinal, nutritional, or other utilitarian uses have vanished from the region (Ba, personal interview), while people face previously unknown health problems (such as diabetes or high blood pressure) or increased threat from diseases that had been relatively limited (malaria). Those who seek out herbal medicines must go to the urban areas to purchase them from those who import them from outside the region. Vendors of herbal medicines set up shop outside of hospitals and clinics, offering their wares to those mistrustful of modern medicine or those who cannot afford to pay for prescriptions. Meanwhile, the store of local

125 The Pulaar word for medicine, lekki, is also the same word for tree, reflecting the strong association between plants and healing, despite the current prevalence of synthetic Western medicines.
knowledge concerning the benefits of certain plants and the range of their uses is diminishing.

Aside from the floral resources, wild fauna have also suffered from the explosion in numbers of domesticated animals. Fuutankoɓe over fifty can recall times in their early lives when people were fearful of venturing outside the village on account of lions or hyenas. Lions have long been absent from the region, while hyenas are exceedingly rare. In 2002, a herder from Seyenne spotted a hyena not far from the dieri fields. At once, a party of men and older youths went out to find it and chase it from the area. They returned only a short time later, and one man told me that they had not seen it, but that they felt fairly confident that it had left the area. While a hyena can present a danger to humans (particularly someone who is alone), the major concern is the safety of the livestock. Like wolves, coyotes, and mountain lions in the American West, large predators are not welcome in areas with large numbers of livestock, considering that those animals represent a source of wealth to the owners.

When it comes to the consequences of drought and the pressure on grazing resources, there are three major problems that herders face concerning their animals. The first and most pressing problem in years of little to no rain is the danger of starvation. Each cycle of drought in the last half century has been associated with massive die-offs of livestock that are unable to get enough nourishment from the depleted grazing areas. Cattle, in particular, are highly vulnerable to perishing during the dry years. They are not

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126 Smaller predators are not welcome either. The chief of Seyenne brought me to his compound one morning and showed me the corpse of a badger that he had killed during the previous night. It was going after his chickens, which roost overnight in small mud structures.
as drought tolerant as camels and goats, and they require a much higher daily caloric intake than sheep.\textsuperscript{127} While herding households might be able to get by giving purchased fodder or surplus grain to their sheep and goats, it would not be affordable nor practical for a family to feed the dozens of cows that they own.

The health of cattle was a major concern when I visited the Fuuta in 2011 and 2012. Given the fact that many households were struggling to feed themselves, the only thing that herders could do was to move their animals to Senegal. Even then, it was not a sure thing that the grazing resources there would be enough to make the monetary and energy expenditures worthwhile, not to mention the fact that the bureaucratic procedures to take one's animals across national borders presents major hassles and headaches to herders. Bidhane herders have the means to take their livestocks long distances by semi trucks, conserving the energy of their herds through the transport. Fulɓe, from what I have seen, are not able to take advantage of this contemporary innovation as there are no suitable roads on the Senegal side of the river.\textsuperscript{128} For those who were unable to move their animals to find pasture, every day brought the prospect of another animal perishing in the countryside. The loss of an animal to starvation is doubly painful, as the value of that animal perishes along with it.

\textsuperscript{127} However, as Riesman points out, Fulɓe consider their cattle to be highly intelligent, particularly in how they do not need any encouragement to leave camp or the village in the morning to go out to pasture, and that they return at night on their own as well (181).

\textsuperscript{128} The paved road that traverses the Senegal Fuuta from west to east lies approximately 25 miles south of the river. The roads that link the paved road to the river are difficult for motor vehicles to travel on, given that \textit{waalo} soils become rigid and uneven as they lose their moisture. Because of this, horse \textit{charettes} are the most common means to travel across this zone, a journey which takes about three hours.
Even for those animals that do survive through the difficult years, there is still a strong possibility of diseases afflicting the herds. In their weakened and undernourished state, the animals are much more susceptible to succumbing to livestock diseases. The threat of disease was probably the most widely shared concern among the Fuuta communities I visited. My visit to Cuucci, in particular, highlighted the severity of livestock diseases and their potential to undermine and disrupt the productivity of herding practices in the Fuuta. Historically, herding has been the primary basis for the local economy for Cuucci's residents, and today it is still a vital activity for the community. It is not surprising, then, that the inability to manage the health of their animals is of grave concern and weighs heavily on people's minds.

One of the community leaders, Mamadou Sow, made a point of showing me one of his sick cattle. According to him, illness has been prevalent in the herds for a few years, but 2012 was especially bad. People were losing several animals to illness, while vaccination and treatment efforts have been ineffective.

You know now it has been five or six years that this disease has afflicted the cattle. This year, from beginning to end, you will not see someone who has not lost three, four, five cattle; that is the minimum. Such a person, we would say, has not lost anything. If one loses five cows to disease, we would say that person has not lost anything, you understand? And then there is no effective remedy available to cure it.
They had vaccinated the herds one or two months prior to my visit, but the diseases are still taking a significant toll. If the “lucky” ones have only lost five animals, than the entire herd is at risk of succumbing to the disease.

After eating lunch with about a dozen of the middle-aged men from the village, Mamadou Sow took us to see one of his sick animals. The day prior, he had brought this and another animal in from the countryside, as they were too feeble to move on their own. Left out in the pasture, these cows would have succumbed to dehydration and starvation. As it was, one of the two had no hope of recovery, so Mamadou slaughtered it to end its suffering. The other one was still alive, but it looked like it, too, would not make it through and recover its health. It was lying down outside of a small mud hut. Mamadou commanded it to get up; the animal appeared to want to respond to the command, but could not summon up the strength to do so. Mamadou pointed out to us some of the visible signs of the disease, discolorations in its mouth and on its tongue. Finally, the cow was able to struggle to its feet, took two or three steps, then collapsed again. It had expended all of its energy with this exertion, and it was clear that it would not get up again while we were there.

The issue of vaccination is one that came up in discussion in several places. As livestock management has become a very complicated and critical endeavor to rural development efforts, both the Mauritanian state and international NGOs have sought to improve and maintain livestock health over the past few decades. Many people spoke to me of past campaigns to vaccinate all animals in the region. The state established special enclosures for herders to round up their animals in one place to receive their yearly
vaccinations. Today, though, the sentiment is that the state has retreated from its coordinating role in these efforts, allowing the vaccination parks to fall into disuse. Furthermore, as Mamadou Sow pointed out in frustration, the vaccines and treatments in use do not seem to cure nor stop the spread of livestock diseases. The herders are not sure if this is because the vaccines and remedies are of poor quality, or if the diseases have become resistant to the available treatments. Whatever the cause or combination of causes, people feel like their handle on the situation is slipping. While they invest time, energy, and money into fighting and preventing livestock diseases, they risk losing everything if their efforts fail. Like an animal that has starved to death, an animal that has succumbed to disease is of no value to its owner. Its flesh is not fit for consumption, nor can it be used in any transaction.

The third major worry for Fuuta herders during drought years is the precipitous drop off in milk production, which has major dietary ramifications, particularly since Fulɓe are so fond of milk. Cattle often give birth during ndungu, meaning that they will produce milk in large quantities for nourishing their offspring. At milking times, the calves will be allowed to suckle for a minute or two to stimulate milk flow. Once the milk is coming easily out of the udder, whoever is responsible for collecting milk will pull the calf away and tie its head to the front leg of its mother. When enough milk has been collected, the calf resumes feeding. For a healthy cow in a good year, a liter per day is considered to be a good amount (Fratkin and Smith 95). Beyond that, there is a risk that the calf will not receive enough to supports its growth and health. With two dozen or so

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129 In surveys of pastoral groups in East Africa, Galvin, Coppock, and Leslie found that milk was the most important dietary component, particularly among women (120).
cows per household, this production is sufficient to supply families with their nightly *leccere e kosam* (couscous and milk; *leccere* is a variety of couscous that is very finely textured, almost sand-like) and maybe even enough for the morning as well. Without refrigeration, families must consume their fresh milk within a day, or transform it into *kosam kaadam* (sour milk/yogurt) which is mixed with water and sugar to make *tufam* as a beverage, or it is served in *ñieri e kosam* (*ñieri* is boiled grain flour, usually millet or rice). As the calendar turns over and the seasons change, milk production will drop off, particularly in *ceedu*. When the cows are no longer producing enough milk, people begin to look forward to the return of *ndungu* to the region.

There are many reasons why Fuutankobe feel that *ndungu* is the best time of year. Trees and grass emerge from dormancy to rejuvenate, grow, blossom while communities prepare their fields for planting with high hopes of a good harvest. Brown and dusty landscape turns a vibrant green while seasonal bodies of water give children a new place to gather and play. Families are also reunited as members who have traveled outside the region for work return to lend their contribution to the household production efforts, whether in the fields or with the herds. Of all these reasons, though, it is perhaps the prospect of plentiful milk that seems to excite people the most as they anticipate the arrival of *ndungu*. Through the long dry, hot months of *ceedu*, mothers will try to placate their hungry children with visions of *kosam* once the rains come and the cows give birth. Hosts will say to their guests how much better their hospitality would have been if it were *ndungu*, with the implication that they could have provided fresh milk for dinner and for breakfast.
But for all the renewed hope and excitement that *ndungu* evokes in people, a lack of rain can quash these good spirits and instill concern and dread surrounding the prospects of being able to avoid hunger and debt for an entire year, knowing there is no guarantee that the next *ndungu* will be any better. Instead of *leccere e kosam*, people will be forced to eat *leccere e haako*\(^{130}\) and *leccere* with Celia. With the meagre rains of 2002 and the complete absence of local pasture, the cows were not strong or healthy enough to give birth the following year. Consequently, households in Seyenne went over a year and a half with virtually no fresh milk production. While drought puts enormous pressure on farmers and hinders the ability for Fuuta communities to feed themselves, the negative effects experienced by the herds and the prospect of long periods with no milk production threaten the core of Fulɓe identity. For all their skill in raising animals and their sense of connection to them, people are aware that they cannot control the climate. If current climate trends continue with more arid conditions prevailing, the culture of cattle raising in the Senegal River valley will be in jeopardy.

In the communities that I visited throughout the Fuuta, people admitted that the long-standing herding practices are unsustainable, and that there needs to be change. Even in Nouakchott, where many young would-be herders look to earn wages in the city to support their families back in the Fuuta, there is earnest discussion over what should be done. Everyone seems to agree that herd sizes must decrease, and that households would

\(^{130}\) *Haako* means “leaves” in general, but in cuisine it refers to a bean-leaf stew cooked with fish, meat, peanuts, or beans and seasoned with a bouillon cube. With all these varieties of preparations, the flavor and texture of it varies considerably from day to day. As people can grow beans year-round, this can be a very cheap and readily available meal. While Fuutankobe tend to greatly prefer *leccere e kosam* over *haako*, they are aware of an appreciate the nutritional value of *haako*, noting “*ine heewi vitamin*” (“it has a lot of vitamins”). Also, there is a belief that *haako* is tough on the digestive system, and that it is liable to cause an upset stomach for foreigners who are new to it.
be better off with no more than ten animals that can be well-fed and kept in enclosures instead of wandering from locale to locale in search of pasture – quality instead of quantity. But, while people agree on the desired ends, they are at a loss of how to get there. \(^{131}\) Nobody wants to be the first one to attempt a new strategy lest it fail, leaving one without this source of assets. With this uncertainty, Fuutankoɓe are likely to maintain current practices – no matter how unsustainable they may be – until a viable strategy emerges.\(^{132}\)

**Drought and Local Economy: Fishing**

The third pillar of Fuuta's historical subsistence economy is fishing (\textit{awo}), as locally caught fish have provided an important source of fats and proteins in the diets of Fuutankoɓe. \textit{Awo} does not carry the same cultural significance as \textit{ndema} and \textit{ngaaynaka} in the formation and expression of Fulɓe identity, yet its importance and contribution to local subsistence has been quite valuable. Those who practice fishing as their primary productive activity (\textit{subaalɓe}, sing. \textit{cubaalo}) constitute a distinctive social caste of Pulaar speakers. Fulɓe who do not practice fishing ascribe special powers to \textit{subaalɓe} that allow

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\(^{131}\) Fratkin and Smith carried out a study among Kenyan pastoralists and noted that herders with larger herd sizes worked “less intensely” than those with a smaller number of animals, and were in a better position to hire additional labor to reduce their workload (105).

\(^{132}\) See Ferguson's explanation of the “Bovine mystique” among Basotho pastoralists in Lesotho, which entails cultural understandings of livestock as a form of wealth that flows in transactional circuits separate from those of cash or other commodities. He demonstrates how it functions as a “one-way barrier” in that cash converts to cattle through purchase, but not vice versa (146-147). This does not mean that pastoralists are against redefining their understanding of livestock as a special category of property/wealth. However, there is a degree of tension when it comes to implementing pastoral development strategies that reduce livestock to a source of capital. In effect, the capitalization of livestock asks pastoral communities to trade their dependence on the land for dependence on the marketplace.
them to achieve success with their craft. Similar to agriculture, the historical method of fishing in the Fuuta involved only hand tools and wooden canoes (laade, sing. laana) that were themselves locally produced. Subaalbe used to use wooden spears with metal points to catch fish, which required a good deal of hand-eye coordination and balance to be successful, particularly when one was fishing from a boat. Later on, they began to use nets woven locally from imported cotton (Ba, personal interview).

The Senegal River has the potential to provide year-round fishing resources for communities that have easy access to it. Additionally, the floods of ndungu swell the waalo zones of the river and its tributaries allowing the nearby communities to access a seasonal abundance of fish, some of which is eaten fresh for lunch while any surplus is dried for consumption during periods when fish are scarce or unavailable. Abdoulaye noted that the seasonal productivity of local fishing grounds can be so great that it draws fishermen from Senegal and Mali. According to him, the Foum Gleita dam in the upper regions of the Gorgol Noir River has stabilized the level of the tributary, ensuring that it never completely dries up. This allows for subsistence level fishing throughout the year, punctuated by periods of extreme abundance.

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133 For instance, Abdul told me that Subaalbe are said to have the ability to communicate with crocodiles or even to become them.

134 Carpenters (lawbe) and blacksmiths (waylube) are also separate castes which contributed to collective production by fashioning the tools for subsistence activities. Their role in the local economy merits the basis for non-monetary exchange with farmers, herders, and fishermen (Leservoisier 57).

135 Whether one calls it thieboudiene (Wolof), maaro e liiddi (Pulaar), or maaro e huut (Hassaniya), rice with a fish and vegetable stew is today the favorite lunch meal for the majority of Mauritanians. In the past, though, before rice became one of the staple grains, Fuutakno would cook fresh fish with a millet or sorghum porridge (niiiri) that included a good amount of oil (nebam).
Mbeɗe siki e nder lebbi jeytati e nder hitaande, I think that in about eight months of the year, yimɓe ine ndaņa do kam maslodaade e liddī maayo. Eeywa ine waada noon kadi sahaaji lewru walla lebbi dide ni nganndu-daa liddī kam a month or for two months, when the fish, you ko ko burti tan. Miin mbiya-mi ni wonaa awo, know, are exceedingly plentiful. I mean, this is miin o sahaa mbiya-mi ko wonaa awo ko guubol not really fishing, I would say when it is like tan, ko keewi, ko guubol tan. Wonaa awo alaa e this, it is not spearfishing, but with big nets, it is liddī heewde, sahaa ine ara do ko guubol tan. a lot, with the big nets. It is not spearfishing when such times occur, they come from Mali, Diin sahaaji so ngari, been ngummo mali, been ngummo senegal, subaalɓe ngara do haa they come from Senegal, subaalɓe come in large heewa, ine ngawa, ine njoorna liddī, ine numbers, they fish, they dry fish, they make mbaada poisson seche fumé ine nawa laddeji. smoked dry fish that they take to their home To bange awo ine waadi ngartam, ine burti to regions. When it comes to fishing, there is profit, bange nokuuji, ine walli yimɓe kadi no feewi to exceedingly so in some areas, it helps people a lot in helping people sustain themselves.

As Abdoulaye describes it, the state of awo as a productive activity has not suffered nearly as much throughout the years as ngaynaaka and ndema.

However, not everyone expressed this level of confidence in fishing. According to the reports of many Fuutankọɓe with whom I spoke, local fishing has steadily declined over the years. This is not necessarily due to absence of fish. A cuballo from Ɗalhaya talked about the need for better equipment:

Miin njogi nokuuji to miin ngawata taw emin We have places where we fish that are productive, but we are lacking in equipment pota heen danje huunde, kono miin ndoonki ko like boats, small nets, line and hooks. All kabirde ko wayno laade, sakitaaji-en, e these, if we have them to help us fish, we can dowlingaaji. Dum fof so tawi miin mbaawi get enough to support ourselves. The river is danje dum ine naanga liddi, emin mbaawi danje able to support us if we have the right heen nguurndam amen. Caangol ine waawi equipment.

wuurdi miin so miin ndaŋi ko miin ligori.
In the past, local carpenters would produce the tools that *subaalɓe* used for their livelihood. Thus, even while fishing resources persist and have great potential in supporting the local economy, the unraveling of the collectivist division of labor\textsuperscript{136} in the Fuuta has hurt the *subaalɓe* and their ability to feed their families, let alone the possibility of earning an adequate income from this activity.

Another problem that some communities face is the difficulty of keeping fish fresh. People prefer fresh fish in their diet as opposed to dry fish, and as a result there is a bigger market for fresh fish. Nowadays, Fuutankɓe are most likely to satisfy this demand for fresh fish by purchasing that which is delivered daily on ice from Nouakchott.\textsuperscript{137} Given the absence of electricity in the majority of Fuuta communities and the consequent inability to preserve through freezing or refrigeration, the quality of fish brought in from Nouakchott is not always suitable for consumption. But even if one can get ocean fish that has not started to go bad, the fact remains that another element of local diet that one could previously obtain locally has become yet another commodity that one must purchase monetarily.

*Climate Change and Community Development: History and Reflections*

The system of collective subsistence production that embodied socioeconomic life in the Fuuta over the first two-thirds of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century did more than provide the

\textsuperscript{136} Many carpenters these days have moved to more urban areas, producing for the urban markets rather than the rural production economy. For discussion concerning the different occupational lineages, cf. 91-96.

\textsuperscript{137} Fishing is Mauritania's second largest industry after mining, and the coastal waters are exceedingly productive. However, foreign vessels dominate this industry, with European trawlers taking in the largest portion of the catch. Their access comes through multilateral agreements between the Mauritanian government and the European Union (Ould Moctar).
material existence of families and communities; it also helped Fuutankóɓe define
themselves and form their sense of identity. As Riesman argues, Halpulaar populations
are no so much interested in the consumption output of production, but rather in the
social (re)production of their families and communities (183). The way of life is the
culture. The modes of production and the social division of labor represent the knowledge
base (gandal) from which to perform work (gollal) to achieve the desired quality of life
(ngonka) or development (bamtaare). Historically, this way of life has been difficult, but
Fuutankóɓe derive a sense of pride to be able to provide for themselves in a harsh and
challenging environment without machines. Their hands may be calloused from swinging
a jalo or a jambere, their feet tough as hooves from years of walking across ground that is
littered with thorns and painfully sharp burrs, but people walk with their heads high. Only
in greatest need would people ask for help and assistance from neighbors or from
outsiders, and they would generally feel a significant sense of shame (seemtende) at
having to do so.138

Today, people refer to this way of life as the embodiment of their tradition
(cossan medéen) that flourished in the past (haŋki medéen), but is currently under
incredible pressure and in danger of disappearing. As the preceding discussions of local
production imply directly and indirectly, lack of consistent and sufficient rainfall from
year to year is one of the major sources of pressure. The influence of drought and

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138 Part of the moral strength associated with pulaaaku is a public denial of need or want, along with a self-
reliance which is the definition of being a free person (Regis 29-30). From enduring illness,
bereavement, or any other misfortune, Fulɓe do not overly complain or ask for sympathy or pity. To do
so is an embarrassment and a mark of weakness. Those who have possess a high degree of seemtende
do not give in to the inclination to publicly ask for help.
desertification is unmistakable in the Fuuta today, and it weighs heavily on the minds of those who maintain their livelihood there as well as those who have left their families behind in search of economic opportunity elsewhere. In every community I visited, people mentioned the diminishing and unpredictable rainfall as one the chief concerns. The reason they did so is obvious; all subsistence-oriented production activities depend on water resources – surface water, precipitation, groundwater – and prolonged drought puts major stress on those resources. Particularly with farming and with herding, the pressures of the dry periods threaten to derail people's abilities to support themselves and survive. An elderly man in Dalhaya stated it simply and clearly as to drought's effect on their lives: “Hande o sahaa buri tampinde miin ko hegge” (“Today, hunger is wearing us out”). Now that a half century has passed since the first disastrous cycle of droughts, there is a sense of resignation that a new normalcy has arrived. As people would say, the rain is in God's hands; there is nothing humans can do to increase it.

This challenge to life in the Sahel has not gone unnoticed by the rest of the world. From an international perspective, the threats of drought and desertification have received a good deal of attention from development agencies as well as scholars from a variety of disciplines. There has been no shortage of studies undertaken to identify underlying factors – anthropogenic or non-anthropogenic – driving climate change. With UN-sponsored international climate meetings, an entire institutional architecture has emerged to promote policy-oriented initiatives to address current and anticipated environmental crises. The Sahel region, in particular, has drawn significant efforts given the humanitarian disasters that have unfolded in recent decades. Images of starving children
in Africa have loomed large in the minds of concerned publics in wealthier nations to the point where many people make a strong association between the emergency relief efforts and development itself. The task of development is to feed people who, for whatever reason, are not able to feed themselves. Indeed, many development professionals participate in humanitarian relief efforts in various capacities, such as implementation support, deployment of resources and services, or lending their voices toward mobilizing international engagement.

The 2011 drought in the Sahel zone of West Africa has been the most recent instance of hunger relief efforts coordinated by the international community. Individuals with lengthy experience in development write impassioned articles addressing the international community to respond quickly, decisively, and effectively to meet the enormous need. For instance, the Communications Director for the US Fund for UNICEF visited localities in the Fuuta and described the urgency she witnessed concerning food shortages as “a 'silent emergency' that desperately needs our attention” (Drake Brandt). The appeal rests on the shared understanding that the combination of poverty, underdevelopment, drought, and other sociological, economic, or ecological pressures can undermine the food security across a wide region (Leary et al. 17). The development response that has emerged over time is an attempt to identify the various pressures and intervene wherever possible to improve access to and availability of food (Ziervogel et al. 173).

In the aftermath of the Sahel droughts of the late 1960s/early 1970s, a number of coordinated studies have sought to assess historical climate patterns of the region over
centuries and millenia. The general consensus has been that the region had a much wetter history, and it may have supported dense forests and extensive lakes during the last ice age (Rain 74, Odada and Olago 3). As the region has become progressively drier since then, historical data show many episodes of localized droughts over the last five hundred years (Somerville 17, Rain 77). While these dry periods did not, as far as the historical record goes, affect the entirety of the region at once, it seems likely that the patterns of economic production among Sahel societies developed with a growing awareness of climate variability. Farming and herding activities shifted in time and space in response to such variability. Earl Scott notes that short-term migration was a typical response to severe droughts, allowing people to maintain their productivity or to earn income through wage labor (4, see also Somerville 17-18). From this historical perspective, it would appear that Sahel societies could readily adapt to the unpredictability of climate and support themselves through the lean years.

This is exactly the sense that I got from Abdoulaye Toure as well as Gelongal Ba in my discussions with them concerning how people in the Fuuta used to live. A given strategy for making a living is known as a feere (plural peeje), which can either be a specialized niche (for example, a griot, a carpenter, or a tanner) or it can be a task involving an entire community (ndema and ngaynaaka). One pursues a particular feere as long as it is profitable and feasible to do so. If a feere is not bringing an acceptable return, one looks for alternative peeje to secure his or her well-being and that of his or her family. For instance, Abdoulaye mentions that in years with low rainfall, people would look to their herds to see them through difficult years, selling one or two animals for
income or slaughtering select animals for household consumption. In this way, time spent on any given activity varied from year to year; a farmer might spend a year away from cultivation to devote more energy to his or her animals, moving them to Senegal or Mali to find grazing resources if necessary. Thus, even though the environment and the climate could take a turn for the worse, Fuutankobe have never sat still waiting to starve – they adapt their lifestyle to the conditions as they unfold.

The last fifty years, though, have seemed to overwhelm the capacity for Fuutankobe to adapt. Regardless of the severity and extent of droughts that occurred during the last few centuries, there is a sense that current trends in climate change are unprecedented for the region. There have been a number of investigations into the factors behind drought and desertification in the Sahel which have led to the formulation of multiple theories attempting to explain the observed trends. Aside from the long-term process through which the Sahel region has dried out since the Pleistocene (Odada and Olago 12-16, Rain 76-77),\(^\text{139}\) the majority of theories point to human factors as the driving force behind the environmental degradation throughout the region, including the Fuuta Toro region of the Senegal River valley. Some of these theories focus on the cumulative long-term effects of farming and herding in marginal lands, while others

\(^{139}\) According to long-range climate studies, the southward shift of the equatorial rain belt (the Intertropical Convergence Zone) is strongly associated with lower precipitation over land at latitudes corresponding to the Sahel region (Odada and Olago 14). Rain suggests that “...the climate of the Sahel has been relatively constant during the past 2,500 years, with short- to medium-term oscillations between drier or more humid conditions and with rapid and highly variable climatic change occurring within these more predictable fluctuations” (76). Observations over the last century point to a correlation between dry episodes in the Sahel and differential heating and cooling of ocean surface temperatures, with warmer temperatures in southern oceans and cooler temperatures in the Northern Hemisphere (Odada and Olago 14, Balling 45).
highlight transformations that occurred during the colonial period and post-independence development.

Of those theories that look at the role of local land-use patterns in climate change and desertification, vegetation removal and soil degradation are two factors that come up frequently. These factors are not independent of each other, and they are both tied to the systems of production that communities throughout the Sahel – including the Senegal River valley – have long employed. Scott suggests that the pastoralist strategy of maximizing herd size as a way to cope with difficult years has eventually led to a condition of widespread overgrazing in many areas (4). Additionally, as human population in the region increased, people cleared more land of its natural vegetation cover to make way for cultivation. Leary et al. also cite intensive agriculture, poor irrigation practices, land-tenure systems, market forces, and widespread poverty as factors that have contributed to vegetation removal and soil degradation (10). Furthermore, the cutting down of trees on a large scale for charcoal production accelerates the deforestation process.140

A hypothesis put forth by Jule Charney sees this progressive loss of vegetation as initiating a biogeophysical feedback mechanism which promotes drought as a cyclical occurrence in the Sahel with the albedo effect of increased surface reflection of solar radiation thereby altering atmospheric patterns in a manner which decreases rainfall,

140 In Mauritania, there is a ban on local charcoal production, whereby Fuuta villagers are fined if caught making their own charcoal. Meanwhile, one can watch a caravan of trucks coming from the Guidimakha region heading towards Nouakchott carrying tons of charcoal.
which places further stress on the remaining surface vegetation (Balling 42). The soil, in turn, becomes more susceptible to wind and water erosion in addition to the leaching of nutrients that occurs with intensification of farming and reduction of fallow periods (Rain 78-79). In this view, drought and desertification work hand in hand in a positive feedback loop, with changes on the surface driving climate changes that compound the intensity of those surface changes. The potential validity of this hypothesis drives a sense of urgency within global consciousness, and urgency that has been in place since the 1970s in response to the first devastating drought cycle of the postcolonial era.

Indeed, international attention to the happenings of the Sahel region seems to dwell most heavily on desertification and famine, with the prevailing sentiment that these two phenomena are intrinsically linked. The travel writer William Langewiesche captures the sense of bleak prospects for the region with foreboding prose:

The Sahara is mercurial, and does not attack in regimental formation. It sprouts in barren patches here and there, perhaps a hundred miles ahead of the absolute desert, and bypasses the greenbelts planted to block its advance. Greenbelts are trees, Maginot lines in a losing war against climate. If they survive, they protect only themselves. Farther on, around a well, near a village, for miles outside a city, the land goes bad. People steepen the decline once it has begun. There are more of them than ever before, wielding better tools. But it is hard to blame them. They cannot wish themselves away, and they must eat. The land cannot support them. The rains have stopped. This is the process now called desertification. It is an old story (260).

Balling notes that other studies have cast doubt on the prevalence of albedo effects driving climate change as a result of vegetation loss while highlighting the role of diminished evapotranspiration in raising surface temperatures (42).
One must keep in mind, however, that climate scientists do not fully agree about any aspect of the desertification process. Balling points out that “a considerable debate surrounds each element of the desertification issue,” and that “satellite records in the Sahel from 1980 to 1995 show us that while vegetation varies with rainfall, no evidence exists of any expansion of deterioration of the desert environment” (47).

From a different perspective, others have suggested that many of the factors driving drought and climate change in the Sahel have arisen through transformations and shifts in land-use patterns initiated under colonialism and large-scale development projects.¹⁴² Many areas of the Sahel saw a conversion in agricultural practices from small-scale subsistence food production to large-scale cash crop cultivation under a system of wage-labor and large landowners (E. Scott 5, Rain 47-48). In Niger, for example, groundnut¹⁴³ production essentially doubled over the period of 1948 to 1955, while the land devoted to the cultivation of this cash crop doubled from 1951 to 1960, owing largely to French policies that incentivized groundnut production for small farmers (Rain 48). Similarly, in Senegal, groundnut production grew from 551,200 metric tons per year in the early postwar years to 976,200 in the early 1960s (Maïga 53). Not only did this expansion displace substantial acreage that previously supported food production, but it also brought large areas of marginal land into cultivation. Furthermore, there was a significant reduction in the length of fallow periods, particularly for the most productive lands (Somerville 21, E. Scott 5). On the whole, the scale and intensity of these

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¹⁴² There is also the suggestion that pastoralist activities have been most responsible for environmental degradation in arid or semiarid zones. However, McCabe notes that development organizations working directly with pastoralists have helped to reverse this assumption based on project experiences (74).

¹⁴³ The French used groundnuts on an industrial scale to manufacture soap and cooking oil (Somerville 20).
For herders, the expansion of cultivated land meant a reduction of available grazing lands. The result of this, along with the restrictive effects of newly-formed political boundaries, was a tendency to overgraze on the lands to which they had access (Somerville 22). With colonial administrations fixated on export agriculture, those who practiced a pastoral lifestyle found themselves on the periphery of the new economic order (Waller and Sobania 45). Somerville sums up the predominant effect of colonial policies and practices as a breakdown in “the cultural, social, and economic equilibrium between pastoral and agricultural peoples (22).”

Farmers moved north to expand food and export crop production, encroaching upon regions normally used by pastoralists. Likewise, the restricted freedom of movement forced pastoralists to move further south in search of water and vegetation. Cooperative herder-farmer interactions gave way to more conflictual relationships (Somerville 22).

Under these circumstances, any notion of conservation practices and considerations of biodiversity, soil quality, and protecting vegetation cover fall by the wayside. With many of the mechanisms by which people in the Sahel guarded against the possibility of drought and famine no longer in place, the region was highly vulnerable to extended dry periods, such as the one that occurred towards the end of the first decade of independence.
The severity of the drought of the late 1960s/early 1970s overwhelmed the capacity of the newly-independent governments of the Sahel to adequately respond to the resultant food shortages. Furthermore, these governments lost an important source of export revenue due to the collapse of cash crop production, while rising fuel prices on the international market added insult to injury. This crisis left a lasting impression on those who survived it. A Mauritanian woman recounted for the Sahel Oral History Project the difficulties of this period that she experienced:

During the famine, our cows' ribs stood out, the land cracked and people became hungry . . . all the men left – only women and children were left behind under the protection of Allah, who wanted us to stay alive. Some women had one or two animals . . . Occasionally they sold one to buy food or clothes. Those with no animals had no security. They couldn't stand life, so they also left (Cross and Barker 23).

Making matters worse, the international relief effort was slow to respond to the crisis as the bureaucratic apparatus necessary to coordinate an effective response was not in place (Somerville 32). It was not until 1973 – when the drought had already been ravaging the pastoralists for several years – that international efforts began to gather steam (Somerville 33). But, even then, the relief efforts met with a number of challenges that weakened the effectiveness of the response. Somerville writes:

[T]he inefficiency and waste which characterized the relief efforts were attributable to a number of factors: tardiness in responding to the crisis, a lack of
data, the inadequate auditing of aid,\textsuperscript{144} corruption, hoarding, biases in the
distribution of aid, the dearth of trained African personnel, and the poor quality
of transportation networks (34).

The lessons of this humanitarian and ecological disaster continue to resonate with
development planners at national and international levels.

For one, there has been a move away from cash crop production towards growing
food crops. In the Fuuta, the investment in riziculture has been a major component of
such initiatives. The Mauritanian government established the \textit{Société Nationale pour le}
\textit{Développement Rural} (SONADER) in 1975 “\textit{avec un accent particulier sur}
l'amélioration des conditions de vie des ruraux par la recherche de l'autosuffisance
alimentaire, notamment à travers l'agriculture irriguée} (Maïga 177).” Their focus has
been on subsistence rather than export, and the realization of income for farmers has been
a secondary aspect to its development strategy. With minimal implementation of
mechanical inputs and processes, the extent of irrigated land increased throughout the
1970s along with overall yields and yield per hectare (Maïga 179-180).\textsuperscript{145} SONADER
also helped to empower women within the realm of agriculture, providing access to land,
water, and seeds (Cross and Barker 28). For pastoralists, the Mauritanian state dug a large
number of wells to improve access to water for the herds (Cross and Barker 23).

However, drought returned to the region in 1982, affecting agricultural production
throughout the Sahel. In 1983, Mauritania was only able to produce locally 6\% of its

\textsuperscript{144} For example, the delivery of coarse-grained sorghum which had been grown for cattle consumption, not
for humans (Somerville 33).

\textsuperscript{145} Despite the productivity of SONADER's efforts in the river valley, Mauritania as a whole experienced a
sharp decline (44.9\%) in grain production over the period from 1974-1978 (Ould Mey 86).
annual need in cereal grains, meaning that the government had to import large quantities of grain in order to feed the population (Somerville 36). The severity of the drought from 1982-1985 compounded the misery of the region, which had not fully recovered from the upheavals prompted by the previous cycle of drought. Reports on the effect of the drought cited severe malnutrition rates – particularly among children – increased incidences of disease and illness, further displacement of rural populations, erosion of the social base of pastoralists, major livestock losses, collapse in livestock prices, falling wages, rising prices of staple goods, and political conflict among Sahel governments (Somerville 36-39). One of the principal lessons of the drought crisis of the 1980s is that subsistence production cannot sustain the rural populations in the lean times, nor can it lift rural households out of poverty by itself. Whereas Sahel populations had minimal interaction with global markets in precolonial times (and in the Fuuta, up until independence), the crises in food and livestock production caused by drought brought farmers and herders into a greater degree of dependence on purchased imports.

Shifts in development policy in the mid-1980s exacerbated these trends, with IMF-mandated structural adjustment policies eliminating national protectionist policies designed to support sectoral growth along with many of the state-supported programs for social welfare. Agreements with the World Bank in the mid 1980s promoted a shift towards privatization in the Mauritanian economy, including the agricultural sector. In fact, the structural adjustment regime initially favored agriculture and livestock, given the preponderance of private control in these sectors (Ould Mey 174). SONADER played a large role in facilitating this shift to privatization, pushing farmers towards self-financing
and self management of planting activities (Maïga 178). Yet, the volatility of the climate along with the degradation of agricultural and pastoral resources presented significant obstacles to the desired transformations envisioned by IMF and World Bank leaders.

Ould Mey summarizes the influence of structural adjustment initiatives in the agricultural sector:

One of the most important elements of the agricultural restructuring was the liberalization of cereal production, marketing, and import. Mauritania imports most of its cereal consumption, and food aid is declining while commercial imports are rising as a consequence of the lender strategy to enlarge windows for their exports through a careful management policy of food aid and food imports . . . Similarly, subsidies are taken away from local agriculture to make it less competitive than heavily subsidized imports from industrialized countries (174-175).

A further consequence of structural adjustment policies was the internationalization of the agricultural and pastoral sectors (Ould Mey 175-176). A large gap, thus, exists between rural producers and the finance capital required to develop the capacity of production activities. Furthermore, this gap also comes into play during times of drought, with the coordination of relief efforts taking place at a substantial remove from communities hit hardest by food shortages and malnutrition.

It is this gap into which numerous national and international NGOs have stepped in order to facilitate the delivery of development assistance, as well as relief supplies in times of crisis. As Ould Mey writes, “...NGOs became systematically and permanently
involved in the local development and their political leverage increased as states became denationalized (138).” This political leverage accrued by NGOs belies their nominally apolitical nature. In fact, NGOs, intentionally or not, can easily effect a breach between local communities and the national state.

The NGOs’ strategy of focusing on the poor, the marginalized, and minorities earns them a social basis that can be embarrassing for the state whose failure to provide assistance for its needy citizens will always provide the leitmotif and justification for NGO intervention as the welfare state continues to shrink (Ould Mey 141).

Not surprisingly, the number of NGOs involved in development activities in Mauritania exploded in the 1980s, and has continued through the 1990s and into the 21st century.

As Ould Mey suggests in the above quote, many Fuutankoɓe expressed to me a desire to work with NGOs directly, bypassing the state completely, as they feel that they will not suffer as much neglect and/or oppression as they feel they have from their own government. Concerning their mistrust of the state, a community leader from Lubudu Barrigaal had this to say:

\[\text{Ndënde fof emin naana ine wiye amerik walli} \]
\[\text{muritani tant e tonne gemhe, france walli walla} \]
\[\text{ñaamliɓe ñaamaande millionaaji sappo e nder duubi noogaas. Dum fof ine waawi taw ko goonga ni ari . . . kono, miinen, miin njiyataa dum, miin njiytortaake dum.} \]

\[\text{Every day we hear how America is helping Mauritania, sending tons of wheat, or France helps, or they loan a sum of ten million over twenty years. All of this, it is possible that it has truly come . . . but we don't see any of it, we won't see any of it.} \]
This sentiment is not new, either. One of the Mauritanian participants in the Sahel Oral History Project of the late 1980s expressed the need for NGOs to “work directly with the people involved – otherwise their efforts will be in vain” (Cross and Barker 35). There is also the sense that NGOs are not as corrupt as state officials and that they will do what they say they will do.

However, NGO assistance does not guarantee more successful development, and Fuuta communities have become painfully aware of the limitations of small-scale projects in the agricultural sector to boost their ability to provide for themselves and survive. In my visits to the communities of Cuucci and Maraysi, community leaders had no recollection of any NGO collaboration, while other communities have seen the withdrawal of partner NGOs. The linkages between donors and lenders, NGOs, and rural communities do not allow for effective two-way communication and interaction. In effect, NGOs have the ability to approach communities to offer partnership, but communities do not have the means to solicit NGOs and/or donors whose centralized operations likely originate in a national bureau in Nouakchott or even in Europe, America, or Asia. As time goes on, it may become difficult for Fuutankoɓe to distinguish between the Land Cruisers of government officials and those of international donors who come to visit a community once a year at most, take pictures, and leave. In the view of many, collaboration with NGOs has not produced a real sense of jokkondiral that would help alleviate the poverty and vulnerability in which they find themselves.

For instance, the World Lutheran Federation (FLM) recently transferred its regional office in Kaédi to branches in Boghé and Mbout, effectively leaving behind the many partner communities in the Département de Kaédi. Cf. 113.
An elderly man from Dalhaya forcefully gave voice to this sentiment, without masking his sense of frustration with what he sees with the pace of development.

Te societeeji di kaalata do dì, societeeji di haygoto heen waalaani miin. Ngondat e amen do balde didì tan, werlo amen, yaha laawol mum. Dum wonaa ballal; ballal ko ñiiibóo, ngondu-dóo e miskiinéebe alla ine ñiiibi. Kono ballal mbaaɗo balde tan; joodowo maana duubbi for a long time. But the help they give is just for sappo walla duubbi joy artaani e amen, dum wonaa ballal. Miin njidi ko mumen ligondirde e mumen fof, miin ligondira e mum goonga, miin ngonda e mum goonga; taw ine walla miin, miin work with everyone, we would work with him or mballa dum, salaam aleykum.

These organizations that they talk about, none of these organizations have helped us at all. They are with us here just two days, give us a handout, then go their way. This is not help; help is long-lasting, to be with us, God's poor people, [a few] days; someone staying with us for ten years or five years has never happened for us, this is not help. We want want someone who will work with everyone, we would work with him or her in truth, we would be with him or her in truth; if he or she helped us, we would help in return, peace upon you.

His words, on one hand, present a rebuke to outsiders who offer periodic contributions while remaining largely aloof. They have given money or food or materials and can sleep well at night knowing that they have done something, while not caring to follow up on what became of their donations or if the donations alleviated the needs and concerns of the recipients. “This is not help” is an accusation aimed at the consciences of the development community. On the other hand, this man's words convey a vision of development as a journey of partnership and cooperation between the community and outsiders. There is a promise that outside investment will be rewarded, that the community will work together to make it bear fruit.

Beyond this sense of promise, though, there is a practical component to sustained cooperation. Conditions are changing so rapidly for Fuutankoɓe, and not just in regard to
ecology and climate change. There is an understanding that development does not mean preserving a subsistence economy that served communities well in the past. Methods of farming, herding, and fishing must change, and Fuutankoɓe are eager to find the right combination of technique and technology to support themselves through their productive activities. Those who are most thoughtful point out that jumping from hand tools to tractor plows and combines would not be wise. Abdoulaye Toure explained – offering a contradiction to his grandfather, the chief of Ganki, who had voiced a plea for such advanced and costly equipment – that there is room for gradual development of methods, incorporating animals, small tillers, small tractors, before beginning to consider investing in large tractors. Aside from the fears that heavily mechanized agriculture would hasten soil erosion and degradation, such a process would have a better chance for households and communities to stay within their means, both in terms of the affordability of equipment and the ability to repair and maintain it locally. A long-term, guided, gradual path towards agricultural development (or pastoral or fishing) can only succeed with close and sustained partnership between community members and outside assistance. As this elder from Dalhaya expresses, he is confident that Fuutankoɓe would rise to the occasion to make the most of such a path to development.

However, one might be quite skeptical of the likelihood of such a marriage occurring between local communities and outsiders with any assistance and investment they might bring, particularly if such outsiders come from developed nations. The international development community considers Mauritania as a hardship country, and the underdevelopment of the Fuuta and its harsh climate are just the initial challenges that
foreigners face when coming to the region. Foreigners must learn the language, must respect the beliefs and social values, and must come to terms with their own privilege amidst extreme poverty. The two years that a Peace Corps volunteer spends in a community may seem like an interminably long period to a young American, but it is essentially a blink of an eye in the life of a community.

Even those native to the region are aware of the rigorous conditions and its lack of appeal. A typical conversation that I would have with young people during my village visits started with someone asking me how I felt about the Fuuta.

“Fuuta ine weli?” “Is Fuuta nice?”
“Eey, ine weli.” “Yes, it is nice.”
“Alaa, gay welaani. Amerik buri welde.” “No, it's not nice. America is nicer.”
“Alaa, Amerik ine waadi cadelle...” “No, America has lots of problems.”
“Gay ko hegge tan, welaani.” “Here, there is just famine, it's not nice.”

Hegge, the word that is part of people's everyday vocabulary. A word that children learn at a very young age. A word that people use to joke with their cousins from rival families.

“Galle mon alaa haydara, ko hegge tan” (“Your house has nothing, only famine”).

Any significant length of time spent in the Fuuta will bring one face to face with hegge. Ten years ago, a man named Ibrahim who lived on the other side of Seyenne would visit my host family's compound regularly, being close to my host father. Ibrahim would tease me regularly for living with a Diallo, as he was from the rival Ba family. He
would point to my host father’s first wife (herself also a Ba), and joke how thin and sickly she was, how she was wasting away being married to a Diallo. Such remarks were just pleasantries exchanged between rival families throughout West Africa, a way to foster friendship and *jokkondiral* amongst strangers and acquaintances alike.\textsuperscript{147} But ten years later, Ibrahim, my host father, and his first wife have all passed away. None of them were exceptionally old, and my host mother was only in her mid fifties. As the older generation passes away, memories of the Fuuta in better, more productive times grow fainter. Ndiaye Seydou’s lyrics are a haunting lament: “*Keccol wayri/keccol kecce maayi*” (“The rains are overdue/rain and laughter have died”). Meanwhile, it is not just climate change and drought that threaten the livelihoods of Fuutankoɓe and the stability of their communities.

\textsuperscript{147} See Dettwyler (60).
The writer and development activist Gelongal Ba is one of the most respected intellectual figures among Mauritanian Pulaar speakers today. He hosts a radio program on *Radio Mauritanie* in Nouakchott that covers a wide range of topics – including history, morality, and culture – and reaches listeners in the Fuuta who admire him for his eloquence, his erudition, and principled rhetoric. His mission when it comes to advocating development is, as he put it, “*habde e humanbinaagal e ŋoode dental*” (“fighting ignorance and forging (sewing) unity”). When I visited his humble residence, basically a hovel, in one of Nouakchott’s dilapidated fringe neighborhoods, it seemed that he preferred living according to his principles rather than compromising them for the sake of personal wealth or status. We sat on the floor of his unfurnished living space, with only a blanket spread out on the floor to provide comfort while we discussed his perspectives and observations on development in Mauritania. I asked him, in a general, slightly vague, and open-ended question (the result of my limitations in using the Pulaar language), what his assessment was concerning development in Nouakchott, as well as Mauritania as a whole. Despite the broad scope of this question, he was quick to respond and did so with a flair for dramatics that one might expect for someone well-versed in the techniques and styles of public speaking.
Gelongal: “Ngal naamnal ngal haawni seeda. So mi woni naafige, mi haalan-ma ko wodaani; so mi haalan-ma ko goonga, mi haalan-ma ko muusi. Wonaa goonga njid-daa?”

Me: “Eey, goonga.”

Gelongal: “Hay gootal wodaani do!”

Gelongal: “This question is a little puzzling. If I were a hypocrite, I would tell you of things that do not exist; if I tell you the truth, what I tell you will be painful. It's the truth you want, right?”

Me: “Yes, the truth.”

Throughout my interviews in Fuuta communities, I would hear similar blanket assessments of development in Mauritania. People had very few positive sentiments to express regarding development efforts in their own communities, and there was little hope for substantial improvements in the near future and beyond. While Fuutankoɓe seek solutions to the problems discussed in the previous chapter stemming from drought and environmental change, they feel that they have to do so on their own while the state works at cross purposes with them. According to people's memories, previous generations were able to adapt to such challenges through their own initiatives and negotiations with neighboring communities and populations. Fuutankoɓe today understand that the world is much different than the way it was fifty or a hundred years ago, and that one of the biggest and most problematic changes for them has been their increasing subordination to state power and authority. Whereas in the past, Fuutankoɓe would say “yo bur wor en” (“may the state bypass us”) while acting to preserve their own local autonomy, the state is everywhere today (Ciavolella 2012, 7). It has taken time for people to adjust and come to terms with this reality, particularly when Fuuta residents see much more trouble than benefit in their condition as Mauritanian citizens. When it comes to development,
Fuutankoɓe feel that the state has its own agenda that diverges from the needs and objectives of communities in the region.

As Gelongal continued to explain, numerous social problems lie at the heart of underdevelopment in Mauritania, while the state, in his view, bears major responsibility for the magnitude of these problems. The biggest failures, according to him, are in the domain of education, where even those who go through schooling and earn degrees do not come out with knowledge and skills that could be useful in improving the economic and social conditions of the country. They only know how to communicate in French or Arabic without having understanding or vision to address the country's ills.

Ninety-eight percent of the Mauritanian population does not have education, even the managerial class. There are managers here who are said to be educated, [but] they did not learn [anything]; they just know French. Knowing French and being educated are not the same thing. Knowing Arabic and being educated are not the same thing.

In his view, the country will not see any progress without serious investment in an education system that combats ignorance and forges social unity. But, as he pointed out with frustration, the reality seems to do the opposite.
Muritani, hadi dum yēltuade ko leydi haasidaagal, ko leydi nafigere, ko leydi fennande, ko leydi racismaagal.

Mauritania, what holds it back from development is that it is a country of egotism, a country of hypocrisy, a country of lies, a country of racism.

One would be hard-pressed to find a Pulaar-speaking Fuuta resident who would not agree with this assessment.

Gelongal's analysis of underdevelopment in Mauritania points to a different realm of challenges than the environmental factors that have constrained the systems of local production in the Fuuta over the last fifty years. The problems here are more of a sociopolitical nature and revolve around issues of governance, hierarchies of power, and especially national identity vs. racial/ethnic identities. This latter point has been a stumbling block for Mauritania throughout its entire existence, the proverbial elephant in the room that continues to undermine social cohesion amongst the different demographic groups. It is something that outside observers are quick to notice, and it has been fairly common to see analogies to Apartheid South Africa or Jim Crow. But within public discourse, it is a subject that speakers tend to avoid for fear of inflaming tensions and inciting violence. In my interview with him, Gelongal had no qualms of speaking frankly on the matter, connecting racial disparities to lack of development:

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148 This is particularly true with respect to the lingering existence of slavery within the country, which has attracted significant scrutiny from the international human rights community. Anti-slavery activism within the Hassaniya-speaking Haratin community has become a divisive flashpoint within Mauritanian society today and is reshaping the internal political divides (Bullard, Okeowo).
In the whole world today, Mauritania is the only place that practices blatant racism. It isn't hiding in a haystack or [under] a bush. There is racism in the economy, there is racism in [political] nominations, there is racism in education, there is racism in cultural [affairs].

If one of the keys to development is to promote social unity, then racism stands in the way of progress. As another young man in a Fuuta village told me, “so tawi tan racism o ine wodi, ça ne développe pas” (“As long as there is racism, there will be no development”). These concerns clearly underlie the perspectives and attitudes that Fuutankoɓe share with respect to development. The fact that they do not share a sense of identity or affiliation with the ruling regimes of Mauritania, past and present, means that they do not expect the state to effectively engage itself in local development efforts.

The sense of marginality that Fuutankoɓe expressed to me runs deep, and it has taken shape through their historical experience amidst the ethnic and racial tensions that have riven Mauritanian society. These tensions reached the point of violence in the late 1980s, but one can find the roots of the problem in the colonial era and the way the French defined Mauritania as an ethnic territory. Around the time of the Second World War, The French colonial administration divided up the Fuuta Tooro with no regard for

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149 This is a key point for Ciavolella, who argues that the political marginality of Halpulaar societies in Mauritania is above all a historical condition of interactions with state authorities as opposed to one that resulted from the nature of their nomadic lifestyle (2012 6).
the populations living in the region. The Senegal River, which had once been the backbone of production, trade, and culture for the region, became an arbitrary frontier to embody an oversimplified racialized geography that served the interests of French colonial rule, separating Arab Africa from Black Africa. The French decided that the north bank of the river would be Mauritania, *le pays des maures*, despite the ethnic diversity present in the area. With a racial cartography in place, the colonial administration took steps to displace communities that were not where they were “supposed to be” (Ciavolella 2010, 111).

For the most part, though, populations in the region continued to live seemingly unaware or unconcerned with the decisions that colonial administrators made in Paris or in St. Louis (in modern-day Senegal). This is partly due to the fact that the French had little interest in the Fuuta region or the deserts to the north. Halpulaar communities in particular interacted with the colonial regime only when it suited them. For instance, farmers and laborers would often head to St. Louis or Dakar during *ceedu* to find wage labor or commercial opportunities to supplement their own production efforts back home in the Fuuta (Ba, personal interview). The fact that Fuutankoɓe today have little memories from the time of independence indicates that they were not very concerned with the event at the time or its ramifications. It was only when the disastrous drought of the 1960s ravaged the Fuuta, along with the entire country, that people began to take note of the new political circumstances in which they lived. In my interviews with older Fuutankoɓe, the drought period – not independence – was the major historical reference point for marking the shift from the way things were to the way things are now. By the
time this awareness took shape, they had become a minority population in a nation unsure of how to handle the cultural diversity of its citizens.

Prior to the droughts, Mauritania's first national government looked to establish its sovereignty as a modern nation and give shape to a national culture. Their efforts concerning the former objective were much more successful than the latter. The droughts were an opportunity for the new state to expand its control over the national territory, particularly with the sedentarization of large segments of the nomadic population. Sedentarization and urbanization made it easier for the state to control and tax its citizens, and it also helped with their development objectives of promoting education, intensifying agricultural production, and establishing industry (Ould Mey 85). However, the state was not equipped to handle such a rapid socioeconomic transition, especially when the French had left almost nothing in the way of modern infrastructure during colonial rule.

Financial crises accompanied the environmental catastrophe, forcing the government to request aid from the international community (Ould Mey 86). Foreign support helped to ensure that enough cash flowed for the government to stay up and running, but it also served to subordinate the state's development plans to the dictates of the emerging neoliberal doctrine.150

Meanwhile, the issue of national culture proved to be a volatile balancing act for Mauritania's government. While the French may have easily overlooked the racial and

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150 The case of iron ore mining is instructive. Even though the state nationalized the industry in 1974, this effort proved hollow. To appease the former European shareholders, the state paid out $90 million as compensation, while the Western Sahara dispute that began in 1975 wound up draining the state's financial resources while at the same time interrupting iron ore production (Bennoune 62). The mining facilities are close to the frontier with the disputed territory, and were highly vulnerable to Polisario Front attacks (Bennoune 63).
ethnic diversity of the population, the new national government – at least in the beginning – sought to acknowledge the different communities amongst its citizenry. While keeping the name Mauritania, the first head of state Moktar Ould Daddah adopted inclusive rhetoric and imagery to appeal to the diversity of the population. Mauritania was to be a *trait d'union*, the hyphen that connects or bridges North Africa to West Africa both geographically and culturally (Ould Mey 78). While the highest posts went to Bidhane individuals, the administration employed a large number of Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof clerical workers who had gone through the French education system. Economically, Mauritania maintained the Franc currency that the majority of former French colonies in West and Central Africa also retained. This made it easier to conduct trade not only with the other countries in the Franc zone, but also with the former colonial power itself (Ould Mey 80).

These efforts to strike an inclusive balance did not endure for long. Already in the first decade of independence, Mauritania's non-Arab communities were unhappy with the decision to make Arabic the official language as well as the language of instruction for education. Black communities protested against these language policies, marking the first time that social unrest broke out along racial lines in post-independence Mauritania (Marchesin 133, Leservoisier 189). By the beginning of the 1970s, Ould Daddah had moved away from the *trait d'union* rhetoric as he sought closer ties with the Arab world. The country gained admittance into the Arab League in 1973 after Morocco ended its opposition to Mauritanian sovereignty (Bennoune 61). The issue of Arabization of state and society became a major point of grievance for Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof
communities as they felt that the Bidhane elite at best ignored their presence and respective cultures within the national society, while the growing fear is that the leaders of the country did not want them there at all. Arabization is also at the heart of processes of racialization in African societies in postcolonial times, especially societies of the southern Sahara and Sahel zones.

Both Mahmood Mamdani and Amir Idris have explored the question of racialization across precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial history, and have remarked how the dynamics have shifted from one period to another. Speaking to the context in Sudan, Idris sees the institution and practice of slavery as fostering racialized identities and hierarchies of power in precolonial society (6). The advent of colonial rule disrupted these processes, as the colonial administration moved to abolish slavery. However, racialization of colonial society continued through the practices of indirect rule, generating racially or ethnically bound institutions of control, what Mamdani refers to as decentralized despotism (Idris 6, Mamdani 17). As the interface between colonial power and its subjects, local elites depended upon some form of racial or ethnic identity to justify their position within the power structure. The position of chief wielded significant power, with political, economic, and judicial authority in the hands of one individual. However, this power met its limits at the sociocultural divisions of tribe, race, or ethnicity. Mamdani notes that these patterns of indirect rule entailed a racialization of state and society, and while the moment of independence allowed for the deracialization of the state, sociocultural divisions persisted within African civil societies (20). These divisions continue to operate and polarize the various national societies across the
continent, especially along the southern edge of the Sahara where the processes of racialization have continued in the form of Arabization (Idris 50).

In Mauritania, the processes of Arabization have recast pre-independence categories of tribal or ethnic identity within an Arab/non-Arab (Black) division in which the former is the dominant term. The more Arab one is, the closer such person is to being a “true” Mauritanian. As such, racial and ethnic identities continue to play an important role in Mauritania's state-society framework, despite the various efforts (sincere or superficial) to defuse the tensions that arise through these forms of social division. This atmosphere of division makes it harder to tackle the problems of poverty and underdevelopment that plague the country. The different ethnic and racial communities compete for scarce resources and investments in the hopes of improving their material situations. Within this competition, each community tends to feel aggrieved by the gains and actions of those outside of their group. Black Mauritanians complain that the “Arab” Bidhane elite actively oppresses them, while the Bidhane elite accuse Black Mauritanian communities of holding the nation back from modernization.

Marginality is another factor that works in tandem with the racializing processes of Arabization to destabilize social harmony and frustrate development efforts. Every segment of Mauritania's population experiences significant forms of marginality which undermine people's sense of security for the present, as well as their hope that their lives will improve in the future. The problem is that the nature of the experience of marginality differs between the different groups. The majority of Black Mauritanians are poor, but the same is true of the majority of Bidhane Mauritanians despite the fact that the Bidhane
elite hold a monopoly on power within the country. But the group that can arguably claim
the distinction of “poorest of the poor” is the Haratins, the Arabic-speaking class of
former slaves, many of whom continue to live in a state of servitude and dependence. For
Black Mauritanians, though, their condition of marginality goes beyond poverty and
underdevelopment; they also face exclusion from power within the state apparatus and
the economic sphere, and they carry memories of persecution and violence that the state
carried out against them with the support of the Bidhane and Haratin communities. Fuuta
communities are thus in a rather impossible position of needing assistance from the state
to support local development while carrying the sense that the state is not inclined to give
them any meaningful support. The next section of this chapter explores some of the
concrete stories and situations that Fuuta residents shared with me that illustrate their
awareness of this double bind with respect to community development.

Any analysis of marginality, ethnicity, and development in Mauritania is not
complete, however, without an acknowledgement that even the ruling elite experience
their own sense of insecurity and marginality. Power in Mauritania has always been
tenuous for those who wield it. Only one head of state in the country’s history has left
office via the democratic process, as personal and tribal rivalries play out within the
Bidhane community and within the top echelons of the military. Citizens have become so
used to coups d'état that there is open speculation amongst them of when the next one
will be. No one expected current president Ould Abdel Aziz to lose the presidential

\footnote{This was Colonel Ely Ould Muhammad Vall who led the coup to oust Ould Ta’ya from power in 2005
and promised a full transition to democratic governance. To allay fears that he would rig the next
presidential election in his favor, Ould Muhammad Vall agreed not to stand as candidate, allowing Sidi
Ould Cheikh Abdallah to become the first Mauritanian president to come to power through an election.}
election of June 2014 – despite widespread discontent with his rule – but there are many suggestions that another coup may happen in the near future. The potential for leaders to lose their positions of power at the drop of a hat means that loyalty is a huge concern for them. There is perpetual fear that political dissent within Mauritanian society is a threat to the stability of power.

On the other hand, Mauritania's political leadership has to confront a sense of international marginality, as they hold very little leverage in the realm of geopolitics and economic development. Even in moments of crisis, such as severe drought or civil conflict, the country flies under the radar of the global community's primary concerns. In my conversations with Americans about my experiences in Mauritania, I have found that many people have not even heard of the country, even people who are highly educated and internationally conscious. Those who do know that the country exists and know its geographic location often have no other knowledge about it. Within the Arab League as well, Mauritania earns very little strategic consideration or reflection amidst the volatility and upheavals throughout the region. There is much confusion as to how Mauritania fits in with the culture and history of the Arab nations. As such, the state feels the need to play up its credentials as a part of the Arab world, even while segments within societies of the other Maghreb countries (such as Amazigh groups) have raised their voices, challenge the dominant Arab identity of the national society. This dynamic makes it even harder for the state to promote or even acknowledge the cultural diversity of its citizenry. Mauritania's government is walking a tightrope when it comes to pursuing its agenda,
including its development agenda, attempting to maintain external financial support while holding off internal discontent from its citizens and political opposition.

The divergent experiences of marginality that pervade Mauritania's state and society may not be the direct cause of racial and ethnic tension within the country, but one should not overlook it as a major contributing factor. John and Jean Comaroff have suggested that inequality, or “the asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy” is one of the main driving forces behind tribalism and ethnocentrism (54). This dynamic certainly holds true for the Fuuta region of Mauritania, as the people who lived there found themselves on the frontier of a country in which they were an ethnic minority. With a history of neglect from the state when it comes to the development of the region, the pull of ethnic identity becomes strong and tends to outweigh any sense of national identity. Historical episodes of conflict have served to deepen these social fractures, while fears increase that future racial/ethnic violence are inevitable. While there is a great degree of pessimism on the sociopolitical front today, some Fuutankobe have been reflecting on how the region and the country can avoid going down the path of civil conflict. Development can play a big role in reducing the grievances that arise through poverty and dependency, as long as all segments of society can share in its benefits. This may be easy enough to say, but coming up with a process to actually address the complex interplay between marginality, ethnicity, and

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152 Tribalism pervades the terrain of intraethnic socioeconomic and political relations for each of Mauritania's ethnic groups. The tribalist structure varies between the different ethnicities, but, in general, there are elite castes, occupational castes, and servile castes. For example, the Bidhane, the precolonial nobility was the warrior caste (Hassan) and the scholarly marabout class (Zawaya), with the warriors having the upper hand, while the tributary caste (Znaga) and slave castes (‘abeid) occupied the lowest rungs (Marchesin 34-41). For Pulaar speakers, the structure is similar, though the warrior caste (Sebbe) occupy a lower place within the social hierarchy (Marchesin 59-63).
development seems out of reach, while the prospect of continued social deterioration seems much more likely.

**Development in the Fuuta: Missing in Action**

One of the first observations that Western visitors to Mauritania generally make is that it feels like they have gone back in time. The journalist John Sutter, writing a report on slavery in the country for CNN in 2012, noted that “the country feels stuck in the past in ways that are both quaint and sinister (Sutter).” Such descriptions on the part of Westerners carry strong Orientalist overtones and also bring to mind Fabian's argument concerning the denial of coevalness in “Time and the Other.” Particularly in Muslim societies, such discourses and modes of representation typically address social customs and belief systems. In Mauritania, though, the sensation of glimpsing the past also derives heavily from the material conditions of living. Beaten-down Mercedes, Toyotas, and Peugeots limp and lumber through the streets like zombies, their days of high performance long gone. None of the technological devices available in the local markets – televisions, cell phones, laptops, etc. – would qualify as state of the art. They would be well outdated in any other country. And then there is the infrastructure, or lack thereof, that makes the country outside of the upscale neighborhoods of Nouakchott seem like it is waiting for “modernity” to arrive.

The Fuuta region certainly does not escape this characterization. In fact, its distance from the major urban centers of the country only serves to intensify its sense of remoteness and isolation from modern “civilization.” Most communities in the region do
not have electricity or running water, the two hallmarks of modern conveniences. My
dad, when he came to visit me in 2004, remarked that life in the Fuuta reminded him of
his childhood in rural Indiana in the 1950s. In a certain sense, this is an apt comparison
concerning the material aspects of living. However, the memories that my dad has of
using an outhouse or getting water from the well pump took place towards the end of the
period of extensive and systematic development of infrastructure and consolidation of
state services across rural areas in the United States. Furthermore, his childhood home in
southeast LaPorte county was not far from the booming manufacturing hubs of the post
World War II era. The combination of economic prosperity and state development
initiatives rapidly transformed life in rural America and signaled a major break with the
past. Meanwhile, in the Fuuta, the absence of these factors does not mean that
Fuutankóɓe are living in the past. Rather, it reflects the general failures in the realm of
economic development. The break they have made with the past has been a painful
transition from autonomous self-reliance to a condition of dependence on external (to the
region) political and economic forces that seem to assume that the particular conditions
of life for Fuuta communities are irrelevant to development.

With the major export industries located in the North and along the coast, the
Fuuta region receives very little infrastructural development. In 2002, there was talk of
paving the road between Kaédi and Selibaby to enhance accessibility to communities in
the Gorgol and Guidimakha regions. Ten years later, this project was finally nearing
completion, but most communities still lack electricity and running water with no hope
that this will change anytime soon. Meanwhile, the agricultural and pastoral livelihoods
of Fuutankobe continue to languish without sufficient support and investment. Farmers do not see the Mauritanian state playing a helpful role in developing the agricultural sector for the benefit of rural communities. In fact, many people see the state as working against their well-being. Changes in land tenure laws in the 1980s favored the Bidhane elite who were able to use their economic resources to claim ownership of land in the waalo (Leservoisier 184). The state used coercive force to help make room for these new private land owners, particularly in the region of the Foum Gleita dam on the Gorgol Noir tributary which had previously been a strictly pastoral zone (Leservoisier 310). Those who had previously utilized this area for seasonal grazing now found the forces of the state arrayed against them. At the same time, waves of Haratin moved into the region to work the land for the Bidhane owners.\textsuperscript{153} This has exerted a great deal of pressure on Halpulaar communities, who find their local autonomy threatened or undermined. There are also significant consequences concerning economic production in the region and the failure of modernized agriculture to improve yields.

Ecological factors certainly played a major role in agricultural development strategies, as the preceding chapter discussed. With the disruptions in agricultural production precipitated by severe and prolonged droughts during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, the grand ambitions of turning the river valley region into an irrigated breadbasket that produced an exportable surplus began to wane. Both the state and its international

\textsuperscript{153} Stephen Reyna describes how mechanization of oasis agriculture in the northern regions of Mauritania in the 1970s and 1980s freed up the need for Haratin slave labor in this domain of productive activity. He suggests that these changes helped to drive a proletarization of Haratin laborers who migrated to urban areas in surplus numbers (Reyna 351). However, the liberalization of land tenure in the south helped to absorb some of this surplus labor and perhaps played a major factor in the motivation of Haratin communities to support the Bidhane against the Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof communities in the violence and unrest of the late 80s/early 90s (Leservoisier 317).
partners started to rethink the strategy for agricultural development. Rather than
continuing to expand irrigated rice cultivation or mechanizing production activities to a
greater degree, the strategy of agricultural development projects for the last two decades
has been primarily to provide the means for people to meet their subsistence needs. This
change in strategy took place as the leading international development institutions began
to promote more grassroots involvement and participatory development (Maïga 290).

While Fuutankôɓe welcome any form of assistance in enabling their agricultural
development, it is clear to most people that small-scale projects are not sufficient for their
needs. As the region becomes more and more integrated to the global economy and
people's lives are monetized to greater and greater degrees, subsistence agriculture cannot
provide enough to ensure well-being for one's self, one's family, one's animals, and one's
community. People still maintain a sense of cultural pride in farming by jalo and jambere,
but in village after village I heard pleas for tractors, for irrigation systems, for anything
that reduces the backbreaking labor and allows individuals to exploit more land for their
crops. Such equipment, of course, is expensive, and few communities could raise the
money to purchase even a used tractor. As such, state development projects have sought
to meet this desire by providing tractors to partner communities (Ba Samba, personal
interview). Motor pumps are another common investment provided to communities by
state or transnational projects.

Yet, these development initiatives produce very little in the way of tangible results
and have been highly unsustainable. Even though communities are spared the initial
purchase of mechanical equipment, they still have to pay for the fuel required to run it.
Then there is the difficulty of maintenance, particularly the replacement of broken parts. When machines inevitably breakdown and no longer function, communities are left with little choice but to go to the state or the entity that provided the equipment and ask for a new machine. This, of course, is not what development planners have in mind when they seek to improve agricultural production in the Fuuta. Abdoulaye Toure suggested a more gradual change in farming methods, keeping any changes in line with the purchasing power of local communities and their ability to access credit. In his view, it has been foolish and short-sighted to attempt to make the direct jump from small-scale non-mechanized agriculture using only hand tools and human labor to wide-scale mechanized farming that employs chemical fertilizers and pesticides. There are intermediate steps that could have been introduced, such as the incorporation of animal labor and small machines like rototillers.

The attempt to shortcut this more gradual process has done nothing except to hasten the undermining of people's agricultural livelihoods. Many people have left farming and herding altogether, recognizing that the returns from these activities are not enough to justify their costs of time, energy, and capital. There is no support from the state in terms of subsidies, access to credit, and no protection from international competition (Ould Mey 209). As mentioned in the previous chapter, many rice-farming communities accuse the state of mismanaging the time-sensitive aspects of the production cycle, such as irrigation control, which leads to crop failure. The loss of a season's crop does not exempt these community's farmers from paying the costs of incompetently
managed services. This situation is becoming intolerable for these communities, and provides a strong source of resentment against the state for this kind of treatment.

Similar sentiments pervade the pastoral dimension of economic activity in the Fuuta. Disagreements surrounding the management and coexistence of pastoral and agricultural activity sparked the violence of 1989, and the management of this coexistence remains a point of tension, especially between Bidhane camel herders and Fuuta farmers. Pastoral codes favor the camel owners, who have the advantage in that they do not need to remain with their animals all the time, but can let them roam freely to graze the countryside. As one farmer from Lubudu Barrigaal described, communities cannot do anything about a camel until it causes crop damage.

*Te laamu wiy woni e dossierji haa laakira kala*  The government says in its laws, any time you see a camel, do not hold it. A cow can be held, a goat can be held, a donkey can be held, a camel though, leave it, do not hold it. Even if you see it going, leave it, it belongs in the countryside.  [Camels] move at night and move during the day, they do not stop.

If a community incarcerates an animal, it must feed it at their own expense until the owner comes to claim it.

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154 Cf. 139-150.
If a camel destroys fields, we can hold it. If we hold it, and if we tell [the authorities] we are holding it, they say to take care of it until we see its owner. A hundred years [could pass], and you would not see the owner until the day it dies. If it dies, tomorrow, the owner will come, will tell you he is coming, that he owns it. You complain [to him] that your crops are destroyed, [he] comes and complains that his camel is dead. You pay for the camel, maybe four hundred, three hundred fifty, six hundred thousand [anywhere between $1250-$2150], until it is no longer profitable to farm.

While this farmer is exaggerating to some degree in his account, the point that he is trying to get across is that Fuuta communities feel that they do not receive fair treatment at the hands of the law in these matters. In their eyes, the authorities will settle any dispute in the favor of a Bidhane individual and show indifference to the harm that Fuuta communities incur.

Beyond the lack of trust in authorities, Fuuta pastoralists also face disadvantages when it comes to adapting herding practices. They have not been able to mobilize modernized and technological means to improve their herding practices the way that Bidhane herders have. Well-off Bidhane have taken to using semi trucks to transport animals over long distances between grazing sites, conserving the energy of both the herders and the animals. They have also constructed forages throughout the pastureland to exploit groundwater resources for watering herds. Groundwater also tends to be a safer source of drinking water for the animals, reducing the risk of disease and parasites that...
comes with drinking surface water. And finally, the establishment of private grazing enclosures in the Fuuta by wealthy Bidhane individuals for the exclusive use of their own herds serves to further demoralize Fuuta herders, particularly given the physical arduousness of moving their herds over long distances in seek of pasture along with the bureaucratic red tape they must wade through in order to take their herds across the border, to Senegal or to Mali. Once again, Black Mauritanians sense that their marginal status creates issues for them as they must submit themselves to official scrutiny at the border. Customs officials are notorious for making trouble for those who wish to cross unless they pay a bribe.

The fact of the border with Senegal which divides up a territory that had been strongly unified has exerted enormous pressure on Fuutankobe since independence, particularly when it comes to movement. On the Mauritanian side, this pressure is combined with the pressure of large numbers of Haratin moving into the region. The Haratin who settle in pre-existing villages are establishing their own separate communities. Many Halpulaar now find themselves as a local minority and face altered social and administrative dynamics within the community. Sometimes these newly split communities are able to cooperate for the benefit of everyone. For example, the village of Lubudu Barrigaal was able to work with the neighboring Haratin village to establish a primary school that serves children from both communities. These two villages on their own are too small and remote for the government to provide separate school staff for each community. With this shared community investment, relations between the two villages are fairly cordial, as one elder from Lubudu Barrigaal hinted to me through this anecdote.
But often, it is not so easy for communities that contain more than one ethnic group to cooperate effectively. In the village of Cuuci, near the town of Lexeiba, the Haratin segment of the community has taken control over the village cooperative and used its officially-sanctioned status to solicit resources from the state while excluding the Pulaar families from sharing in these resources. These latter have formed their own cooperative through which to supplicate the government for aid. As one man told me:

There is not a form of request that we have not tried, but we have never received [any help]. I can tell you that this one well that we have, even this, we dug it with our own resources. Even if [someone] only has one goat, [he or she] needs to sell it and contribute the profits . . . We made this well with our hands. Some hauled the dirt out [of the hole], some did the digging.

Not only did the state not contribute to the digging and construction of the village well, which is the only nearby water source for the community, they actively hindered the project, claiming that the villagers did not have the right to dig a well in that particular location. For the Pulaar speakers of this village, the perception is that the government will not assist them in community development and would rather see them disappear, leaving the land to the Haratin.

_Citizenship Blues_

One statement that I would hear frequently during my interviews was “ɓaleejo ko kodo e nder leydi mum,” which roughly translates to “a black person is a stranger/guest in [his or her] own country.” This phrase is a very apt and profound expression of the
different forms of marginality that Pulaar speakers experience in their everyday lives in Mauritania. While the concept behind the term kodo carries largely positive connotations in Fuuta communities, the honor goes to the hosts who demonstrate their benevolence and hospitality by providing for the well-being of an individual from outside the household or community. To be a kodo in one's own country implies a lack of control over the conditions in which one lives and a lack of power to make decisions regarding those conditions. If schools and healthcare facilities fail to provide anything close to quality services for Fuuta communities, there is little that these communities feel they can do to take matters in their own hands. Thus, from the perspective of people who live there, underdevelopment in Fuuta communities stems in part from this lack of agency and their marginal position with respect to the planning, funding, and direction of development activities.

However, the phrase “ɓaleejo ko kodo e nder leydi mum” conveys a critique of Mauritania's social hierarchy, specifically the racial aspects of that hierarchy. The use of the term ɓaleejo creates a degree of ambiguity as to whom the speaker is referring, but the term is overtly racial in its meaning. As the Pulaar word for “black person,” a speaker might use it to refer collectively to Mauritania's Pulaar, Soninke, Wolof, and Bambara speakers, as well as any foreigners from Subsaharan Africa. Other times, a speaker may restrict its meaning to just Pulaar speakers, while at others, the term could encompass the Haratin community (although often attached to the Pulaar word for “Moor,” i.e. capaato ɓaleejo). In this more inclusive sense, ɓaleejo would apply to a clear majority of
Mauritanian citizens who face exclusion from power within the country's state-society framework.

For those who live in the Fuuta, there is also the threat of exclusion from the right to exist within the bounds of the national territory of the country. This would also apply to residents of the Cinquième (Sebkha) and Sixième (El Mina) districts of Nouakchott that have a reputation as the African quarters of the city. To say a black person is a stranger in Mauritania evokes the history of conflict and the painful memories of the violent persecution experienced by Fuutankobe at the hands of the state. The statement, then, is also an acknowledgement of the discourses of autochthony that pervade discussions and debates throughout Mauritanian society. Whenever social unrest heats up, authorities are quick to blame any trouble on les étrangers who do not belong in Mauritania anyway. Fuutankobe hear such accusations and their minds immediately turn to the events of the late 1980s when the state made the same claims against them and drove thousands of people in the region out of their communities. It is quite striking that the movement that emerged among Black Mauritanians in response to the 2011 census enrollment and the allegations of racism surrounding it took the slogan “Ne Touche Pas Ma Nationalité” as its name and battle cry. Mauritania's social dilemmas are not reducible to the issue of race and ethnicity, but the problems and tensions tend to reinforce these divisions, pitting the different groups against each other.

In May 2011, the government initiated a census enrollment along with an update and standardization of national identity cards, which all citizens need to travel, to get

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155 There has been a degree of self-segregation in residency patterns in Nouakchott, particularly in the aftermath of the "events" of 1989.
jobs, and to get access to social services. From the start, Black Mauritanians feared this process as an attempt for the government to deprive them of their citizenship. Many reports circulated saying that Blacks faced suspicions from census workers and officials regarding the validity of their national origins and had to prove their knowledge of the country in order to allay such suspicions (Carayol). In response, a protest movement coalesced against the census – calling itself “Ne Touch Pas Ma Nationalité” – with demonstrations and rioting occurring in September of 2011. State media reports that foreigners were responsible for the violent nature of these protests did little to assuage the concerns of Black Mauritanians, considering that the same pretense was used to expel people from the country during the violence of the late 1980s. It seemed for a time that history was replaying itself and that racial conflict would be inevitable. However, such flash points reveal more than just racial/ethnic animosities; moments of volatile unrest point strongly to the broad and general dissatisfaction that Mauritanian citizens have concerning the status quo of their lives and the absence of development within their communities.

**Educational Concerns**

Frustration among Fuuta residents is particularly palpable in the realm of social services, with an extremely substandard quality of education and healthcare being the norm throughout the region. The state is in charge of delivering these services, and the poor results that people see in their communities adds to the list of grievances that they hold against their own government. The failure of education to create opportunities for
Fuutankoɓe has been especially galling. With many Fuutankoɓe leaving farming and herding, education is supposed to lay the groundwork for newsways for communities of the region to secure their economic livelihoods. The truth of the matter, though, is that the quality of education that the state provides in the Fuuta is abysmal. In fact, it is quite shocking to observe the impossible conditions in which Fuuta children attend school when education is supposed to be the strategy by which individuals and communities can break the cycles of poverty and underdevelopment.

On-the-ground realities notwithstanding, there is no shortage of rhetoric within the development community concerning the importance of education. It is practically gospel among all those involved in development that gaining knowledge through education is the foundation for a brighter future. Many people with whom I spoke shared the same contention with me, underlining the fundamental importance of knowledge and education. The village chief of Abbaye, responding to my question of what development means, said “Yelitaare kam miin e yiyende am, ko aadi fof ko gandal” (“Development, for me in my opinion, the first thing is knowledge”). Similarly, a man from Thiede told me “D'abord ko jaŋde, sa jaŋaani tan, a andaa....sa andi, yelito-daa, sa andi a arti” (“First is education; if you have no education, you don't know [anything]. If you know, you will develop; if you know, you will arrive”). A retired school director from Sinthiane Diakary said:
It is necessary for people to become educated so that they can have knowledge and be able to perform work that will bring them benefit. If a person can do this, he or she can bring about development; if a person cannot [do this], if he or she is uneducated, does not know how to work, this person will not be able to gain anything.

In my interview with Gelengthal Ba, he compared knowledge to the sweetness of a mango:

If a mango exists, if knowledge exists, if intelligence exists, it is good. Perhaps this is what makes development important: the importance of development is that you know when you are informed and when you are uninformed. You, to have knowledge is different than ignorance . . . to have education . . . to be someone who has culture is different than one who does not have culture.

Completing this thought, he adds:

Thus, what makes development good is that knowledge is good, what makes development good is that governance is good, what makes development good is that growth is good . . . If you have risen from where you were, you arrive at a higher place.

Many more people echoed these sentiments, briefly or at length, to the point where it is clear that Fuuta communities welcome development efforts that target education as a
means of increasing knowledge through which new *peeje* (strategies) might emerge to address the problems they face in maintaining or improving their livelihoods.

The importance of education to community development is one of the more prominent themes of contemporary expressive culture of Fuuta communities, especially among musicians. The lyrics of the popular song “*Ngendi Men*” (“Our Nation/Society”) by the hip-hop group *Ngal Poulal* portray education as a bridge that should connect the past and future of the Fuuta while preserving a strong sense of cultural identity. While the group's members live and work in Nouakchott, *Ngal Poulal* frequently tours throughout the Fuuta giving performances that draw rousing enthusiasm from the communities, especially from the youth. I visited Seyenne after one such performance, and children of ten, eight, or younger were eager to talk about it and share their excitement. Later on, in September 2012, the group returned to Seyenne as part of a cultural celebration day that included musical performances, dancing, poetry, and sheep races. Education and development came up again and again as prominent themes throughout the singing and the poetry. Young people from the community, dressed in traditional-style clothing, recited poems that affirmed the strengthening of knowledge as the foundation for future prosperity (*Cridem*). The affect involved in such performances underscores the notion that Fuuta communities look at education (*ajannde*) as an integral part of their cultural strength rather than a new concept arising from the processes of modernization.

156 This phenomenon is certainly not unique to the Fuuta, and one can observe it in the works of artists, musicians, and writers throughout West Africa. One of the most popular songs when I studied abroad in Mali in 2001 was Oumou Sangare's “*Maladon*,” which extolled the virtues of education and how crucial it was to bringing about a better future.
But despite the rhetoric concerning education and its fundamental role in development, the reality is that Mauritania's education system is not bearing tangible fruit in Fuuta communities. On the ground one finds the deck stacked firmly against the children in rural communities. First off, there is the horrible quality of school facilities. Most school buildings in the Fuuta are rudimentary concrete and metal roof structures that essentially become ovens throughout the midday heat. If temperatures in the sun approach 120 degrees Fahrenheit, it is likely that the temperature inside the classroom might reach 150 degrees. The discomfort increases with the number of bodies that cram into each classroom. It is also usually the case that the number of students in a given classroom exceeds the number of seats available, forcing many children to sit on makeshift plastic mats on the floor. With such conditions, students face enormous physical obstacles in focusing on the lessons.

Another part of the deplorable state of education in Fuuta communities is the insufficient number of teachers. Often, one teacher is responsible for a hundred students or more. The state assigns teachers to schools based on their determination of how many teachers each school needs. The number of actual teachers who show up to a community to teach for a year is not enough to meet the need. The community of Mafondou, for example, should have six teachers for their primary school. During the 2011-2012 school year, there were only three teachers. In Seyenne, there are two teachers responsible for all six primary levels of students. In Cuuci, only one teacher came to the village that year, when the state had determined that their school needed three teachers.
Even with the teachers that do show up in communities to teach, there are often problems with those individuals staying put during the school year. The majority of Mauritania's teachers are not working in their home communities, meaning that they are outsiders. The state does not always match the ethnicity of the teacher with their assigned school. The idea is to develop a stronger sense of unity across ethnic lines, but it often backfires in practice. If teachers do not feel welcome or comfortable in the community where they teach, then they are apt to go away for long weekends. One of Mafondou's three teachers was a Bidhane woman from Lexeiba. It was not unusual for her to go home on Thursday morning (the last day of the school week) and not come back to Mafondou until Sunday evening or Monday morning. Instead of a five day week, the students only get three days of classes. The situation was the same in Seyenne in 2012. One of the teachers was a Bidhane man, and many of the schoolchildren mocked him and complained about him to their parents. One mother expressed her frustration about his tendency to take four day weekends.

The reasons for this alarming and depressing state of affairs are complex, and the Mauritanian state is not completely to blame. One older man from Dorel, a fishing community along the river west of Boghé, noted that structural adjustments weakened the government's role in social service sectors. He said:
Politique maɓɓe ine yahrata ni, Banque Mondiale e Fond Monetaire e tan wiyde laamu ya ittu juude mumen e huunde fof, fof yo wontu e hands off everything, to leave everything to the juude yimbe . . . gila ḅum waadi, miinen ko ḅum cadelle mehe ḅum addani miin. Haydara moyyaani e golle Banque Mondiale e Fond Monetaire International, waadaaka barka. . . . Their politics have gone like this, the World Bank and IMF told the government to take their hands off everything, to leave everything to the people [i.e. the private sector] . . . since this time, we've had nothing but problems. Nothing good has come from the work of the World Bank and IMF, it has not benefited us.

But even though people acknowledge that the government's hands have been tied in providing services, Fuutankoɓe feel that the state has done significant harm on their own in the domain of education.

The most contentious aspect for Fuuta communities concerning Mauritania's education system is the language of instruction. Officially, there have been several approaches since independence concerning language and education. The objective of the state has been to replace French-based instruction with a curriculum that uses Arabic exclusively. This has been the case for Hassaniya-speaking communities, which brings their educational experience more in line with that of other Arab countries. While speaking the local dialect at home and in the community, students learn Modern Standard Arabic in school.\textsuperscript{157} French, however, continues to play a significant role in education and instruction, especially in Fuuta communities. Part of the reason for the use of French in Fuuta schools has been the fact that a written tradition in Pulaar has been slow to develop and has yet to achieve standardization. As recent efforts to make Pulaar (as well as Wolof and Soninke) a written language have employed Latin alphabet characters, the use of

\textsuperscript{157} Meanwhile, religious schools base their curricula on Quranic Arabic.
French was supposed to be merely a stepping stone for transitioning to the use of these national languages in education (Ndiaye, personal interview). But despite the practical intentions of this approach, the biggest problem is that Fuuta schoolchildren do not begin learning French – or Arabic, for that matter\textsuperscript{158} – until they begin attending school. Therefore, they have to learn two new languages before they can even really grasp any of the basic subjects of the curriculum like math, science, history, and geography.

The *Institute pour les Langues Nationales* (INL) was one of the rare times when the Mauritanian state attempted to address the language concerns of non-Hassaniya speaking communities in the domain of education. The idea was to transition into the use of French and Arabic as instructional languages as students moved through primary school grades. Schools could use local languages to teach core subjects, with the goal of building proficiency in French and Arabic as students progress. By the time students reached secondary school, they would be prepared to handle an exclusively French and/or Arabic curriculum. As part of this reform, intellectuals and educators worked to develop the abstract and conceptual terminology in Pulaar, Wolof, and Soninke that teachers would need for instruction in these languages. Ndiaye Seydou was one of those taking part in this project, and he described to me how the bulk of this terminology derived from rather common words that already existed in Pulaar (personal interview).\textsuperscript{159} Another aim of the INL was to give students the chance to learn one of the four national languages other than their mother tongue. Pulaar-speaking students, for example, could study

\textsuperscript{158} Aside from Quranic instruction.

\textsuperscript{159} An example from geometry was the concept of a square. The INL researchers coined the term “naaykibal,” from *naay* (four) *kibal* (side) (Ndiaye, personal interview). As this is a compound term, its meaning would be self-evident to even the youngest Pulaar speakers.
Soninke, while Hassaniya-speaking students could study Wolof. With the potential of this strategy, it may have been possible to foster a stronger sense of national unity, a sense of Mauritania that includes, recognizes, and promotes all of its distinct cultural groups (Ndiaye, personal interview). However, as political winds shifted at the upper levels of Mauritania's administration, the INL never had a chance to fully implement its reforms. The state quickly abandoned its support for the institute and its work, and since that time there has not been any serious efforts to revive it.

On the ground in Fuuta communities, frustration and pessimism are boiling over with respect to the quality of education in their schools. Some suggest that Fuuta communities should step up in the absence of state support to hire their own teachers and provide students with books and school supplies. Abdoulaye Toure was one of the few I encountered who felt that communities could take matters into their own hands when it comes to education. As others voiced their complaints regarding the local school, he suggested that they could tap existing financial resources\(^{160}\) to pay the salary of a teacher directly. This suggestion, though, implies a privatization of education, stepping into the void left by the state. In the eyes of many Mauritanians, state-run schools are hopeless, and the state's failure to deliver quality education is contributing to greater degrees of social inequality. Fuutankoɓe watch with resentment as members of the country's elite enroll their children in Nouakchott's top private schools or send them abroad to receive better education.

\(^{160}\) Such as school building funds or dues from the Parent Teacher Association.
During my visit to the community of Abbaye – a small village in the dieri 12 km north of Boghé – the president of the women's cooperative gave as clear and strong a condemnation of the state of affairs with respect to education in Mauritania as I heard at any point in my community interviews. She had sat listening throughout most of my interview as the village chief patiently and circumspectly answered my inquiries, interjecting from time to time to widen the scope of the discussion. Finally, she could not hold herself back and took charge of the proceedings, speaking off the cuff concerning her frustrations, stating the obvious for the benefit of an interested and sympathetic outsider:

We, all of us, go to school to educate our children, but there is no teacher there now. They all teach in private schools; the elite send their children there to educate them and build beautiful buildings. Our buildings now are here, when it rains in the rainy season, they leak until it ruins the building completely, there is nothing here where we are (laughter) . . . The Bidhane there have ten buildings, they should give us some of them...And education, everyone goes to school until they are worn out, nothing is gained except for those who are able to go abroad. Right now the strongest Pulaar children are [abroad] pursuing their education until they finish. But even if you go to school and finish and come back to the country, you [still] will not get the position that you ought to get.
After a few minutes of this, the chief, an elderly man of seventy, suggested that she tone down her rhetoric as I might happen to be working with the government. When I responded that I was not with the government, she continued on, emboldened, even making fun of the chief a little bit for his declining health:

_Ay, o naani naan do dojjaa jooni kañum yehi toon laamu alaa hay ko safrori wonde, becce ine muusa . . . Kanko chef du village o alaa hayko o alaa haydara. Suudu naani, alaa baffal, alaa baril, bingel maako naan do yaha ekol wona toon haa tampa taw jañaani arta, a tampi, arta, leelo, yehi haa daañi bac, haydara heñaani, so wonaa ine joojib haydara jañaani jooni. Miinen jooni cadelle bonde bonde bonde miin ngondi, ada andi wonaa majjere maa tawde muritani kam baleejo tan itanaaka heen gedal, alaa heen gedal haydara._

Yes, him [sitting] right here [the chief] coughing now, he went to the government and they had no medicine to help him, his chest is hurting . . . Him, the village chief has absolutely nothing. His house is here, there is no door, no barrels, his daughter is here, she goes to school and stays there all day until she is tired; meanwhile they have no teacher, she comes back, she is tired, she comes back and lays down, goes until she receives her Bac, but she still will not get anything. And if she does not go to school, she will sit and get nothing. For us now, we have big, big, big problems. You know that it is not [a matter of] ignorance; you find in Mauritania that black people are not given anything and they have nothing.

Her troubling words convey the belief that education is primarily a benefit to the rich that does nothing for the poor but add to their burdens. The majority of rural-based Fuuta children seem to give up on school sooner rather than later. In some communities, it is a rare or unheard of thing to have a student finish primary school and move on to secondary school.
Health Concerns

Similar sentiments pervade the domain of public health, with Fuuta communities feeling sorely neglected by government health services. Again, Ndiaye Seydou's words strike a sharp chord concerning the plight of Fuuta residents:

*Baasal cellal*  
Poverty of health

*Naata e mawbe saka sukaaɓe yéeewe*  
[Ill health] afflicts the adults and their children

*Wonaa ledde, wonaa kabirde*  
have no one to look after them

*Hay kabirde so wodi ko maa cooda*  
There is no medicine, no supplies

*Te mambuuli nana coori e nder gure.*  
Even if there are supplies you have to buy them

All the while, disease spreads through the community.

With the absence of even minimal healthcare, illness and disease runs rampant. Many rural communities have no health facilities whatsoever and must travel significant distances to access the nearest clinic. If a village does happen to have a clinic, the facility is, as a rule, understaffed and undersupplied. Oftentimes, such rural clinics do not have the capacity to treat the majority of the ailments for which residents seek medical help. Furthermore, the medications that rural clinics do have on hand are often expired or otherwise ineffective.¹⁶¹

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¹⁶¹ A young man from Agriis, near Lexeiba, suggested that pharmacists feel that they can sell expired medication in villages because of the high rates of illiteracy: “Yimɓe fuutankɓe, eɓe njogi cadelle; woon noon feccere heen njiyattaa mbinde. Jomum daraata tan ko yo marchandise yah, ko commercial tan hankadi natti yéeewe ko yo marchandise mum yahataa, ndooke düm ko date mum gaasi walla ko alaa efficacite.”†

† “Fuutankɓe, they have problems; half of them cannot see writing. For the pharmacy, they just want to move their merchandise, they are a retail business that tries to sell and get rid of its merchandise. [So] they will give them [medications] that are past their expiration date or that do not work.”

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Without sufficient local facilities, Fuutankobe with healthcare needs often must travel to the larger towns – Kaédi, Lexeiba, Boghé, Bababé – which can be upwards of 35-40 km. The transportation costs of such journeys are not negligible to many villagers, nor is transportation readily available in the event of health emergencies. For villages with no paved road access, such as Mafondou, Dalhaya, and Sinthiane, transport vehicles travel to Kaédi once a day, taking an hour and a half to two hours to make the trip on rough dirt-track roads. During the rainy season, some communities find themselves unable to reach any town because the floods cut off the vehicle routes. However, even if they can make it to a hospital to see a doctor, they still must find the money to purchase the prescription, which may or may not be effective. For many people, there is nowhere in the Fuuta for them to go to get the healthcare they need. For this reason, people with serious and chronic health issues travel to Nouakchott or Dakar to seek treatment. This requires even greater expense and no guarantee that they will be able to see a qualified health worker or afford any recommended treatment.

In the midst of these desperate concerns surrounding healthcare access, Fuutankobe see the Mauritanian state as culpable in its absence. People feel that the state should play a leading role in providing both healthcare and education. As a village leader from Sinthiane put it, Western NGOs can assist in the construction of quality facilities, but it is up to the national government to make sure such facilities are up and running with adequate staff and resources. What good is a school building with no teachers or a clinic with no doctor? How much can just one or two teachers do in a community that needs ten? Everywhere, one hears the refrain, “laamu ligaaki fuuta” (“the state does
nothing for Fuuta”). Politicians only appear during election campaigns, when candidates come to communities with great fanfare handing out money to entice locals to vote for them. Villagers will take the money, but there are no illusions concerning the promises these candidates make.

With the preceding characterization of the economic and social underdevelopment of the Fuuta region as people who live there see it, the major takeaway is that the people who live there have the sense that their lives have gotten worse and more difficult over recent decades, not better. The various challenges that have plagued agricultural and pastoral activities, the failure to deliver quality education or healthcare to Fuuta communities, the lack of industrial or export-oriented activities in the region, and the monetization of socioeconomic life have combined to put the squeeze on households and communities, robbing people of hope and optimism that life will get better. Their sociopolitical marginality in Mauritania also compounds the difficulty of their situation, as Black Mauritanians face undue scrutiny on a daily basis to prove the validity of their citizenship, while their absence from the highest levels of the national political elite limits their access to the economic advantages that have come through this elite's comprador position. If one were to sum up Fuuta residents' perspective on their relationship with the state, it would be that the state may at best provide a few crumbs with one hand while using the other to extract whatever it can. The question on people's minds is whether or not there is a way out of this situation that does not involve fighting. They tried this option in the 1980s, and it failed miserably. But given the desperation of people's

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162 See Reyna (348-349).
circumstances, the possibility of renewed conflict looms large over the region and the country as a whole.

Lessons from the Past: Identity and Conflict

If I wake up one morning, and you see me, would you think that I am Arab? If you met me, would you think that I am Arab? Then, how could I wake up one morning saying to myself that I have become an Arab...would that be possible? If I agreed, then I would be nothing more than their donkey, and if I refuse, then it's war.

The question of cultural identity continues to trouble Mauritanian society and complicate the economic and social development of the country. The preceding quote from my interview with Gelongal Ba illustrates the dilemma that Black Mauritanians face concerning the state's continuous efforts to Arabize society and to equate Mauritanian identity with an Arab one. The pull of national identity is not strong enough to outweigh the different cultural identities that the various segments of the population adopt. The fact that these identities are in competition with each other gives rise to the fears that interracial or interethnic conflict could break out at any time. As the state pursues closer political and cultural ties with the Arab world, Mauritania's non-Arab citizens cannot help but feel left out of the national community. Arabization drives a wedge between the
Bidhane and (some) Haratin on one hand and the Pulaar, Soninke, Wolof groups on the other. The way these latter groups see it, the state is asking them to forgo their own cultures and languages for an identity they cannot rightfully claim. Fuutankobé feel, as Gelongal's quote expresses, that they are caught between the choice of sacrificing their dignity or fighting to preserve it.

The conflict of 1989 is the watershed moment that tarnishes the past, the present, and threatens to destroy the future for Fuutankobé. That episode of Mauritanian history casts a grim shadow over the entire national society, many of whom lived through the experience and remember it vividly. While bitterness lingers along with mutual recriminations, analysis of the conflict has yielded a complex array of factors and circumstances that gave rise to the violence of the period. From the surface, the conflict initially appears as a cut and dried racial conflict, with Moors and Black Africans looking to settle ancient scores with one another and assert dominance within their respective nations. However, those who have examined the concert of events that played out leading up to the outbreak of violence in the Senegal River Valley have noted the interplay of a host of issues, especially questions of sovereignty for both the Mauritanian and Senegalese states as well as development policy decisions taken by international entities (Ould Mey 236-237, Leservoisier 221-222). It is instructive then, to briefly recount the factors leading up to the conflict, how the conflict played out, and the aftermath which saw the state reverse course on a number of economic, political, and social fronts even while it consolidated its power over Mauritanian society. It is this very history that
heavily contributes to the fear and cynicism that Fuutankobe express today concerning local development.

The first half of the 1980s was a politically volatile time for Mauritania with frequent changes in leadership. This period came to an end in 1984 when Colonel Ma‘ouïya Sidi Ahmed Ould Ta‘ya came to power in a military coup and was able to stabilize the presidency. The following year, the Mauritanian government undertook a series of structural adjustment policies, as part of an agreement with the IMF, in an attempt to bolster the development of existing economic sectors (Seddon 204). As was the case elsewhere under IMF-mandated structural adjustments, the population experienced tremendous pressures from the cuts in public services, despite the Social Dimensions of Adjustment\textsuperscript{163} program which was supposed to lighten the burden of these cuts. As Seddon writes, “For Mauritanian's (sic), the economic reforms meant wage freezes, job losses (especially in the public sector), higher energy and utility charges, and increases in the cost of living linked to devaluation and the phasing out of subsidies (205).” While these painful effects of structural adjustments hit the urban population most severely, rural areas began to experience profound transformation through the liberalization of land tenure. This process favored the country's economic elite, allowing them access to the agricultural lands of the river valley (Leservoisier 175; Seddon 205; Ciavolella 2012, 8).

The results of all these changes served to frustrate and alarm Black Mauritians. It appeared to them that the state was on one hand undermining their local autonomy,

\textsuperscript{163} This program was provided by the World Bank, African Development Bank, and the UN Development Program (Seddon 205).
while on the other hand excluding them from the economic and social advantages enjoyed by the country's elite (Ciavolella 2012, 9). To make matters worse in their eyes was the fact that Ould Taya pursued a policy of Arabization in earnest (Marchesin 216) while becoming close allies with Iraq's Saddam Hussein towards the end of the decade.\textsuperscript{164}

By this time, frustrations within the Black African community had boiled over into open resentment.

In 1986, a group of Black dissidents, calling themselves the \textit{Front de Libération des Africains Mauritaniens}, or FLAM, published a manifesto, saying that the Mauritanian state pursued a racist agenda against its Black communities that amounted to a policy of apartheid (Marchesin 211, Ould Mey 235). The document described how Black Mauritanians faced discrimination in all aspects of public life, in government, the judiciary, the military, the economy, the media, the education system (Human Rights Watch 103).\textsuperscript{165} The recommendation of FLAM's manifesto was to oust the government, dismantle the political system, and reconstitute it in a manner that equitably addressed the needs and interests of Mauritania's different groups.

Ould Ta'ya reacted quickly and decisively to this manifesto, arresting prominent Black Mauritanians – academics, civil servants, journalists, and intellectuals – who were suspected of involvement with FLAM (Seddon 206). Ibrahima Sarr, who was a television journalist at the time, was among those arrested and tortured, enduring four years in three

\textsuperscript{164} The Mauritanian Baath party was the main vehicle for Iraqi support. Despite Mauritania's official status as an Islamic Republic, the largely secular Baath party maintained a high profile in Mauritanian politics throughout the 1980s (Ould Mey 234).

\textsuperscript{165} Black Mauritanians today continue to express this grievance of exclusion from positions of power and influence (see below).
different prisons (Sarr personal interview). Several of these intellectuals died in prison
due to malnourishment and alleged mistreatment and the overall unsanitary conditions of
the prison facilities (Amnesty International 23-25). Among those who died in prison were
Tene Yusuf Gueye, a writer and former diplomat, and Djigo Tafsiru, one of the leading
agricultural development experts in the country (Ba, personal interview).

In 1987, an alleged plot by three Black military officers to overthrow the
government came to light, prompting a number of purges, this time targeting Blacks
within the army. The wives of the accused were also subject to arrest and deportation
(Amnesty International 26). The Amnesty International report that chronicles the events
of the period summarizes the mass arrests during this period as “outside the framework of
Mauritanian law” (29). With tension mounting, Black Mauritanians were starting to fear
that the state was preparing to eliminate them. Protests in response to the execution of the
alleged coup plotters led to further repression (Seddon 206). Rumors circulated that
Saddam Hussein had suggested to Ma‘ouïya that he should eradicate the non-Arab
portions of the population. Whether or not there was any truth to such rumors, Fuuta
communities felt a clear sense of mistrust and antagonism vis-a-vis the state during the
years of violence. For the state's part, Ould Ta‘ya's regime accused both FLAM and the
coup plotters to be acting through foreign interests, particularly French and Senegalese.

The fears regarding racial/ethnic conflict took shape when violence broke out
along the river in April 1989, as political repression gave way to mob violence. The spark
to this violence was a dispute between Pulaar Mauritanian herders and Soninke
Senegalese farmers in a village on an island in the Senegal River. This dispute attracted
the involvement of Mauritanian authorities, and two Senegalese were left dead from the incident (Human Rights Watch 11). News of this incident spread to Dakar, setting off anti-Mauritanian riots and mob violence directed against the Bidhane community and their businesses in Senegal. A few days later, Mauritanian urban areas erupted, as mobs comprised primarily of Haratin roamed around targeting anyone suspected of being Senegalese. With the rapid pace and strong emotion of these events, many non-Senegalese Blacks were caught up in the violence, including many Mauritanians from the south (Human Rights Watch 13-14). The fact that in Mauritania it was primarily Haratin groups who carried out attacks complicates the racial dimension to the conflict. The Haratin have their own history and consciousnesses of oppression and exploitation at the hands of the Bidhane community, primarily through the deeply ingrained practices of slavery. However, they sided with the Bidhane during this conflict and carried out much of the dirty work, both in the initial riots as well as the following years when the river valley turned into a militarized zone.

As rioting in the two countries continued for several days in late April, the respective governments leveled accusations of responsibility against each other while closing the border between them and cutting off diplomatic relations. The international community observed the escalation of violence with alarm, with regional governments and France and Spain leading the way to head off full-scale war. These governments helped to organize an airlift to transport stranded immigrant populations in the respective countries – Mauritanians living in Senegal were able to return to Mauritania and vice versa. Yet, while a significant number of individuals were able to take advantage of this
and other facilitated repatriation efforts,\textsuperscript{166} these measures to quell the unrest helped to bolster the view of some who viewed the result of this period of violence as a return to a 'natural' order in which Senegal is a Black country and Mauritania an Arab country. With such an understanding, even though it may have been largely tacit, the Mauritanian government and its security forces continued to target Black communities in the river valley for the next three years, confiscating the land and bringing in large numbers of Haratin to farm it.

Given the autonomy with which Fuuta communities lived for much of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s shook their social foundations to the core. This was the first time that many such communities had to confront the realities and dynamics of postcolonialism. It would no longer be possible to escape the authority of a centralized state, as they had been able to during the colonial and precolonial eras. The lądde no longer afforded the protection from taxation, land claims, and other forms of subjugation to the state apparatus (Ciavolella 2012, 9). The river valley, which had been the center of social and economic activity in the region, became a disruptive barrier, reconstituting notions of belonging and identity on either side. While crossing the Senegal River may have brought safety to those who fled the violence, it also produced a change in subjective status from citizen to refugee, changing their relationship to the Mauritanian state. Those who remained had to confront the realities and consequences of marginalized citizenship – their choice was death, imprisonment, or poverty.

\textsuperscript{166} It was estimated that 100,000 Mauritanians and 85,000 Senegalese were repatriated through the airlift and other measures (Human Rights Watch 15).
To this day, Fuutankoɓe who lived through these events harbor intense bitterness towards the state as well as the Hassaniya-speaking majority. To an extent, this sentiment extends to Arabs in general, seeing as many associate the processes of Arabization with the efforts to eliminate Black Mauritanians from the national society. In 2004, I was speaking with one former soldier who spent time in prison during the events, and he told me that he wished that he could join up with the US-led coalition forces in Iraq so that he could kill Arabs. In a more recent conversation regarding the plight of the returned refugees, one person shared his opinion with me that there is no way that these people would flee their communities again. They would rather die fighting than become refugees a second time. If there is no action towards defusing the fear and the tension, Mauritania could very well follow the path of Sudan or Somalia with seemingly unending cycles of violence. While the situation has yet to explode, it is clear that there is a lack of trust on all sides, as each group senses that the other will become the aggressor. In the meantime, the Mauritanian state since the crisis of the late 80s/early 90s has followed a much different approach to national development and produced stronger rhetoric concerning national unity. However, as the section that follows illustrates, these new strategies have left the state in a much more powerful position vis-a-vis the Mauritanian citizenry.

Post-conflict Trajectories: State Retrenchment and Grassroots Stagnation

The aftermath of this period of interethnic/interracial conflict saw a dramatic change in course by the Ould Taɣya regime, which began to embrace democratic reform. However, this reversal seemed to be not so much a change in heart by Ould Taɣya, but a
strategy to ensure regime survival. The Mauritanian state found itself increasingly isolated internationally for its condemnation of the US-led invasion of Iraq during the first Gulf War. The threat that Saddam Hussein posed to Saudi Arabia prompted the Saudis to withdraw their support for Ould Taïya's government, while Western governments and donor agencies also cut off aid. Ould Taïya was faced with the prospect of a severe financial crisis and the possibility that such a crisis would provide an opening for a rival to step in and oust him from power. He therefore sought to restore his government's international image and to repair relations with donor countries (Girod and Walters 184-185). He even went as far as to establish diplomatic relations with Israel to convince Western powers, in particular, that he was a trustworthy ally, even though this move was highly unpopular within his own power base. In effect, Ould Taïya was gambling that the chances of prolonging his rule were greater with strong external support rather than with internal support. Under such circumstances, the needs and desires of the population take a back seat, and development is little more than window dressing to bolster the image of the state.

A second round of IMF-mandated structural adjustments in the early 1990s demonstrated Ould Taïya's willingness to follow Western prescriptions concerning the administration of the economic, political, and social dimensions of the country. As was the case previously, this round of structural adjustments prompted widespread popular protest, as Mauritanian citizens suffered through currency devaluation, steep inflation, 167 Mauritanian's official position was active neutrality, condemning both the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as a violation of sovereignty as well as the stationing of coalition forces in Saudi Arabia as aggression against the worldwide Islamic community (Ould Mey 226, Girod and Walters 184).
and extensive job cuts, particularly in the public service sector (Seddon 209). In response to this unrest, the regime endeavored to ameliorate the public suffering through the assumption of responsibility for the pricing of the most basic essential goods (Seddon 211). At the same time, Ould Taʿya dangled promises of democratization and allowed the formation of opposition parties. This process, as many observers have pointed out, seemed to be heavily stage-managed; the aim of the regime was to give the appearance of moving toward democracy while maintaining and consolidating its grip on power. As Seddon writes:

> Whether these government moves represent a genuine concern for the welfare of the poor or fear of popular unrest and the potential for conflict within Mauritanian society is debatable. But the government has certainly proved generally able, over the last few years [i.e. the mid 1990s], to respond to certain pressures from below and to manage a degree of glasnost without releasing its control over the economic reform programme and the political process (212).

The adeptness of Ould Taʿya at balancing external commitments and internal pressures allowed him to extend his rule through a second decade, winning presidential elections in 1993, 1998, and 2003, despite concerns over fairness and transparency.

> Meanwhile, communities in the Fuuta struggled to carry on with their existence and the challenges of climate change and underdevelopment. No one from the region had forgotten the violence directed against them in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Despite Ould Taʿya's new direction and rhetoric, people of the south continued to harbor bitterness and resentment towards him and his regime, in particular, and towards Bidhane.
hegemony, in general. While outright ethnic discrimination may have diminished, the processes of marginalization of Fuuta communities continue unabated. Ciavolella identifies how the state can effect marginalization without having to deploy overtly racialized or ethnicized rhetoric: “gaps in the timing of integration to state administration, and in access to education and economic development, have shaped a more profound fracture in Mauritanian society . . . ” (2012, 10). At the same time, the state is able to shift the blame of poverty and underdevelopment onto the marginalized segments of society. It is their supposed resistance to modernization which holds them back from joining in the development of the nation (Ciavollela 2012, 5). The state could therefore ignore its own role in the impoverishment of Fuuta communities while admonishing such communities for seeking handouts from the government. The absence of racialized rhetoric, though, does not mean that people do not perceive the connections between identity and power.

Another military coup finally ousted Ould Ta'ya from power in 2005, but despite the promise of a true democratic transition, old dynamics continue to hold sway. The most prominent presidential candidate for the elections of 2006 and 2009 who was not a

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168 Ould Ta'ya used his 2002 tour through the Fuuta as a platform to enjoin Fuutankoɓe to embrace modernity and put aside their 'anarchic' tendencies (Ciavollella 2012, 5). At this time, I was undergoing Peace Corps training in a small village near Boghé, where it was rumored that the president would stop, greet the crowd, and make a speech. The villagers undertook enormous preparations for this possibility, wanting to ensure that the presidential procession would be well-received if it stopped. With everyone waving Mauritanian flags and holding pictures of Ould Ta'ya's face, the motorcade bypassed the village without stopping. The mood among the villagers quickly turned to disappointment and cynicism. Meanwhile, the town of Bababé, on the main road between Boghé and Kaédi, built an arch over the roadway at the entrance to the community to commemorate the occasion. This structure survived intact for about a year, until a truck overladen with goods and merchandise could not clear the archway.

169 Girod and Walters describe the character of the Mauritanian state as internally coercive yet externally dependent (189). As such, the ruling power has the ability to manipulate its image internationally to try to appeal to various external donors.
Hassaniya speaker, Ibrahima Sarr, gained less than ten percent of the vote (Sarr, personal interview), with virtually no support outside of the Fuuta. The Bidhane continue to hold the overwhelming majority of top administrative, judicial, and security positions within the government, along with control of all the industrial, financial, and media entities (Ba, personal interview). And while the state has made gestures to placate the concerns of the Halpulaar, Soninke, and Wolof segments of the population, questions of race and ethnicity continue to loom large with respect to domestic social harmony. Much of this has to do with the clear racial/ethnic imbalances of power in Mauritania's political, economic, and social spheres. These imbalances continue to fuel the marginality of impoverished communities and strengthen social divisions along racial and ethnic lines. As the frustrations of Fuutankoɓe discussed above convey, they have little reason to hope for help to come from the state. They have to take charge of their own development and make their appeals to international NGOs, or they have to send their sons and daughters abroad to earn income that they could not hope to earn staying at home. With this state of affairs, it is hard for Fuutankoɓe to feel like they are a true part of the national community.

Identity, Sovereignty, and Governance

One of the most intractable challenges for the postcolonial states of Subsaharan Africa has been the coexistence and accommodation of multiple racial, ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic communities within one nation along with their diverse modes of social and economic production. Just a mention of places like Sudan, Rwanda, Congo/Zaire,
Nigeria, and others can haunt the collective conscience of the international community with memories of some of the longest and bloodiest armed conflicts of the late 20th and early 21st centuries while people around the world watched in horror. For some observers, the only explanation is that ethnic, racial, or religious identities foster deep-seated hatred of others who do not share the same identities while trumping any sense of loyalty to the community of the modern nation state. Such an explanation offers a simple and compelling logic for political strife and conflict in Africa, allowing those who reach this conclusion to avoid going into the context and details of each civil war. The obvious problem with this thesis is that identities are not static and draw heavily on notions of history, geography, and political economy that different groups share or contest to different degrees from place to place. As such, it is difficult to generalize the phenomenon of ethnicity across African countries; one must take in the particularities of each nation or even each locality before considering the implications for broader application or for theory. In particular, the role of the state and its oftentimes heavy-handed and uneven efforts to produce a loyal, obedient, and submissive political subjectivity\textsuperscript{170} among its citizens can fuel ethnic divisions, despite the efforts to stamp out such divisions.

Mahmood Mamdani has argued that the prevalent patterns of colonial rule generated internal contradictions in political subject formation across African societies,\textsuperscript{170} In different times and places, states have tried to suppress ethnic identities in favor of a larger national identity (MacDonald 4). Conversely, there have been states that have looked to validate local identities as a strong basis for national identity (Mamdani 25). The vacillation between these two modes embodies a movement between centralized and decentralized despotism, where each new regime looks to reverse the trends that his or her predecessor established (Mamdani 26).
particularly with the politicization of race and ethnicity. According to Mamdani, the primary question for colonial rulers was that of controlling the “indigenous majority” (16). For the colonial powers, indirect rule was a solution by which they could maintain a powerful presence in urban areas, protecting major market interests over a limited geographic area. At the same time, authority in rural settings devolved onto native “customary” officials who comprised local power structures. These power structures remained more or less intact, except that local authorities obtained a greater range of powers (Mamdani 18). From this, a bifurcated state emerged, comprised by foreign and foreign-educated native elites, on one hand, and by local chiefs on the other (Mamdani 22-23). The subjugation to local customary authority put rural populations at a double remove from power while reinforcing ethnically constituted institutions of control. Mamdani writes:

Ethnicity (tribalism) thus came to be simultaneously the form of colonial control over natives and the form of revolt against it. It defined the parameters of both the Native Authority in charge of the local state apparatus and of resistance to it (24).

The dialectical operation of ethnicity in African colonial contexts presented a challenge to the grassroots anticolonial movements. “The revolt from below...carries the seeds of its own fragmentation and possible self-destruction (Mamdani 24).”

Like so many other postcolonial African nations, the issue of ethnicity has haunted Mauritanian society practically from the moment of independence. Each

Mamdani uses the term “decentralized despotism” to describe this power dynamic in rural areas, which revolved around the figure of the chief. “The authority of the chief thus fused in a single person all moments of power: judicial, legislative, executive, and administrative (Mamdani 23).”
successive ruling regime has had enormous difficulties creating a national identity that transcends the other forms of allegiance amongst its citizens. Racial, ethnic, tribal, linguistic, and caste identities permeate Mauritania's society, engendering complicated patterns of division. Even within the ruling Bidhane elite, tribal loyalties have figured largely in the major political transformations and upheavals of the country's history. Whenever there has been a new head of state, Mauritanians have been quick to notice that individual's various affiliations with the expectation that those who share an ethnic or tribal relationship to the new president will enjoy significant economic and social benefits.

On a more local scale, Mauritanians face the challenge of negotiating and mediating the various divisions within their communities, many of which are not readily apparent to outsiders. Family names, for instance, convey information about the social status and occupation of individuals (even if such information does not apply to all individuals bearing the name) and can provide a way by which strangers can establish a basis for interaction. Religion is another marker of difference among Mauritanians, despite the fact that everyone follows and practices Islam. Different Sufi orders hold sway among different segments of the population, while the Muslim Brotherhood claims a large number of adherents among Mauritanians. But despite the dizzying complexity of identity patterns and the loyalties they engender, the most explosive markers of difference in Mauritania's post-independence history have been race and ethnicity. These two factors have frustrated attempts by the state to instill a sense of national loyalty amongst all segments of the citizenry. Furthermore, the tendencies to reduce demographic analysis to
race or ethnicity elide the fluid dynamics of how these factors continue to evolve and reconstitute themselves over time. Following Mamdani, the operation of race and ethnicity in postcolonial African societies proceeds according to specific historical circumstances (25). For Mauritania, the specific form of ethnic/racial contestation has revolved around the notion of Arabization and its consequences for the country's non-Arab citizens.

Mauritania has four major ethnic groups (see Appendix B), each speaking its own language – Hassaniya Arabic, Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof. Of these four, Hassaniya is the most prevalent, spoken by the Bidhane as well as the Haratin, who are former slaves or descendents of slaves. While one is Bidhane or Haratin largely through one's lineage, race and social status are significant factors in the distinction. Haratin are (usually) darker-skinned and have occupied the lowest rung of Bidhane society up to the present day. It is also quite probable that Haratin make up an overwhelming majority of Hassaniya speakers, with certain estimates claiming that Haratin Mauritanians currently outnumber Bidhane Mauritanians approximately two to one. Estimates for the other three ethnic groups together range from 20% of the population to 35%. Of the three, Pulaar speakers are most numerous, followed by the Soninke, then the Wolof. Despite the fact that these groups constitute minorities within Mauritania, there is not much of a sense of unity or camaraderie among them. Hassaniya speakers, though, see little need to differentiate amongst these groups, referring to them collectively as kewri.

172 There is also a significant number of Bambara speakers along the Malian frontier in the southern parts of the Hodh Elgharbi and Hodh Elchargui regions.
When the French gained control of the territory that was to become Mauritania in the late 19th/early 20th century, they did so mainly through agreements with Bidhane nobles and notables. While French were generally content to leave the social hierarchy in place, they did engage in some manipulation of Bidhane tribal dynamics, elevating the standing of their marabout allies (Zawaya) against the formerly dominant warrior caste (Hassan) (Ould Mey 73). This manipulation has had long-term effects as the Zawaya castes have held the majority of the most important positions within the Mauritanian state throughout its short history. Both the Zawaya and Hassan groups claim Arab ancestry, and have preferred an orientation to the Arab world. With the proliferation of racial discourses since independence – especially in the last two decades – the Haratin have asserted their difference more and more forcefully, despite their linguistic and cultural connections to the Bidhane groups. Prominent Haratin activists have agitated for a society-wide reckoning with the legacy of slavery along with strategies for lower-class Haratin to gain access to greater opportunities for social mobility (Okeowo).

Since independence, the Mauritanian state has tried to manage the racial/ethnic/linguistic diversity among the population through different strategies. The first government of Mokhtar Ould Daddah sought to impose an inclusive approach of forging a national identity that embraced the country's racial and ethnic diversity. Mauritania was to be un trait d'union, or hyphen, drawing on a metaphor that the French had used under colonialism with a largely geographic connotation (linking up Algeria with French West Africa). In post-independence rhetoric, though, the term took on a more demographic significance, referring to the fact that the country bridges the transition zone.
between Arab North Africa and Black West Africa. While the head of state and highest administrative positions went to Bidhane individuals, Black Mauritanians filled the majority of civil service positions, owing to their greater level of education and their experience working within the colonial administration (Ould Mey 71). Thus, the use of this *trait d'union* symbol reflected, in part, a pragmatic sentiment by the new government. Mauritania's first leaders recognized the need for qualified individuals to handle bureaucratic affairs, which meant making sure not to alienate such individuals.

External circumstances provided another pragmatic reason for the Mauritanian state to prefer the *trait d'union* concept of embracing both an Arab orientation as well as an African one. During the 1960s, the Arab world rejected the legitimacy of Mauritania's independence, deferring to Morocco's claims of sovereignty over all of the territory of the Western Sahara (Ould Mey 80). Without allies or support in the Arab League, the government of Mokhtar Ould Daddah turned instead towards its southern neighbors and their regional concerns. Mauritania also maintained strong economic links with the other countries that had been part of French West Africa, retaining the CFA franc currency shared by France's former colonies in the region. In order to facilitate the administrative transition from colonialism, French remained as the official language. This was certainly beneficial to those Black Mauritanians who had received French education and had experience in the colonial administration, ensuring that their language skills would be useful in the administration of the independent state.

Despite the inclusive approach of Mauritania's first government, the internal harmony among the various ethnic groups proved difficult to manage. Racial divisions
coalesced and intensified, particularly with the severe droughts that stressed or
overwhelmed the productive capacities of the population. The socialist policies that the
state attempted to implement failed to spur economic development, and those who left the
countryside to escape the drought found very little in the way of economic opportunity in
the country's urban centers. Meanwhile, Ould Daddah consolidated his political position,
banning the political opposition and placing strict controls on the press. After a decade of
independence, relations began to thaw between Mauritania and the Arab World, and by
1973, the country entered the Arab League. In a series of steps on the part of the
Mauritanian state, Arabization of state and society made significant inroads during the
1970s, despite the fact that approximately one-third of the population did not speak
Arabic or self-identify as Arab.

*Development and Political Legitimacy*

From the perspective of the state today, national development is integral to the
legitimation of its rule and authority, as a prosperous citizenry is likely to be a loyal
citizenry that accepts and supports its government. The successive ruling regimes of
Mauritania have been highly aware of the carrot aspect of development as a means of
instilling the loyalty of its citizens while limiting the growth of political opposition.
Mauritania's presidents and ministers waste no opportunity during campaign speeches or
public events to tout their record in this matter, to enumerate their achievements, and to
declare their vision for advancing the cause of development. On television, on the radio,
and at rallies, an inundation of slogans attempts to conjure images a bright future of a
united and prosperous country that is just around the corner, as long as the state is allowed to stay its course. Crowds all over the country respond to this rhetoric cheering, applauding, and waving flags enthusiastically. This is true even in the Fuuta, where attitudes towards the state are clearly negative and carry bitter memories of persecution along with a sense of mistrust and abandonment. When the speeches are over and the hoopla has subsided, Fuutankoɓe vent their frustrations concerning the state and its failure to live up to its rhetoric when it comes to development. With entrenched poverty in their midst and inadequate or absent public services, it is not hard to understand and sympathize with their criticism. The disconnect between official rhetoric and painful reality is clear, and there is little expectation among Fuutankoɓe that things will change for the better anytime soon.

Loving one's country seems natural to many Americans, but in talking to people who live in the Fuuta, it is rare to hear anyone express anything positive about Mauritania. Bitterness is clearly evident whether one is talking about the state, the territory, or the national society. It is almost as if the idea of Mauritania is a bad joke for Fuutankoɓe. Given the memories of recent conflict and the entrenched poverty that people see around them every day in their homes and in their communities, it is perhaps unsurprising that Fuuta residents express negative attitudes about their own country, ranging from disillusionment to outright hostility. The specter of racism frequently rises to the surface with respect to Mauritanian state and society. But even without these troublesome concerns, older Fuutankoɓe claim that they were better off when they were able to live for the most part outside the control of state authority, whether it be the
Mauritanian state or French colonial rule. At the same time, both young and old tend to hold the state as responsible for the region's failure to develop. But laying blame does not do anything to address the lack of development or any other problem they face. Fuutankoɓe know this, but they are nonetheless unsure of whether or not there is a place for them in Mauritania, and if so, do they even want to be a part of the national community. Development may be one of the keys for Fuuta residents and communities to buy into the idea of Mauritania; however, from the state's perspective, this can be easier said than done.

While Mauritania's Pulaar speakers feel like strangers or outcasts within their own country, the Mauritanian nation as a whole has had to grapple with its own marginality in the international sphere. From a regional perspective, Mauritania is basically an afterthought in both the Maghreb (let alone the larger Arab world) and West Africa. Instead of being a bridge to connect Arab North Africa with Black West Africa, the country has been more of a backwater for both regions. Over the years, many Arabs whom I have encountered have admitted to having little knowledge of Mauritania and they often harbor striking misconceptions about the country and its society. There are some who are not even sure if Mauritania is actually part of the Arab world, despite its standing as a full-fledged member of the Arab League. Meanwhile, West Africans will often give a dim view of the country. A Malian university professor in Bamako once told me that many people did not like Mauritania because of the ongoing practice of slavery, with the implication that Malians are sometimes victims of this practice. Negative attitudes and perspectives of Mauritania also extend to many Arab and West African
immigrants living and working in the country. A Lebanese restaurant owner scoffed when
I told her I was researching development in Mauritania. She suggested that she had seen
no development in her fifteen years living there, and that she seemed rather bitter that she
was more or less stuck there.

Such sentiments on the part of individuals may not have much bearing on the
Mauritanian state and its sovereign power, but they point to a climate in which the state is
constantly having to prove itself as a worthy member of the international community.
Whether talking of human rights, democratic governance, or development, the state is
frequently in the position of having to defend its record in these areas. The withdrawal of
Western aid in response to Mauritania's declared neutrality in the 1991 Gulf War seems to
have shown the state that it needs to refrain from running afoul of its international
partners. The country's rulers seem to understand that they are caught between the carrot
and the stick when it comes to pursuing their development objectives (Girod and Walters
190). Thus, the state has reaffirmed its prohibition of slavery and added criminal penalties
for those caught holding individuals as slaves. At the same time, the current regime of
Ould Abdel Aziz has been quick to discredit and silence the grassroots activism that has
sprung up in recent years agitating for the authorities to not turn a blind eye to the actual
persistence of slavery and enforce the laws (Okeowo). The problem, from Ould Abdel
Aziz's perspective, is that those who continue to practice slavery have ties to the ruling
class through kinship and tribal allegiances. The state would risk offending a large
segment of its base by cracking down heavily on slaveowners. Their solution, it seems, is
to have it both ways by proclaiming to the international community that they have fully abolished the practice while trying to keep the issue out of the spotlight.

The returned refugee issue is another case where it seems that the Mauritanian state is eager for positive press and recognition from the international community. As a gesture to heal the wounds from the conflict of the late 1980s/early 1990s, the invitation of welcome to the communities that fled violence and persecution suggests an olive branch of reconciliation and a promise of recompense. This act is also a way for the regime to deflect criticisms associated with racial and ethnic tension, providing signals that non-Arabs have a place and a right to citizenship in Mauritania. Yet, as suggested by the testimony of the chief of one of the returnee communities, the actual engagement of the state has been minimal when it comes to ensuring the establishment of these new communities, their access to jobs and resources, and their legal documentations and proofs of citizenship. When it comes to sorting out all the complex issues of the transition, such as infrastructural development or land-use rights, the state has done very little, as if they had not thought through the logistics of re-establishing these communities.

According to this returnee chief, the state extended an invitation to return, granting them land with which to rebuild their villages. But despite great fanfare on the part of the state marking the return of those who had fled the violence of twenty years prior, many community members have been unable to secure adequate housing or work, and, in his estimation, only about half of the people have obtained their citizenship documents. On the housing front, a large number of families only had rudimentary
hangars provided by UNCHR for temporary shelter. Essentially a roof with no walls, these structures provide virtually no protection from the elements.

About two hundred some families here . . . just have hangars. These hangars, with the wind here, do not last more than a year. Everyone who does not have means or does not have a child working, well, being outside is miserable because of this [current] cold or the heat. When you enter the village [and see this], it will break your heart.

Just as discouraging for the returned refugees is the employment situation. According to the chief, many people had work experience in skilled positions in Senegal, but have been unable to find similar work in their new community or they run into problems getting their citizenship documents in order so that they have legal permission to work. As a result, many people travel to nearby Boghé to look for informal, unskilled labor to earn a pittance in wages.

There are those with education who head to [Boghé], they are helpers in boutiques, they are laborers and masons, they go and do under the table commerce to try to get some money to meet their basic needs. But these who are making money are not making more than that. [They] cannot make enough this way to benefit [themselves].

In contrast with their previous conditions living in Senegal, the chief claimed that their quality of life had been ten times better.
Throughout our discussion, the chief kept coming back to the negligence of the state, which he faulted for the persistence of deplorable living conditions. The state, according to him, welcomed them back, but has not offered meaningful assistance since then, aside from a few photo opportunities. In his commentary, he brought up social inequality as a major factor hindering development of their community and the country as a whole.

As the chief reflected on his community's relationship with the Mauritanian state, he sadly and cynically concluded “to wono hañki do haa hande ko doon woni” (“The way it was before is the way things are now”).

It very well may be that the state does not have the capacity to deliver the necessary support and resources, but that does not stop the returnees from feeling abandoned and hung out to dry. In May 2014, with presidential elections looming, a number of the returnees mobilized to express their dissatisfaction pertaining to life in their new communities. They organized a march from Boghé to Nouakchott, a distance of 263
about 200 miles, with the aim of presenting their grievances in front of the presidential palace. While such demonstration tactics have been fairly common in Mauritania in the past few years, this time the authorities responded with suppressive tactics. Gendarme brigades met the marchers at the outskirts of the city, and blocked them from proceeding to their goal. The gendarmes used tear gas to disperse the protesters while forcibly detaining many of them (Tidjani Sylla). The reasons for cracking down on this particular protest remain unclear. For the returnees, however, it is easy for them to interpret these actions as a message that the state has no interest in their actual concerns. They are nothing more than a political chip for the regime to use to curry favor with the international community. After this incident, though, Abdel Aziz arranged a meeting with the leaders of the march to listen to them and try to repair the damage of the crackdown.

The pattern at work here where the Mauritanian state acts to protect its image above all else suggests the importance of foreign aid for state solvency and survival. As a rentier state, the successive ruling regimes of Mauritania receive a greater share of their national income from foreign aid than they do from domestic production and taxation. The state has taken domestically unpopular stances over the last decade, such as diplomatic relations with Israel and involvement in the Global War on Terrorism, so that they could keep external funding coming in (Girod and Walters 189). Girod and Walters have suggested that the state manipulates fears over terrorism to increase support, specifically from the US and France (189-190). The ultimate consequence of this dynamic in rentier states is that the state has little incentive to invest in economic growth of their own productive sectors or to heed the desires of their own citizens (Epstein and
Power 9). In order to address citizen needs for welfare, the state takes on the role of patron, doling out assistance and resources to its reliable and loyal subjects. In a country such as Mauritania, personal connections to those in power often carry greater weight than whatever individual merits one possesses, such as a high level of education or demonstrated excellence in one's employment or productive activity. Without such close connections, Fuuta communities have slim prospects of receiving any form of state assistance or investment. These prospects shrink to practically zero if a community does not vote for the ruling party during elections.

Over and over in my conversations with Fuutankoɓe, people affirmed with a sense of bitterness that nothing came their way in terms of development assistance from the state. Bitterness was especially evident in my visit to the community of Mbonjeri, 18 km northwest of Boghé. As I arrived in the village, it became quickly apparent that the community was not well off. More than anywhere else, I encountered a reluctance to speak about development, and I learned that they felt deceived and manipulated by the way previous development projects in their community unfolded. As our discussion progressed, the residents turned to the issue of racism, which they saw as the biggest factor hindering their capacity to develop. Mauritania, they said, is a country rich in resources with oil, minerals, and fish. But because of the racist character of the state, the benefits of this material wealth circulate only within the Bidhane segment of the population. In order for things to improve, as one of the younger men noted, “. . . il faut potal ngal waawa wodé d'abord, il faut ko racisme o iwwa” (“. . . It is necessary for there to be equality first, it is necessary to overcome racism”). The underlying implication of
this diagnosis is that the patron-client character of state-led development in Mauritania fuels racial and ethnic tension. As another older man of the village pointed out, the social problems would remain if a Pulaar speaker happened to become head of state without changing anything else regarding the status quo.

The situation that these men from Mbonjeri were describing is called *leñam-leñolmaagu* in Pulaar. This term denotes the concept of ethnocentrism and carries a connotation of negativity and danger; literally, it means “my people, your people.” When *leñam-leñolmaagu* prevails, and each community only takes care of its own, then development is impossible. When I spoke with Ibrahima Sarr, the two-time presidential candidate, he linked the prevalence of *leñam-leñolmaagu* with inequality and underdevelopment. He described the need for equality, saying, “No *leñam-leñolmaagu*, no slavery, nothing like that; everyone is united...not [a situation] where those people have a lot while those don't have [anything], or those people have the right to do something and those do not. Yes, that is how I see development (Saar, personal interview).”

The opposite of *leñam-leñolmaagu* are the values of *jokkere endam*, solidarity, and *dental*, unity which are two of the most resonant positive concepts for Fuuta communities. Given the difficulty in making a living in the harsh and volatile environmental conditions of the region (particularly without mechanization), communal production allowed Fuutankoɓe to get what they needed for survival (Ba, personal interview). *Jokkere endam* also served to work against centralization of power and resources in the region. Development rhetoric in Fuuta communities today emphasizes
unity as a key to moving forward. Thus, it is not surprising that one of the goals of effective development work that Gelongal emphasized is “ñoo de dental” (“building unity”). A major component to such vision is finding a way past the divisive tendencies implicit in ethnic or racial identity politics. All of the country's language communities must feel welcome and part of the national community. Yet, one must keep in mind Mamdani's analysis of the dialectical operation of ethnicity between state and society. Society has historically affirmed ethnic identity in response to persecution and/or crisis, but a role reversal is also conceivable in which the state deploys ethnicity as a way to maintain control. With the state's current dependence on external support and goodwill in an international climate that values cultural diversity, there is strong incentive for Ould Abdel Aziz's regime to establish a stronger reputation with respect to its marginalized minority citizens.

Indeed, there are some examples where the state and its supporters have adopted such inclusive rhetoric. One example is the controversial census enrollment. When faced with the backlash and protest against the 2011-2012 national census and the fears that it was a ruse to disenfranchise the non-Arab segments of the population, the state moved into damage control to try to allay those fears. The state television channel aired a commercial to explain the census process to citizens and to highlight its potential benefits. This commercial featured individuals from the four largest language communities – Hassaniya, Pulaar, Wolof, and Soninke – each speaking their respective language without translation. The Hassaniya speaker (who happened to be a well-known comedic actor on Mauritanian television) played the part of the uninformed, while each
of the other three individuals walked him through the process, including what documents he would need, and what to do if he did not have those documents. The dialogue and gestures convey a sense of familiarity, friendship, and harmony among the four individuals. The fact that there is no translation between the speakers implies that all four languages are part of the fabric of the national community. The move in which the three non-Arab individuals explain the procedures to the Hassaniya speaker reverses the expected dynamic given Bidhane dominance in Mauritanian society. While this commercial was essentially a form of damage control in the wake of the public backlash against the census, the state demonstrated in this instance a sensitivity to the grievances of its non-Arab citizens.

One can see another gesture of inclusiveness towards all of Mauritania's ethnic groups in a music video by the hip-hop group Ewlad Leblad (Sons of the Nation). Three members comprise the group – a Bidhani, a Haratani, and a Halpulaar – and the majority of their lyrics are in Hassaniya or Modern Standard Arabic. Their songs tend to take on patriotic subjects and often promote a sense of Mauritanian nationalism. One such song is “Lestiglale” (“Independence”) commemorating the national holiday marking the country's independence. The intro carries a military-like marching beat underlaying a recording of the official announcement of independence in 1960. The lyrics speak to the importance of the holiday as “ramz ul-Hurria li-lmauritaniyiin” (“Symbol of freedom for Mauritanians”) and call on all citizens to celebrate it. In the final verse to the song, Ewlad Leblad switches from rapping in Arabic/Hassaniya to rapping a few lines to praise the

173 In the last year, however, their songs have become highly critical of Ould Abdel Aziz's rule, which has angered the Mauritanian president and those close to him (Diagne).
holiday in each of the other three national languages. The music video depicts images of Mauritanians of all backgrounds stopping what they are doing and looking up in the air, as if they heard a call from above to celebrate their nation and citizenship. At the end of the video, all of these individuals gather together waving the Mauritanian flag and carrying banners emblazoned with the national symbol (Kane). Taken together, the elements of this song promote an unqualified positive portrayal of Mauritanian national identity that, in theory, extends to citizens of all ethnicities.

Fuutankoɓe, however, would not likely share such enthusiasm towards national independence day, considering that one of the most brutal and outrageous acts of violence against Black Mauritanians took place on that day in 1990. At the military prison of Inal in the north of the country, Bidhane and Haratin soldiers executed 28 black soldiers, hanging them in a perverse celebration of Mauritanian independence, the 28th day of November (No Peace Without Justice). The clear symbolism of the killings sent a chilling message to Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof communities, one which they are not likely to forget for many years. The state may prefer to sweep this incident under the rug and not confront its legacy, but shock, anger, and bitterness continue to resonate among the families and communities of the victims. When Fuutankoɓe reflect upon their place within the national community, painful memories such as this one rise to the surface. Until they see serious efforts from the state and the Bidhane elite to bury the hatchet of interethnic/interracial tension and work to restore a sense of trust, Fuutankoɓe will remain deeply suspicious of gestures of inclusiveness and ambivalent (at best) towards their own national identity.
In the meantime, there is in general an understanding that the state, in its position, can do little more than offer gestures, which makes it easy for Fuutankoɓe to be cynical concerning political solutions to their problems, including development. Ciavolella writes about the political engagement of certain educated youths, but he also notes that by and large people disparage any such efforts (2012, 16). Politics, for the most part, is a dirty word for Fuutankoɓe, indicating at best empty promises, and at worst outright oppression. It is possible that the historical antipathy towards centralized political power among the inhabitants of the region feeds some of this sentiment. However, my sense is that the vast majority of Fuutankoɓe are pragmatic and realize that they need to adapt to the changing world around them. If political engagement would bring any tangible results, they would likely have greater enthusiasm towards being active on that front. But, with the patron-client nature of Mauritania's state-society relationship, Fuutankoɓe are not happy with their position of dependence on the government, whether there is good will or not. Rather than donations, people want investment in local productive capacity or generation of income-earning activities for households and communities. But, as the next chapter discusses, this socioeconomic side to development has not come to fruition either, adding to the uncertainty of Fuuta residents as to how they can make ends meet and survive with all the complex and onerous circumstances they face.
Chapter 5: Pitfalls of the Periphery: Globalization and Disenchantment in the Fuuta

Despite the common perception of outsiders, the Fuuta region has seen tremendous change in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century, and those who live there are facing major upheavals in the life of their households and their communities. As is the case practically everywhere across the African continent, newer technologies and commodities have made their way into everyday life, while increased media access has changed the information landscape for African societies. In my conversations with Fuutankoɓe, the processes and effects of globalization were of great concern. Everyone understands that life as they knew it or as their parents and grandparents had known it is not the same. There are some positive aspects to these changes that people recognize, such as devices that save labor time, vehicles that save travel time, and ease of communication with family and friends who live far away. The flip side of this, though, is that people need money, not only for these items of convenience, but also for the basic necessities that they use and consume on a daily basis. While this might seem obvious to anyone from an industrialized country or from any major city, Fuutankoɓe remember a past in which they produced almost everything they needed locally, meaning that they did not need to earn much in the way of money. Despite these remembrances and the nostalgia that often accompanies them, people are keenly aware that moving forward with development does not mean a return to the past.
Nor, in their view, do present challenges indicate a decay in social values and cultural identity. Rather, the problem with respect to rapid socioeconomic changes in the international landscape is the disappearance of opportunities and incentives to invest time and energy in local development efforts.

This nuanced perspective came out clearly in my conversations with the village chief of Agriis, a man who also worked in local politics with the mayor of Lexeiba. Agriis itself is about 12 km southeast of Lexeiba, on the opposite side of the Gorgol Noir floodplain, just below the lower dam on the river. The seasonal lake that forms in the rainy season cuts off the major routes to Lexeiba, making it difficult for people to get around. Like the other communities in this zone, Agriis have devoted themselves historically to herding, farming, and fishing, and these activities are still important today. In the chief's assessment of where these activities stand vis-a-vis local development, he simply stated that the community needs assistance to make their efforts worthwhile. At the time of my visit, the chief mentioned that they had not been working in the *dieri* fields much lately because, as he put it “*gese dieri de keewaani ngartam no feewi*” (“The *dieri* fields do not [provide] much benefit”). At the same time, people of the community were feeling optimistic about herding, given a recent project involving processing milk and turning it into yogurt for local sale. The sense is that this opportunity will allow the participants in the operation to benefit economically with steady income. Even if this operation restructures herding practices and relations of production and consumption, Agriis were quite welcoming of this change.
When I asked the chief to compare life in the past as he had experienced it with what he saw today, he acknowledged that there is greater potential today to enhance production, to meet one's material needs, and to live comfortably. The problem, though, is that too often people are unable to realize this potential. As he put it:

Yes, life today is easier because people are able to make money; they are in America or in Congo, sending money to help out. In the past, one cultivated with just a small hoe and a small cow. If this did not work, you had nothing, you died of starvation. Today, this is not as much of a problem, remittances can help you [get by] without having to sell your cow. This has changed a little bit [over the years]. But before, people were [nevertheless] better able to provide for themselves.

His words suggest an apparent contradiction with respect to potential and output that reflects a perceived loss of agency. The circumstances of life today allow for high output if communities are able to mobilize and deploy the right resources under the right conditions. Without resources or proper coordination, people are more likely to be worse off than they were in the past. The other aspect of potential that he mentions is the contributions from Fuutankoɓe who leave the region to find work wherever they can in the world. The remittance income that these migrant laborers send back to their families and communities can often be the difference between making ends meet and starvation.

Elsewhere throughout the Fuuta, the people I met conveyed a similar analysis of their current circumstances and predicaments. There is a willingness to adapt their
production activities, to learn new skills, to experiment with new crops or techniques in order to improve their economic output. With such a pragmatic attitude, it seems that Fuuta communities should make ideal partners for international development organizations who are supposed to have the expert knowledge and resources to channel the labor potential of the local workforce so that they can work and provide for themselves. But whether it be through a more neoliberal market-centered approach or through a more socialistic approach favoring infrastructure, education, and healthcare, the results are not there. One does not need to spend much time in the region to see that processes that seem to function more or less seamlessly in other parts of the world do not work nearly as well – if at all – in Fuuta communities. Services such as transportation, electric power and running water (where they exist), trash collection and waste disposal are fairly unreliable. Teachers, school principals, doctors, and public officials fail to show up for work on a consistent basis. However, given the meager resources with which they have to work, putting in a full week or even overtime would not make much of a difference. If there is one thing that does work well, it is the inflow of mass-produced goods from abroad, though many of these products do nothing to improve people's quality of living and do little other than undermine local producers.

With the preceding considerations, a portrait emerges whereby the processes of globalization contribute in significant ways to entrenched poverty and misery throughout Mauritania, and especially in the Fuuta. While the Fuutankobe with whom I spoke did not directly formulate critiques of neoliberal capitalism, many of my interviewees provided perspectives that echo many of the points that academic and activist critics have made in
recent decades highlighting the imbalances of these processes. These perspectives are the subject of this chapter; the development challenges they face with respect to changes in the socioeconomic realm. People feel that they have little or no control over how these changes manifest themselves in their local environments. This sense of a lack of agency is all the more interesting given the memories Fuutankoɓe retain of previous generations who were able to live with a greater degree of autonomy, with less interference from outside powers. The comparison between the past and the present is highly instructive, as is the way that people have tried to adjust themselves to new realities. In some respects, people have been able to do quite well for themselves individually or as a household. Fuutankoɓe have also demonstrated creative responses to changes in lifestyle and technology, particularly in the area of communications. However, just because people have been able to adapt to new socioeconomic realities, it does not mean that they are happy with these changes. As the perspectives of this chapter illustrate, there is a major disconnect between the hopes that Fuutankoɓe hold for a better life through development and how they actually experience their lives.

Autonomy and Decentralization in Pre-independence Fuuta

Fuuta Tooro is just one of the areas throughout West Africa where Pulaar speakers established local and regional political orders. Much of what we know of the history of

174 Particularly the dependency theorists and critiques of structural adjustment. Cf. 42-45 and see f.n 24 and f.n. 25.
175 Other areas include the Fuuta Jallon of modern-day Guinea, Macina in the inner delta region of the Niger River in Mali, and the Sokoto city-states of Northern Nigeria. Kane and Robinson describe the demographics of the Fuuta Tooro as “an amalgamation of “ethnic” groups attracted to the middle valley of the Senegal River] over the centuries, [who] have come to call themselves Halpulaar’en, “those who speak Pulaar,” since the language is one of the major factors binding them together” (1-2).
these polities, especially prior to the mid nineteenth century, comes to us through the oral tradition. To this day, griots transmit the chronicles of the successive dynasties, focusing particularly on the influential figures and the moral character of their leadership. For instance, a watershed event in the history of the Fuuta Tooro was the defeat of the pagan Deňaŋkoɓe rulers in the mid eighteenth century and their replacement by the Almaamate rulers. From this point on, political authority in the region went hand in hand with adherence to Islam, and Fuuta Tooro played a significant role in the jihads of the nineteenth century. This is not to say that the Almaamate rulers enjoyed total allegiance and sovereignty throughout the entirety of the Fuuta Tooro. There was no consistent seat of power for the Islamic regime, and many localities operated with a significant degree of autonomy up until the colonial conquest and even afterwards (Kane and Robinson 158).

Along with the decentralization of power in the region, there was also a notable absence of the concentration of wealth in any particular community. As Ciavolella argues, the pastoral lifestyle and the specific historical social structures went hand in hand and mutually reinforced each other. “Les Fulaabe ont évolué dans un espace interstitiel, aux marges de centralisations politiques régionales, en gardant avec celles-ci une relation à la fois d'autonomie et de dépendance (Ciavolella 2010, 54).

This condition of relative autonomy from state formations came out in some of my field interviews. Most notable was the historical description from Chapter 3 that Abdoulaye Toure gave which highlights the freedom of movement for remoobe (farmers) and aynaabe (herders) as they sought out the most productive lands that were available to

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176 Cf. 66-74.
them. Toure was describing specifically the early twentieth century, when the French had already laid claim to the region. Nonetheless, communities were able to migrate to new areas without interference from the colonial authorities. The elders from Gure Cuuci also mentioned their ability to move seasonally between the *waalo* and the *dieri* in the Département de Monguel (northernmost department of the Gorgol Region; about 25 km north of Lexeiba) until the time of independence. These communities were certainly aware of the colonial presence and its efforts to impose taxation upon them, but they were also well aware of the limitations of that power – how they could evade it through their own mobility. The idea of *ladde* (the bush), as Ciavolella notes, helped to underpin this strategy:

*Ladde* is a complex and ambiguous emic concept. The magic idea of the bush was defined by the ambiguous relationship that these nomadic and pastoral communities entertained with it. It was the place of nonhuman and uncontrollable forces, the domain of danger, in opposition to the village . . . At the same time, the *ladde* constituted the most important resource for the pastoral economy and for political autonomy. It was a free space, a pioneer front, a territory for conquest and free expansion to flee state power . . . Mobility in the bush became the best political resource: thanks to the *ladde*, Fulaabe could flee centralized political entities, such as the colonial regime, escape their control, avoid taxation, and circumvent their territory (2012, 7).

What Ciavolella describes here, in essence, is a deliberate attempt by Fuuta populations to resist political incorporation. Just as the Almaamate was unable to enact complete political control and regional hegemony over the entirety of the Fuuta at any given time,
the French – much further removed from the terrain – held very little sway in the region prior to independence.\(^\text{177}\)

This remembered sense of autonomy comes out in the reflections of elderly Fuutankoɓe today who speak with a sense of pride concerning the past way of life. In the absence of political allegiances or subjectivities, family networks and kinship relations (not necessarily blood relations) provided the social structure that allowed people to live and thrive in the spaces of nonhuman forces throughout the *ladde* (Ciavolella 2012, 7). An elderly man from the village of Dalhaya who expressed clear frustration and disillusionment with life today, recalled the strength of the past social structure in response to my question about differences between the youth of today and those of yesteryear:

*Sukaaɓe haŋki, buri moyyüde . . . biiye ko biiye,* Children in the past were better . . . a child was *bii bannde ko biiye, bii kodiido ma ko biiye.* [your] child, a relative's child was [your] child, a *ndooku-daa dum fof ko heen heddoto; ko* neighbor's child was [your] child. Those for *kaalan-daa dum fof, ko doon daaro.* whatever you provided would listen to you; whatever you said to them, they would do it.

Through obedience and discipline, intergenerational bonds played a significant role in the success of past livelihoods. Whereas the elders supplied the knowledge of their experience in surviving without reliance on state surpluses or market relations, the youth would supply the labor power to put this knowledge into practice. Many elders today

\(^{177}\) James C. Scott has described the dynamics of societies living beyond the reach of state authority as doing so either in resistance to that authority or as a refuge to avoid the various state-making projects (22). Either way, his contention is that these populations are generally “choosing” to exist in the non-state zones.
refer to the agricultural or herding work they performed in their youth as their education, invoking a parallel between these practices of knowledge transmission and those of modern, state-supported schooling.

Another salient aspect of pre-independence society in the Fuuta was the limited role of the market in constituting relationships of production and consumption. Subsistence production provided for people's basic necessities and dietary needs, while locally available flora took care of the majority of people's medicinal needs. This is not to say that there was no exchange economy; Fuutankoɓe would use their specialization in livestock raising and herding to their advantage with neighboring populations. This was particularly true in dry years, when households could not depend on agricultural yield to get them through such periods (E. Scott 4). Beyond these circumstances, the role of the market throughout the Fuuta was largely supplemental to the local subsistence economy. Trade with the French along the river fostered an appetite for certain items of fashion, especially imported cloth (Kane and Robinson 43). Fashions, though, were and are capricious. Even to this day, Fuutankoɓe are more apt to prefer familiar commodities over new types or brands of consumption goods. Coca-cola is available wherever there is refrigeration, but the impression that I get is that rural Fuutankoɓe view the product as an unnecessary extravagance that causes stomach problems for those who are not accustomed to drinking it. People are happy enough with their locally-produced milk and their imported Chinese green tea with mint that typically comes from local gardens.178

178 Mauritanians of all ethnicities tend to be discerning about the quality of mint that they use for their tea. According to people's tastes, the highest quality mint comes from Boghé, which people refer to as naa'naa Boghé. Anyone traveling from or through the town will likely purchase a quantity of this mint to provide as a gift to their family or to their hosts. Girls and young women stand by the taxi garage and
The utilization of locally available resources also extended to building construction, obviating the need for a materials or labor market to facilitate this realm of activity. One could obtain materials for houses from the clay soils of the *waalo* as well as nearby timber resources and pastureland. Families and communities would (and still do) cooperate to provide building labor. When a thatched straw roof is ready to go on top of a round mud hut structure, everyone who is physically fit pitches in to lift it up off the ground and put it in place. One could make a comparison to Amish barn-raising in the way that the community comes together to work for the benefit of one individual or family. It is yet another manifestation of *jokkere endam* within Fuuta communities. Since everyone sooner or later will need to rebuild one's house or one's roof, the willingness to help out one's neighbors will pay off in the long run when it comes time to undertake the same project one's self.

The larger significance of these observations is that the economy, the society, and the culture of pre-independence Fuuta communities were all geared towards autonomy. The *ladde* was not an easy place to live and provide for one's self and one's family, but past generations of Fuutankobe were able to make it work because they preferred it to the alternatives. They did not toil in the groundnut fields of Senegal or the cotton fields of Mali, nor did they migrate to the big cities on the coast. They used their *jalo* and *jambere* to make the soils yield up crops, and they carried their *sowru* (herding stick) behind their shoulders while taking their animals to pasture, or they took their *gaawal* (spear) down to the river to catch fish. All these tools came from the work of local blacksmiths and gas stations to offer the mint for sale to the various vehicles that come through.

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carpenters. People might still have had a desire for imported commodities and tools, but
their ways of life did not depend upon such items in order to be successful. People could
take advantage of markets for these goods when it suited their interests, but the market,
along with the colonial administration in general, remained largely exterior to social
relations of power and exchange among Fuuta communities.

Ciavolella relates a particularly illustrative episode from a century ago that
conveys the degree of autonomy Fuutankoɓe held under colonialism. After a drought year
in 1913, the French colonial authority sought to use the time of hardship as a strategy to
bring rural populations more under their control, offering food aid distributions of rice in
the larger towns throughout the region (Ciavolella 2010, 94). The French hoped that this
effort would help entice pastoralists to settle down, to convince them that they would be
better off in terms of their food security if they stuck close to the markets of these denser
population centers. For the most part, the Fulɓe of the region did not take the bait; instead
of going to the distribution centers to receive rice, they accessed it by bartering with
people in sedentary communities. They offered these communities dairy products from
their herds in exchange for the donated rice (not a dietary staple at this point in history),
essentially short circuiting the exchange relationship that the colonial authority was
hoping to establish (Ciavolella 2010, 94). In fact, oral accounts of this episode from
Fuutankoɓe do not even acknowledge any role that the French played in the
circumstances behind the hitaande maaro, or the “year of rice” (Ciavolella 2010, 94-95).

Such incidents and the way that people remember them today shed light on the
relative weakness of colonial authority in the Fuuta region when it came to the
transformation of economic and social relations. Colonialism here was not the traumatic
disruption in lifestyle and cultural memory the way that it was in other parts of Africa and
Asia, where conversion of agricultural economy to cash crops and export crops like
cotton entailed increased taxation and debt for farmers along with drops in food security
(Murshed 6). Fuuta pastoralists in particular (as well as Bidhane pastoralists) were able to
evade and circumvent control measures such as taxation and conscription. They did not
need to give up their way of life in favor of sedentary and civic lifestyle; Fuutankoɓe
were able to negotiate a sort of coexistence between the two. It would not be until after
Mauritania and Senegal achieved independence that this sense of autonomy began to
erode. However, some individuals did indeed take active part in the colonial project,
perhaps out of a desire for new opportunities, but perhaps even more so out of a
pragmatic belief that such ventures could open up new avenues of support for the well-
being of their families and communities.

One major avenue of participation in modernity available to Fuutankoɓe was
education. French-style education was available on a limited basis throughout the Fuuta,
while greater education opportunities existed in the colonial capitals. Given that the
Bidhane to the north showed little interest in French schools, Fuutankoɓe (including
Pulaar, Soninke, and Wolof speakers) who received such education at the hands of the
French were easily able to find themselves positions within the bureaucracy of the
colonial administration (Ould Mey 71). As independence drew near, such individuals
looked to use their knowledge and experience to play a major role in the administration
of the postcolonial state. Their experiences with education also helped to pave the way
for the establishment of literacy for their native languages, utilizing Latin characters for their alphabets rather than Arabic ones.

In addition to civil service, some Fuutankobe served the French colonial empire as soldiers. I had the opportunity to meet and speak with a veteran of the French campaigns in Southeast Asia as well as Algeria. In my encounter with him, he spoke with a sense of pride as he recalled these experiences, showing me and Abdul an old photo of him in uniform along with official certificates that he had kept in his possession for half a century. He currently holds the position of chief in the town of Thienal, a community of around two thousand people located on the Senegal River a few kilometers upstream of Boghé. Among those whom I met in the community during my visit, it was clear that they respected his authority, despite the fact that he was hard of hearing, had lost all his teeth, and spoke in a strained, hoarse voice.

The paths of those individuals who pursued education, who worked in the colonial administration, or who served in the military of the colonial power, took them away from the Fuuta, but the hearts of many of these people never left. Despite the distance and the long periods of separation, those who emigrated for work would still maintain strong connections to their families and communities in the Fuuta. Their exposure to the bustling activity of large cities did not erase their longing for what they considered to be their true home. For the most part, they did not feel that the lifestyle of those who continued to make their living in the ladde was outdated or primitive. Many of those whose careers took them away from the Fuuta would retire to their towns and villages of origins. Most of the time, their families would remain in the Fuuta, continuing
to farm, herd, or fish. Income from salaried positions or from business ventures was certainly a helpful contribution to the welfare of families, a potentially productive feere (strategy) amongst many possible peeje (strategies). Nonetheless, many Fuutankoɓe felt that the most crucial aspect of their well-being was local production; everything else was just supplementary. Even today, as local production encounters enormous challenges and households have become more reliant on income remittances, people draw heavily on remembrances of a richer and more productive past in the formation of cultural identity. As such, nostalgia has become a significant component to the collective experience of Fuutankoɓe – nostalgia for home among those who have traveled abroad and nostalgia for the past among those who remain in the Fuuta, mired in the deep poverty of their communities and uncertain that the future will bring any improvement in their circumstances.

The fact that nostalgia for the past corresponds to the colonial period does not mean that Fuutankoɓe preferred French rule to the current political state of affairs. It is true that the unraveling of the socioeconomic fabric of the region has mostly taken place over the half century since independence. It is also true, as the previous chapter addresses, that Fuuta communities have experienced serious discontent and discord with the Bidhane-dominated Mauritanian state. But while Fuutankoɓe will lay a large share of the blame for their current misery at the feet of the state and its policies and prejudices, people also understand that forces beyond the confines of the nation have added to their hardships and threatened their way of life. Without using terms such as globalization, neoliberalism, or capitalism, people are still aware of its growing influence in the region.
in part through the breakdown of communal values and ethics. People would say things like “aduna hande ine yahre hoore mum hoore mum” (“The world today is everyone for him or herself”). The solidarity, the jokkere endam that was key to survival and prosperity in earlier times does not work as well under current realities. Some people will even admit that people of the region need to embrace individualism in order to take advantage of the opportunities available through the processes of globalization. Yet, many people are not so willing to abandon these core values of Fulbe cultural identity, especially when economic development has largely bypassed their region. There is a saying, “ndendi-den ko yahwi njenci-den” (“coming together [in unity] will quickly produce benefits”) that helps remind people of what their strengths are. But even with the effort to maintain the collectivist ethos, it remains to be seen whether today's youth will carry these ideals throughout their lives as they face enormous barriers to providing for themselves, let alone their families.

*Free Markets and Cheap Imports*

Perhaps the most useful place to turn for illustrating the ways Fuutankoɓe grapple with the processes and consequences of globalization is the body of films by international director Abderrahmane Sissako, who is himself a dual citizen of Mauritania and Mali. One of the major themes throughout Sissako's work has been the failure of processes of modernization and globalization to lift African societies out of abject poverty; in fact, these processes seem to add to the social miseries that people already bear. Sissako employs a slow and deliberate pace to his films, with sparse dialogue and little emotion
from the characters. Plot development is nebulous, and the story lines carry little tension, and do not move towards a sense of resolution. Instead, the films present the viewer with a wealth of visual clues, poignant anecdotes, and pregnant ellipses through which to digest the message and the content. For anyone who has visited Mauritania or its Sahelian neighbors, the visual features of the films are highly familiar; however, the characters are much more subdued in behavior and temperament than what one often finds in such settings. The characters that Sissako portrays do not really know how to get what they want, or even what they should want. With such uncertainty, it is better to do nothing.

Sissako's work makes the point that African societies suffer from weak and unfavorable connections to global flows of materials, technologies, and innovations. Africa is a global backwater, where goods and products from around the world haphazardly make their way into local markets without the dynamic potential of supply and demand forces. One brief scene in the film *Waiting For Happiness* (*Heremakono*), which is set in Mauritania's economic capital Nouadhibou, conveys this point with my Sissako's characteristic subtlety. A melafa salesman walks into a compound looking to sell his wares to the lady of the house, who is sitting on the ground and does nothing to acknowledge the presence of the visitor. The salesman, perhaps used to such reception, makes a token effort at a sales pitch, trying to entice the woman with the latest fashions,

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179 The movie *Bamako* and its courtyard/international courtroom framing device is somewhat of an exception, given the eloquent and impassioned speeches of the “trial” participants. But the main subplot of a family falling apart through illness, unhappiness, and suicide utilizes a similar narrative style and tone to that found in *Life on Earth* or *Waiting For Happiness*.

180 A long length of dyed fabric that virtually all Bidhane and Haratin women use for outerwear, wrapping and tying the cloth around their bodies from head to toe.
including the “Beijing” style. With no response from the woman, the man slowly turns around and leaves. The elements of this scene hit upon some of these market flow issues: a surplus of cheap imports circulating through informal commercial activity with little consumer demand to make such business worthwhile.

Despite the low earning potential for the majority of these informal merchants, it is often the path of least resistance to finding some kind of employment. Depending on the merchandise, one can set up a little stall on the street or carry it in a crate on one's head or a basket slung over one's shoulder. Such sellers tend to congregate in areas that attract lots of foot traffic, i.e. the marketplace, taxi garages, hospitals, schools. They try to catch the eye of passersby to interest them in a new plastic fan, or a belt, cheap plastic flashlights, knock-off watches, little plastic toys or trinkets, or mass-produced children's clothing outfits bearing the imagery and symbols of the American or Asian pop cultural repertoire. Such items are usually on the lowest end of the demand spectrum when it comes to the surplus of cheap imported goods that are usually Chinese-manufactured. In places like taxi garages, where people sit and stand around waiting for variable lengths of time for their vehicles to depart, they walk up to bystanders and pause in front of them looking for any sign of a potential sale. Just as the woman in the scene from _Waiting for Happiness_, those who are not interested in buying anything avoid eye contact, staring off into space until the vendor moves on. It is usually men who are selling such merchandise; women street vendors are more apt to offer food and/or beverage items. All of these vendors are not only competing with each other for customers, they must also compete
with the larger boutique or market stall merchants who offer a greater diversity and higher quality of items and have the advantage of dealing directly with importers.

Several Fuutanköɓe highlighted how miserable such ventures can be, walking around all day in the heat just trying to scrape together 200 UM (a little less than seventy-five cents) in sales. The general consensus that I have heard from Fuutanköɓe was that the average monthly income for such commerce was 25,000-30,000 UM ($90-$108), which comes out to three dollars and change per day. Some individuals are able to earn a good deal more through informal commerce. A man I met in one Fuuta village along the river told me of how he got his start in the Kaédi market, turning 1,000 UM in start-up money to quickly make 10,000 UM. His enterprising abilities allowed this kind of commercial activity to become a viable way of life for him. He traveled all throughout the Fuuta, into Mali, and up to Morocco making his living as an informal street vendor. Through his travels, he was also able to gain a good deal of perspective, coming into contact with people of different cultures from all over the world and observing the differences and commonalities among them. He feels that he benefitted from this experience, supporting himself while making significant gains in knowledge. He was one of the lucky ones, though; most of the thousands or tens of thousands of Fuutanköɓe who turn to informal commerce cannot expect to reap such profits, monetary or otherwise, from such activities.

Aside from the mind-boggling surplus of imported goods dumped into their markets, African consumers must contend with the abysmal quality of many of these items. For Mauritanians, it is bad enough that the climate and environmental conditions
take a punishing toll on manufactured products. Extreme heat and ever-present sand and
dust tend to shorten the lives of any mechanical or electronic item unless one takes
extraordinary precautionary measures. But many of these goods do not have the
capability of holding up even in more moderate climates: batteries that power a flashlight
for two days before losing their juice, lightbulbs that are already defective upon purchase,
consumer electronics that simply do not work. Another scene in *Waiting For Happiness*
shows an electrician and his young apprentice attempting to wire a house for electricity.
With the installation complete, they test out a new light bulb. They screw it into the
socket and nothing happens. After a couple of unsuccessful trials, the apprentice offers
the suggestion that maybe it was one of those “Taiwan” light bulbs, implying that
Taiwanese manufactured products have a reputation for substandard quality.

One might expect that many Mauritanians would accept products of lower quality
given that such items are cheaper than name-brand items. But with more and more
sophisticated devices from abroad showing up in people's homes, the desire for quality is
growing, even in rural Fuuta communities. In my stay at the chief's compound in
Mafondou, the wife of the chief showed me a portable electronic entertainment device
that her husband had brought back to her from one of his long stays in France. The device
contained a DVD/CD player with a small screen (essentially a laptop screen), a few pre-
programmed video games with a controller, and an antenna that could receive FM radio
or television signals (though there were no such signals to receive in Mafondou). She
only had one DVD of a locally-produced sitcom filmed in Kaédi, but she mentioned that having this item helped to pass the time and *ittu yeewende.*

Mauritanians who desire quality goods have few options in-country to acquire such items. Almost all markets and boutiques that sell high-end electronics, textiles, fashion goods are located in Nouakchott's Tevragh Zeina district. This district is where the majority of the Western expat community lives along with the country's political and social elite. Ordinary Mauritanians generally do not frequent such boutiques, as the social distances involved tend to keep people of modest means out of the wealthier areas of the capital. Yet, Mauritania's elite are more apt to shop for their consumer and luxury goods abroad, particularly in France. Many Mauritanian passengers on flights from Paris to Nouakchott carry close to the maximum in allowable luggage full of items that they have purchased to bring back home. It goes without saying that the majority of Mauritanians do not have the opportunity to take even one shopping trip to Europe in their lifetimes.

Fuuta communities in general look for markets that supply utilitarian items more so than consumption goods or luxury items. There is a desire for tools and machinery that can improve their production efforts. I encountered an example of this mindset in one of my visits to Seyenne, when a woman from the village cooperative (one of the most active and enterprising individuals in the community) sought my assistance in finding a peanut grinder for the cooperative boutique. The boutique already had a peanut grinder, but this woman wanted a better one; one that was French-made and not Chinese-made. These grinders are relatively simple machines that one cranks by hand, but the poor quality and

181 “Kill boredom,” essentially.
durability of the moving parts of the Chinese-made grinder left her wanting an upgrade. She asked me if I could look around the markets in Nouakchott to see if I could find what she was looking for. I went to the two largest markets, Capitale and Cinquième, and asked around for the item in question. A number of merchants had peanut grinders for sale, but none of them had any that were French-made, nor did they know where one could find such grinders. In the grand scheme of things, the business of the Seyenne boutique would not suffer from continuing to use the Chinese-made peanut grinder. However, anecdotes such as these suggest that the available markets do not respond well to demand for quality items.

From a development standpoint, there is no doubt that the dramatic rise in imported goods available in Mauritanian markets has given people greater options and choices in the realm of dietary choices, clothing, telecommunications, household goods/furnishings, tools, etc. There is also the possibility for people to earn income from the commerce of imported goods. However, the frustrating reality of the marketplace in Mauritania is that these choices and opportunities contain meager potential and value for the vast majority of people. For consumer goods and tools, people have to make do with secondary quality or worse. For employment, informal merchants struggle every day just to make the equivalent of a buck. For food, Fuuta families pool their resources to purchase the staple elements of their diet that come at a greater cost and a lower quality than what they used to produce themselves. Some of these staples may satisfy daily nourishment requirements, but many Fuutankoɓe believe that they lead to long-term health complications and ailments. The rise in ailments such as diabetes and high blood
pressure corroborate their suspicions, and one woman told me that people are much more frail and brittle than they used to be.\textsuperscript{182} On the balance, the markets in the region and throughout the country are awash with the unwanted surpluses of global trade, the kinds of items at which even Walmart might balk. The image of a backwater of global trade that I suggested above really seems to capture the reality of the marketplace in Mauritania – stuff drifts in or washes up on shore where it becomes stagnant. Such is the predicament of the peripheral zones of global trade.

If this backwater metaphor is apt, then the question becomes whether or not markets can do better in stimulating improvements in the quality of life. In my interviews and interactions in the field, this question did not come up explicitly, though some people, especially some of the older adults, hinted that their communities, and their society as a whole, will always be behind with their position in the flows of global trade.

At one of our stops in the field, Abdul got into a discussion with our host (a man of around sixty) about the greater penetration of digital technology in the region. I had my laptop out at the time and was using it to catch up on my field notes, which is what spurred the discussion. Our host pointed to my laptop and told Abdul that even if he became proficient in how to use it, by the time that happened, white people (\textit{toubako\text{"Ġ}be}) will have already moved on to a more advanced device that will have superseded the old. His declaration suggests that Fuutankob\text{"Ġ} (and Africans in general) will forever be trying to catch up on the playing field that the wealthy and developed nations have set up and established the rules to benefit themselves.

\textsuperscript{182} As she put it, “\textit{adana, hay so ned\text{"Ġ}o yaani, hellataa, kono hande njaando fof hellat}.” (“Before, if a person fell down, [there would be no problem], but today whoever falls down breaks [something].”

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What About Local Markets?

If markets can do a better job of spurring development in the Fuuta or any other impoverished region, the rules will have to change so that the dynamic potential of trade flows and exchanges does not get bogged down in these global backwaters. If Waiting For Happiness presents a vivid and at times darkly humorous portrayal of African societies as sort of development purgatories, Sissako's later film Bamako pulls no punches in laying the bulk of the responsibility for this reality on the Bretton Woods institutions that have been the architects of the policies that create such wide disparities. One of the focal elements of the film is a trial scene in the courtyard of an African family where the defendants are the World Bank and the IMF. While the defense lawyer defends the record of these institutions as not responsible for the failure of their policies, a parade of plaintiffs marches to the stand, each one pointing out the hypocrisies in the defense lawyers rhetoric. As the trial takes place, the family who lives in the compound is falling apart from illness, poverty, and hopelessness. Sissako's film draws these elements together to drive home to Western viewers the tangible and tragic effects of a global economic playing field tilted heavily in the favor of those who are already wealthy and secure in their lives.

In a similar vein, the documentary Life and Debt, directed by Stephanie Black, takes a look at underdevelopment in Jamaica unfolding largely through trade policy changes and loan financing conditions that the IMF and other international lending institutions implemented and imposed on the island nation's economy. The documentary shows interview excerpts with an IMF official who explains with confidence and
certitude that his institution and its collaborators acted for the best interest of economic growth in Jamaica. Meanwhile, Jamaican vegetable farmers, dairy farmers, textile workers, transport workers, along with university professors and public officials (including former prime minister Michael Manley), all relate how policy changes have completely undermined local producers and ruined their livelihoods that had thrived prior to these changes. Exposure to subsidized foreign competition in the agricultural and dairy industries drove these producers out of business, as imported produce and milk powder came in at a lower cost in the marketplace than the local products (Black).

Producers in the Fuuta face a similar uphill challenge in marketing their outputs. Given their previously successful subsistence lifestyles of farming, herding, and fishing, many people feel like these activities would be a good place to start in terms of marketing their production. Plus, deep cultural attachments to these activities (especially herding) makes it easier to motivate and mobilize labor power. People would rather earn income doing the work that they had always been doing. As an elderly woman from the village of Dubungu put it, agriculture (*ndema*) is what they know and it is the key to their development. But, like the situation in Jamaica that *Life and Debt* highlights, Fuuta producers have been unable to find a place in the market for their goods. Yes, they have been hurt by the recurrent destructive droughts and volatile climate trends, but the problem goes deeper than that. Even in good years their products must compete on the market with cheap imports.

Dairy production is a clear example where the pricing trends on local markets favors imported products over local ones. The brand Rose milk, which comes from
Germany, is available in every single boutique at a price of 200 UM (seventy-five cents) for a half liter container, a price that has not changed in over ten years. The cheapest option, though, is Celia brand milk powder; families purchase it in bulk, and if finances are tight they can stretch out their supplies by using less powder. The vicious irony here is that milk production holds a place of pride and esteem in Fuuta communities. Milk is what families consume when times are good, when the fertility of the region is at its highest annual peak. Households with animals still produce milk for their own consumption when they can, but the presence of low-cost imported alternatives means that their milk will not do well on the market. Many people feel that there is still potential to commercialize their dairy products, to capitalize economically on their ability to raise and care for livestock animals.

Agricultural producers in the Fuuta face a similar plight in that their crops have little market value. Grain farmers have found that their millet and sorghum cannot compete on the market, particularly with imported wheat flooding the country. Much of this wheat comes from the US as food aid and is heavily subsidized. Large merchants will often sell this wheat in their boutiques, a practice that is illegal yet nonetheless widespread due to the distance between the donators and the destination of the food aid. When it comes to produce, truckloads of vegetables and fruit from Morocco or Spain arrive every day in the larger towns (especially Boghé and Kaédi) which undercuts the potential of local cooperative gardeners to profit from the sale of their production, no matter how fruitful their efforts.

Rice is the only domestically produced grain that fares well in the market, owing to the high demand. In the Fuuta, rice has become the lunchtime staple that virtually every family eats.
For instance, the cooperative garden in the tiny village of Sinthiane Diakary produced substantial yields of tomatoes, cabbage, *folere*, eggplant, okra, and potatoes. The cooperative women benefitted from strong collaboration with a Spanish NGO, *Action Contre La Faim* (ACF),\(^{184}\) who worked through local technicians and extension agents to boost garden production with solar well pumps and irrigation delivery systems. Despite the enhanced productivity and yield, the cooperative women still lacked the opportunity to profit from selling their produce on the market. The nearest market for Sinthiane women is Lexeiba. Not only do they have to incur transport costs\(^{185}\) to get their vegetables to market, they have to compete with those who sell the same items shipped in bulk at a cheaper price. The women with whom I spoke in Sinthiane were largely pleased with their abilities to grow more food more efficiently, but they see little potential for their activities to provide significant income. It is better than nothing, but it will not come close to meeting the needs of their households.

Despite the successes of ACF’s work in Sinthiane and Mafondou, it is fair to say that the successes do not translate into increased income potential. For the most part, people in Sinthiane are quite happy and grateful for the assistance they have received from ACF and look forward to continued partnership. Indeed, ACF seems to be working effectively with the community, drawing on the resources and knowledge base that are available on the ground while working to extend that base to a larger number of

\(^{184}\) This NGO was also partnering with the women's cooperative in Mafondou, providing similar support for gardening activities.

\(^{185}\) Fuutankoɓe are very mindful of transport costs and consider them to be burdensome. There is the round-trip cost for each individual who rides along in a vehicle heading to town (a more or less fixed rate depending on the distance traveled) as well as costs for excess baggage. These costs can add up to 1500-2000 UM per trip ($5.35-$7.15), which cuts deeply into the profit potential of small-time producers.
community members. Their contributions have helped to diversify production, increase yield, and improve production efficiency; however, the problem of selling local produce on the market seems to be beyond the scope of the project. There is little that ACF or any other NGO or coalition of organizational partners could do to protect cooperative producers against competition in the market. On the whole, it seems that cooperative gardening projects at best can only be half measures, which is a shame for such a venture that demands a significant investment of time and energy to see even modest benefits in dietary improvements.

One might ask why Fuuta producers even bother putting in the effort for activities from which they make little or no profit. Why do they not devote their energies to activities that will generate income for them? One might be tempted to conclude that Fuutanköbe are too attached to their lifestyle that they are unwilling to try new modes of labor and production. While there is considerable cultural attachment to the farming, herding, fishing lifestyle, Fuutanköbe are pragmatic people. They sent their sons and daughters to school before Bidhane families did. Historically, Fuuta communities have been highly adaptable, maintaining their survival through volatile circumstances. There is no reason to think that if viable opportunities to make a living were available to them, that they would not embrace such possibilities.

186 As noted previously, there are a number of individuals who have given up on farming, herding, etc.
Migration Effects

The fact is, there are virtually no jobs in the region due to the absence of large scale employers. The Fuuta contains no major mining or manufacturing operations and very little in the way of service sector employment opportunities. Of all the markets in the region, only Kaédi's has a large enough concentration of potential buyers to absorb significant employment in the commercial sector. Even so, the possibilities to earn adequate income through commerce are rather limited, as I discussed above. With so few jobs available close to home, employment seekers leave the region in large numbers for areas that can absorb large numbers of laborers.

Nouakchott or Dakar are the most frequent destinations for Fuutankoɓe. Many of those who migrate to the capitals remain in close contact with other family members or community members who have also migrated. In this way, the solidarity and support networks from the village are able to transplant themselves to the urban setting. This is not always the case, though, as some migrants find lodging for themselves in parts of the city that are far from their family members or village compatriots. For such “orphaned” migrants, the next best thing is to find a new support network. In Nouakchott, such improvised support networks rely heavily on shared ethnicity and language. A Pulaar individual will look for support and social intercourse with other Pulaar speakers, a Soninke individual with other Soninke, a Haratin individual with other Haratin, etc. People look to these networks for assistance in finding employment and/or material support (cash loans, room/meal sharing, etc.), not to mention social interaction. Without strong civic institutions, ethnic cleavages remain strong throughout the capital with a
large degree of segregation among the different groups. While there are certainly many exceptions, the conventional wisdom holds that wealthy Bidhane and Western expats live in the Tevragh Zeina district, middle-class Bidhane in Arafat, poor Bidhane in Toujenine, Haratin in the peripheral districts of Dar Naim, Riyadh (P.K.), and Teyyarat (Première), and Black Africans in Cinquième (Sebkha) and Sixième (El Mina).

For many people, though, the capital cities do not offer much beyond informal commerce opportunities that will not generate enough income to lift people out of poverty or to even meet the needs of families back in the Fuuta. Those who can get employment in the gold mines of the north consider themselves lucky, despite the severe hazards of working in the mines where the risk of injury is high, as is the risk of developing long-term health conditions. The real jackpot, however, is passage abroad to Europe, the United States, or Canada, whether through legal or illegal means. And while remittance income from such migrant laborers plays a key role in maintaining the welfare of Fuuta households, this rural exodus has produced drastic demographic shifts in Fuuta communities while straining the capacity of families to remain intact.

The story of rural exodus in Subsaharan Africa has become very familiar to anthropologists, social scientists, and those who work in the development field. Its effects are plainly visible not just in the African megacities that have exploded in population since the end of colonialism, but also in the suburbs of European cities and the market towns of North Africa. Since the opportunities of the global economy have not come to the rural areas of Subsaharan Africa, rural dwellers have had to go to where those opportunities are and seek them out. In the pragmatic reasoning of many Fuuta families,
long-term migration of some family members represents the best hope of earning the income necessary to sustain themselves, with maybe enough left over to buy new clothes or even build a new house. The vast majority of Fuutankobe who do migrate out of the region are males whose ages run the gamut from late teens to late fifties or even sixty. As such, when one visits a Fuuta village, one finds that adult women significantly outnumber adult men.

My host family from Seyenne was certainly characteristic of these patterns of migration. My host father, Adama Moussa, was the head of the household and the only adult male who lived more or less permanently in the compound with his two wives and their children. Also in the compound were the two widows of his deceased older brother – along with the children of the two women – and the wives of his two younger brothers Amadou Moussa and Abdoulaye Moussa. Amadou had spent years working in the army, stationed at various locations around the country. In recent years, he took care of the family herds, accompanying them on their transhumant movements. Abdoulaye, on the other hand, had the chance to travel abroad, spending many years in Gabon working in commerce. Over the years, he would return occasionally for brief visits. His wife Jami Ali remained in the village with their sons Moussa Abdoulaye and Thierno Abdoulaye. She had given birth three other times in between those two, but those children did not survive. Likewise, Amadou's wife Aissata stayed in Seyenne taking care of their children. My fieldwork assistant Abdul was the oldest of these children, although he was not the firstborn. When I started my Peace Corps service, he was about to move to Kaédi to begin college, while his younger brother Moussa Amadou was already there as a Quranic
student. When Abdul finished his lycée studies, he went to Nouakchott to look for work, which is where he was when I returned for my fieldwork. His youngest brother Alassane Amadou was studying at lycée in Kaédi and aiming to follow a similar path.

In 2004, Adama's youngest brother Abdoulaye Moussa returned from Gabon to live in Seyenne permanently. He was in his fifties at the time. He and Jami had two other children, and he also took a second wife and has had three children so far with this woman. Through his experience in commerce, he was able to set up a boutique in the Kaédi market to which he commutes every day except Friday. The household's commercial interests in Gabon continue, however, as Adama Harouna – one of the sons of my host father's deceased older brother – has been working there for the last fifteen years. Adama Harouna has an older brother who lives in Kaédi as a Quranic teacher and a younger brother who frequently travels to Nouakchott or to Senegal for manual labor. All three of them have wives who live in the family compound and take care of the children.

I met Adama Harouna in 2003 when he returned from Gabon to get married. His younger brother Moussa Harouna was also getting married at the same time. In September of that year, my host family held a double wedding for the two of them, while they were both around. Adama was to spend only a few months back in the village before heading back to Gabon. Moussa was around to help out for the dieri planting season (that year being a wet and productive campaign), but his time in the village has always been short-term. Moussa's wife came from Senegal, from the same village where his mother's family lives, while Adama married Kadiata Oumou, the daughter of his paternal aunt who lived in Seyenne. From the get go, Moussa and his wife appeared to be a good match for
each other with a harmonious relationship. The same was not true of Adama and Kadiata's marriage, as they did not seem to have much in the way of mutual respect or affection. Several years later when I visited Seyenne, I asked Kadiata how her husband was doing. This question elicited a derisive sneer from her, conveying that their marriage was not holding up very well. Later on I learned that she had given birth to a child at some point while Adama was away, and there was no question that he was not the father. Children born outside of marriage carry a heavy stigma in Fuuta society, and they receive little care and support beyond what they receive from the mother. Kadiata's child did not survive, while she and Adama had produced no children as of 2012, nine years since their marriage.

Stories like that of Adama and Kadiata are not uncommon these days in the Fuuta, especially with the greater number of husbands who spend long years working abroad. The distance and the time apart produce strain on even the most harmonious relationships, and it leaves the wives with the greater burden of raising the children. Some women can gain support from co-wives or from their own parents, but not every woman has this option. The radio journalist Mamadou Demba Sy addressed these concerns in my interview with him in his Nouakchott home, noting the stress on both husbands and wives while pointing out that areas of the Fuuta that have the longest history of immigration (particularly the Guidimakha region) also see the highest numbers of illegitimate children born to women whose husbands have been away (personal interview).
Along with these concerns about marital fidelity, there has been growing concern about the potential for HIV infections to rise in the region. Communities now find themselves needing to address these sensitive issues openly to try to head off a potential health crisis. In these matters, some development NGOs\textsuperscript{187} and theater groups have offered support in generating this conversation through village visits and radio programs. The internet offers another platform for discussing these concerns, for those who have access to it. A PSA drama on Youtube portrays a couple who have been reunited with the husband returning home after a long absence. The first scene shows their building anticipation about seeing each other and sharing physical intimacy again. The feeling builds until the point when they are in bed together, when it becomes apparent that the wife is concerned about the possibility that her husband has been unfaithful and possibly carrying a disease. She is unable to tell him this, though, and instead lets a voice on the radio convey this fear to her husband. This entrance of doubt kills the romantic mood, and the couple begins a standoff where they hold back from speaking to each other the concerns on their minds while withholding themselves from intimacy. When they finally admit their respective confusion and misgivings to each other, they agree that the best solution is that they both go to get tested for HIV, while the husband proposes that in the meantime they can still indulge their physical desires while using protection against the possibility of disease transmission (Global Dialogues).

\textsuperscript{187} FLM, when it was active in the commune of Ganki, would organize tours with a Nouakchott-based theater group that aimed to spread the word about the dangers of HIV and other STDs, and how to avoid transmission. One such program I witnessed avoided explicit discussions of sex and sexuality that would not have been acceptable in such a public forum.
Despite the strain that migration places on families and communities of Fuutankoɓe, there still exists a strong connection to place, lifestyle, and cultural identity among those who live in the diaspora as well as those who remain in the region. The Fuuta, with all of its problems and challenges today, still inspires a sense of home to those who have left in search of better opportunities. With respect to the history of the region, migration has been a major component to the lifestyle, whether it be seasonal migrations for herding, commerce, wage labor opportunities, or pilgrimage, or whether it be a more permanent relocation of families and communities throughout the ladde. The Pulaar language itself suggests that the current patterns of migration share a continuity with the past. The verb in Pulaar meaning “to migrate,” eggude, is the same verb that denotes movement of any kind, no matter the distance, scale, or time-frame. Ciavollela relates an incident where his attempt to describe itinerant wage-laborers as “modern migrants” and sheep herders as “traditional migrants” did not make any sense to his interlocutors (2010, 248-249). In this sense, the fact that Fuutankoɓe today are traveling further afield in search of livelihood opportunities does not seem to constitute a break with the past, as previous generations still needed to move frequently to make the most of the volatility of the climate or political shifts.

For many who leave the Fuuta today to travel to Europe or the United States, the mentality seems to be that they are continuing these past trends. When they are ready to retire or when their residency permits expire, they expect to return to their home communities to live out the rest of their days. Diaspora communities of Fuutankoɓe have come together in various locations throughout the United States and Europe. Those who
live abroad can thus take advantage of the concentrations of their compatriots to both adjust to life in a new country as well as to maintain a sense of connection and community with others who share their culture, language, and history. The solidarity within diaspora communities can be strong enough that certain migrants spend years without learning the language of their host country. The Fuuta community in Columbus, Ohio, for instance, has a number of individuals who have been unable to gain functional proficiency in English. While this limits opportunities for employment, they can work through the diaspora network to get positions where they do not have to use English directly to perform their occupational tasks. For example, some women in the community cook food out of their homes for restaurants that serve the diaspora population, meaning that they would not have to use English at all in their work. With such level of solidarity and ability to remain somewhat segregated from the host country society, it is not surprising that many migrants do not sever their connection with their places of origin.

Diaspora solidarity also translates into a significant political force with respect to Mauritanian national politics. Migrant communities are able to mobilize funds to back their preferred political candidates. Ibrahima Sarr, in my interview with him, talked of his visits to the Fuuta diaspora communities in the United States as part of his presidential campaign. Similarly, the antislavery activist Biram Ould Dah Abeid made visits and direct appeals to the Mauritanian diaspora in the United States to support his candidacy in the recent presidential election. Abeid's aim was to gain support from Haratin and Black African citizen groups, and he made strong appeals to the Fuutanköɓe community in Columbus for financial and logistical support. After finishing in second place in the
election, he communicated his gratitude to those from the diaspora who helped him, citing them as among his most faithful allies.

Finally, the diaspora plays a role in community development for their home communities. During my visit to the environs of Boghé, several people mentioned a project whereby a diaspora organization partnered with Boghé's mayor, Ba Adema, to purchase an ambulance to serve the community. Other projects have involved the sending of medical supplies to Fuuta villages. But while there is some activity along these lines, many people in the Fuuta and abroad feel that there is much greater potential for the diaspora to assist in local development efforts. There is an impression that the development assistance of the Pulaar-speaking diaspora lags behind the efforts of their Soninke neighbors in the Guidimakha region. Those communities have a strong network through which they send community members abroad to France where they work and contribute portions of their income to development assistance funds. The diaspora networks among Fuutankoɓe have emerged in a more haphazard fashion and have yet to achieve the dynamism of Soninke organizations.

Another limitation to diaspora-supported development assistance in Fuuta communities has been bureaucratic obstruction within the regional government apparatus. For instance, the community of Hayre Mbaar in the the Brakna region used to have a *jumelage* with a community in France that would send doctors and healthcare supplies every year. This relationship ended, though, when the Hakem of Bababé (about 20 km away) found out about these activities and demanded oversight as well as a cut of the donated materials (Dieng, personal interview). Similarly, Columbus-based Fuutankoɓe
have related to me instances where materials that they purchased and sent for certain communities never reached their intended destination. Given the history of animosity and atmosphere of mistrust between Fuutankoɓe and the various authorities of the Mauritanian state, it is not hard to understand the concerns of diaspora organizations when it comes to sending development resources to their home communities.

One can say a great deal more on the subject of large-scale migration and the way it is shaping and reshaping Fuuta communities at home and abroad, their lifestyles, their cultural identity, and their understanding of the world. The preceding discussion only touches the surface on certain of these aspects. The main takeaway is that the recent migration wave of adult-aged males has given rise to a number of stresses and challenges within Fuuta society, including the enormous burden that families endure through prolonged separation of loved ones. Yet, the desire to migrate remains strong, as parents and grandparents encourage their children to find any way they can to go abroad. The repeated failures of local systems of production over the course of the previous half century leave people with few other viable options; migration is the best path to continued survival. But there are also concerns surrounding the potential for such continued migration patterns to undermine networks of cultural solidarity and cultural identity. As such, it is perhaps not surprising that Fuutankoɓe have quickly embraced another aspect of 21st century globalization, communication technologies. As the following section will discuss, Fuutankoɓe have been very active in developing strong

And there are a number of Fuutankoɓe who came to the US as refugees seeking asylum during the events of 1989-1991 and have never been back to the country since.
communication networks and media outlets to serve communities of the region and in the diaspora that have become vital resources for community development.

Cell Phones and Transistor Radios: Jokkere Endam in the 21st Century

The flourishing of new telecommunications technologies throughout Africa seems to be a rather incongruous development to the minds of those who have never visited the continent. At the beginning of the 21st century, landline telephones were sparse, expensive, and unreliable. And if millions of people across the continent do not have access to running water or electricity, then it would seem to follow that cell phones would be a much lower priority, both in terms of infrastructural development as well as consumer demand. Even with strong consumer demand, how is it that impoverished individuals can spend their insufficient financial resources on the devices, the SIM cards, and the phone credit necessary to make calls? Yet, this is precisely what has happened over the last fifteen years, and cell phone service reaches across all of Mauritania, at least all areas that have human habitation. Cell phones are ubiquitous even in the rural areas, and many individuals own at least two phones and three SIM cards to match up with the three telecom companies present in the country, Mauritel, Mattel, and Chinguitel. With this ubiquity, cell phone technology has become a dynamic tool for Fuutankoɓe, allowing

189 See Sissako's 1999 film Life on Earth which contains numerous scenes from a small town in Mali where residents attempt to use the local telephone boutique to no avail, encountering wrong numbers, disconnections, and missed connections in their quest to communicate.

190 Those who live along the river can often receive the signal from the towers of the French telecom company Orange that provides service in Senegal. Fuutankoɓe will often carry Orange SIM cards so that they can be in touch with relatives across the border without having to pay international rates. One can use Mauritel, Mattel, and Orange SIM cards interchangeably in the same phone, with some phones able to hold two cards at a time, whereas Chinguitel makes SIM cards that one can only use with the phones they produce.
families to stay in close and regular contact with each other, no matter how far its members are scattered across the country or the globe.

Despite limited financial means, Fuutankoɓe have still been able to make effective use of cell phone service. This is partially due to the terms of service of Mauritania's telecom companies. Rather than offering their customers monthly contracts for service, SIM cards provide a pay-as-you-go option that only charges the action of placing a call, not the receiver. Also, the rates for placing calls incentivize keeping calls within the same company, i.e. calling a Mauritel number from a Mauritel number, or a Mattel number from a Mattel number. For this reason, Mauritanians are apt to have a SIM card for all three companies and take advantage of the different local rates or service coverages amongst the three companies.

One purchases a credit code (kaartal) for making calls in installments of 100 UM, 200 UM, 500 UM, or 1,000 UM. In communities large and small, most boutiques sell kaartal, while roadside vendors in cities often look to entice drivers and passersby to purchase from them. In Nouakchott, it is also possible to purchase any desired amount via text message. All throughout the city, young men sit at envoyer crédit posts with a loudspeaker playing a recording advertising the different rates available for purchase. While envoyer crédit is not available elsewhere throughout the country, people in the

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191 The figure of the envoyer crédit vendor has quickly entered the popular imagination of Mauritanian culture, as evidenced by a television comedy sketch program episode featuring a farcical interaction between Benne, a well-known comedic actor, and an envoyer crédit vendor. Benne approaches the vendor seeking to borrow the young man's turban (which is a strange thing to request, especially from a stranger), while the vendor insistently trying to sell phone credit, even after he realizes that Benne is not interested in any credit (Bellewar Media 2011). The exchange in this sketch highlights the omnipresence of these vendors all throughout the streets of Nouakchott along with the assertive nature of this commercial presence. Interestingly, Benne is also one of the primary spokespeople for Mauritel, appearing in their television and billboard ads.

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Fuuta can easily arrange for a family member in Nouakchott to purchase such credit for them. In this way, cell phone credit acts as a specific form of remittance income.

With the rapid diffusion of cellular technology and service, an entire etiquette of communication has sprung up amongst Mauritanians that builds in part upon the centrality of orality in expression and communication, while also reflecting the socioeconomic standing of the vast majority of the country's citizens. As to the latter element, those with little means are still able to make use of the technology for their communication needs. Even if one has no credit remaining on one's SIM card, one can still place a call to a friend or family member and hang up after the first ringtone. That person can then return the call – provided he or she has remaining credit – to inquire into what the original caller needed. Fuutankoɓe refer to the action in this circumstance as *beeping* someone, and *beeping* carries with it a greater sense of obligation than it would, for instance, in American settings. Fuutankobe consider it rude to not respond promptly to *beeping*, and the most acceptable excuses for delayed response are if one is in prayer, in the toilet, lack of credit, or lack of battery power.

Similarly, people frown upon call screening; the expectation is that if your phone rings, you should answer it, even if you do not recognize the number. The person on the other end will likely redial your number immediately or after a few minutes in hopes that you were temporarily indisposed. Teachers or those who work in office settings will take a call while teaching or in meetings. I was at a wedding one time amidst the adult men who were performing a benediction (*duwaaw*) for the dowry transaction between the fathers of the bride and groom, when one man's phone started ringing. The sound was
rather jarring considering the atmosphere of the benediction's murmured tones, but the man displayed no embarrassment at this disruption. He promptly brought his phone out, answered it, and had a conversation with the person on the other end of the line while the benediction continued.\footnote{I have heard as well of an incident in a movie theater in New York with a mixed audience of West Africans and Americans, when one of the West Africans answered a cell phone call in the middle of the film. The American viewers were indignant that this person had broken the atmosphere of silent viewing in this manner; yet, in Mauritania or other parts of West Africa, it would have been more impolite to ignore the incoming call.}

Incidents such as this reveal a strong cultural element to the etiquette of cell phone use that derives from the importance of oral communication in a largely non-literate society (Slim and Thompson 16). This is particularly true in rural areas, where reading is generally not something that people do at all; virtually all sharing of information and ideas takes place orally.\footnote{This is not to say that Fuutanköɓe have not had to adapt their communication styles for communication over the phone. Especially the greetings that people use when meeting face-to-face and which can go on for a few minutes become problematic when time on the phone carries a price tag.} Even those who are literate do not spend their time reading, especially if they do not have access to internet. In general, Mauritanians do not utilize the texting capability on their phones, nor do they maintain their contact lists in their phones. Just as was the case in this country before the advent of cell phones, Mauritanians are very good at memorizing phone numbers and recognizing them when they receive incoming calls. Aside from the matter of limited literacy, Fuutanköɓe in particular also must deal with the practical matter of the pre-programmed textual languages on their phones. None of these languages – French, English, or Arabic – are preferable when it comes to informal communication, and people are generally less comfortable with written Pulaar.
Given these factors, it is not surprising that the dynamic role of cell phones in Fuuta communities arises largely from its capacity to facilitate verbal communication across long distances. Thus, from the perspective of Fuutankoɓe, cellular communication increases the potential for jokkondiral (partnership/connections) beyond the region or even the national borders. As de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, and Brinkman note, mobile phone communication deterritorializes social networks by becoming a powerful thread within the social fabric (12). But it has also played a major role in efforts to revitalize solidarity on a more local scale, having a synergistic effect with another widely available oral medium, radio. From what I observed during my fieldwork, the interplay between these two modes of technology provides a strong and democratic platform for individuals across the Fuuta to access and participate in the discussions of the relevant and pressing issues that their communities face. The oral nature of both media means that this forum is open to all, regardless of level of education or literacy.

Radio has been around in the Fuuta much longer than cell phones have. The national radio station, Radio Mauritanie, began around the time of independence, and quickly found enormous popularity amongst the citizenry (Chad). The state was able to use this centralized mode of communication to control the flow of information, and in a large sense the national radio station is still an important vehicle for disseminating official propaganda. However, even in the early years, Mauritanian citizens saw the potential to use the radio waves to communicate across long distances. One of the most popular programs from the early years was the transmission of messages between family members, friends, or acquaintances across the airwaves. These messages are known as
*balaghat*\(^{194}\) in Hassaniya, and often consisted of death notices, spreading the news of a deceased person's passing to all those who might know this person (Chad). This program continues today, and each day *Radio Mauritanie* broadcasts *balaghat* in Hassaniya, Pulaar, Wolof, and Soninke. The Pulaar *balaghat* program comes on around noon, and Fuutankoɓe tune in daily to listen to the messages, in case any of them pertain to them or someone they know.

From a logistical standpoint, radio works well in rural areas because it is inexpensive, completely wireless, and easy to repair. Cheap, basic radios are widely available in the marketplaces of larger towns, and one can purchase the D-size batteries that they run on virtually anywhere. Also, the devices hold up in the harsh environmental conditions – especially the intense heat and blowing dust – much better than other types of electronic devices. Even if there are mechanical problems, many people are adept at repairing broken antennae, transistors, or speaker cables. As for the infrastructure and network, the broad, flat topography of the Fuuta means that radio station towers can broadcast their signal over expansive distances. But the radios that people own are not just AM/FM, but can also pick up shortwave frequencies from all over the hemisphere. It may be fair to say that more than any other technological medium, radio has been the most effective means for Fuutankoɓe to gain information about the world beyond the region, and it has been facilitating this function for at least a half century.

The most significant change in the radio landscape in the past decade has been the growth of Pulaar-language programming, most of which originates in Senegal. Before

\(^{194}\) From the Arabic verb *balagha*, to reach or attain.
stations in the Senegalese Fuuta went on the air in Thilogne, in Matam, or in Peeta, Mauritanian Pulaar speakers only had access to about an hour and half of programming in their language on Radio Mauritanie airwaves. This was the same amount of time that the national radio station dedicated to Soninke- and Wolof-language programming; the rest of the day broadcast programming in Hassaniya.\textsuperscript{195} Fuutankoɓe would tune in just to hear the Pulaar-language broadcasts, and the rest of the day they would go over to the short wave dial and listen to Radio France Internationale (RFI). Of course, the news broadcasts and other programming on RFI often did not speak directly to their own interests and concerns. Even with the RFI branch for Africa, it is a big continent and the Fuuta region does not attract much attention. Thus, when new radio stations in Senegal hit the airwaves in the mid 2000s, Fuutankoɓe listeners quickly switched over their dials to be able to access more relevant programming that was broadcast in their mother tongue.\textsuperscript{196} During my fieldwork, people were tuning in to Pulaar-language programming virtually around the clock.

The alignment of all of these factors has allowed for the emergence of a vibrant platform for emic discourses on the pressing concerns of Fuutankoɓe today in terms of development and society. The content of the programming addresses issues such as social

\textsuperscript{195} This is a major sore spot for Fuutankoɓe, and many people complained about this distribution of language programming.

\textsuperscript{196} In my interview with Mamadou Demba Šy, he suggested that the popularity of Senegalese radio stations in Mauritanian Fuuta communities carried a potential downside of greater marginalization within their own national community. He says: “Ɗum woni cadéllə dë . . waade yimbə hewə paamaani ko muritani woni e dow mum, sabu kambe haakillaajii mabbe ngone tan ko e to baange senegal, haa cika kambe wonde be njeyaaka e muritani, ko cadellə mawdë” (Šy, personal interview). (“This is a problem . . [it] causes many people to not understand what is going on around them in Mauritania, because they’ve turned their minds towards Senegal to the point where one would think that they have nothing to to with Mauritania. This is a big problem.”)
and economic development, education, the ethical imperatives of Islam, the management of cultural identity vis-a-vis their investments in Mauritanian citizenship and the national body politic, and engagement with processes and effects of globalization. Part of the reason I was able to easily engage Fuuta communities on their perspectives on development was because conversations on this subject entered into their homes every day via the airwaves. The moment this dawned on me was when I was in the village of Dalhaya, on the southeastern edge of the Gorgol Noir floodplain. I was sitting in the chief's compound unwinding after finishing my interview with community elders and leaders when I became aware of the discussion taking place on the radio which was in close earshot. The program was discussing some of the very same issues pertaining to healthcare and to agricultural pest control that community members had just shared with me. It was at this moment that I realized that the interviews and conversations I conducted throughout my time in the Fuuta intersected with larger conversations that were taking place through the formatting of Pulaar-language radio programming.

Through this medium, Fuutankobe are able to discuss and work through important issues using their own language and the epistemological framework that arises through their specific cultural and historical experience. They are also able to learn about development projects in the area. For instance, people in Seyenne were able to learn about the ACF women's cooperative garden enhancement project in Sinthiane Diakary and Mafondou through hearing about it over the radio. My host mom told me how she had heard that the project had allowed the women to produce a significant yield of potatoes. Her oldest daughter was living in Sinthiane at the time, and was able to send
some of her husband's family's share in the yield. For other listeners, this information can
alert them to the existence of local products or opportunities of which they can take
advantage.

Beyond the information and discussions that the radio programs are able to
disseminate to Fuuta listeners, the format of the medium also allows for listeners to
participate directly in these conversations and exchanges. This participatory dimension
emerges through the interplay between the radio format and cellular communication.
Many of the programs give ample time for listeners to call in to share their input on the
topic of discussion, similar to the manner of talk radio shows in this country. Other
programs devote their entire airtime to listener call-ins, where people go on the air to pass
along greetings and messages to family and loved ones who might be listening. During
one of my visits to Seyenne, my host mom Djeynaba told me how her youngest sister had
called in to a show recently and was able to send her greetings to all her scattered
relatives throughout the Fuuta. The act of sending greetings in this public manner helps to
augment the sense of jokkondiral and jokkere endam amongst Fuuta families and
communities and helps to foster a regional identity among listeners. In effect, this sense
of region encompasses both sides of the river, strengthening the sense of connection and
kinship that have been present historically among communities in the Senegal River
valley.

Other popular types of programming on the radio airwaves involving listener
participation include shows that give listeners the opportunity to display their wit,
knowledge, or creativity on air. Of particular emphasis is knowledge of the Pulaar
language and its vast lexicon. Program hosts challenge their listeners to define arcane words or demonstrate the ability to avoid the use of borrowed foreign words while speaking. Other programs hold lectures on the etymological and phonological backgrounds of the Pulaar language as it has changed over time, imparting a deeper knowledge of the language to the listeners. There are also programs that allow for call-in listeners, particularly children, to demonstrate their knowledge of the Quran with the recitation of specific *ayāt* in Arabic. A program such as this provides additional social space for the development and refinement of Quranic Arabic. This is a significant cultural imperative for Fulɓe who must master Arabic as the liturgical language of their religious practices and beliefs. All these examples illustrating the diversity and popularity of Pulaar-language radio programming and its strong participatory dimension suggest that this medium is a major conduit for the circulation of cultural capital amongst the program hosts and guest, call-in participants, and the listening public.

In the context of globalization and its challenges to Fuuta households and communities, the emergence of Pulaar-language radio appears to be one of the more positive developments. It serves a role in informing, educating, and connecting the listening public while providing another platform of discussion concerning what it means to be Fulɓe today as citizens of either Mauritania or Senegal. It also allows the language itself to adapt itself to rapidly expanding horizons of knowledge and experience as Fuutankoɓe learn more and more about the world beyond their borders. As influential figures, such as the politician and former television journalist Ibrahima Sarr, point to the Pulaar language (as well as Soninke and Wolof) as the key to national development (Sarr,
personal interview), it would seem that radio is another oral medium that Fuutankóɓe can use while laying the groundwork for potentially realizing such a vision. Fuutankóɓe still face daunting challenges to their continued survival and well-being within their communities – failing schools, inadequate healthcare services, lack of job opportunities, competition for land and resources from Bidhane and Haratin communities, volatile climate conditions, and much more. With so much going wrong for Fuuta communities, it is nonetheless encouraging to see a creative and robust effort through radio to reinvigorate or reconstitute the collectivist ethos of jokkere endam that served them so well in the past.

Aside from the sense of encouragement that derives from the success of Pulaar-language radio programming in the Fuuta in distributing information and facilitating discussion of relevant issues, there are other positive considerations to make regarding the potential for radio to be an instrument of development. One could look at radio as infrastructure that is already in place within Fuuta communities and more reliable than the physical infrastructures for transportation or public utilities, or the institutional infrastructures for education, healthcare, businesses, etc. Development organizations can have reasonable confidence that the radio can connect them with a broad base of listeners, provided that these organizations have the means and willingness to use Pulaar as the primary language of communication. This latter aspect if extremely important, as it allows listeners to respond to what they hear with their own perspectives and opinions. With the right approach, the radio can be a two-way channel for communication and
exchange of ideas, whereby organizations and communities identify the resources and strengths for development and discuss how to deploy those resources effectively.\textsuperscript{197}

\textit{Conclusion: Strengthening Knowledge and Unity}

Like the large-scale challenges of climate change and sociopolitical tension/strife, the processes of globalization have in many ways been hindering the development of Fuuta communities and adding to poverty and social misery. As part of the periphery of global trade flows, Fuutankọɓe confront lifestyle and consumption changes that originate elsewhere, and they have little agency to use these flows to their own advantage in the marketplace. Rather than enjoying the supposed benefits of these changes, for the most part it appears that Fuutankọɓe are just trying to hang on and survive. By and large, Fuutankọɓe are proud of who they are and how they have lived, but they are also pragmatic, especially given the dire circumstances they face. As one who has spent a significant amount of time in the region, I often find myself inspired by their capacity for resilience. For development efforts to make any headway against the major roadblocks that this chapter and the preceding ones have discussed and highlighted, partner entities would do well to connect with the Fuuta communities in a way that mobilizes and augments the strengths of those communities.

One strength of Fuuta communities that outside partners could easily support is their desire to increase their knowledge, particularly in the realm of science and the

\textsuperscript{197} Yet this does not make radio a substitute for face-to-face communication between organizations and partner communities. A few of my interview corresponds underscored the importance of organizations visiting the communities where they work on a regular basis. The jokkondiral potential of radio does not replace that which obtains from direct interaction.
natural world. As many of my interview correspondents pointed out, development begins upon a foundation of knowledge that allows people to work in pursuit of their interests in ways that can be successful. With the changes that Fuutankoɓe have encountered and experienced in recent years, there is widespread recognition that their knowledge base needs to expand in order to confront the challenges they face. At the same time, public education seems to be failing the youth of Fuuta communities, unable to deliver the benefits that it promises. However, there are other potential avenues that development organizations can use for the purpose of expanding knowledge. Schools need significant support and investment to be effective, but Fuutankoɓe can also increase their knowledge through some of the Pulaar-language radio programming available on the airwaves.

Another idea along these lines comes from Bocar Dieng, a Mauritanian who lives in Columbus, Ohio, but had spent many years working in the development field before leaving his country. His proposal is to secure ownership of a houseboat and convert it into a floating library traveling up and down the Senegal River and stopping at communities along the way to give them access to the knowledge resources contained in the library. He has been dubbing educational programming from PBS and nature documentaries into Pulaar, which would give Fuutankoɓe a window into parts of the world that they likely never get to see, with their own language explaining and interpreting what it is that these programs present. With such ideas in germination, outside support – whether it be financial, material, or logistical – could allow such projects to flourish.

The other major component to Fuuta resiliency is the sense of solidarity – *jokkere endam* – within and between communities across the region, and development partners
would do well to find ways to support and augment this solidarity. *Jokkere endam*, involves more than making connections and building a network; it means close cooperation, pooling of resources, and sharing of knowledge. One person explained it to me using an example of a group of individuals getting together with habitual regularity and talking to each other of the experiences and observations that each person had while he or she was going about his or her daily business. When the feeling of *jokkere endam* is strong, those who listen will be able to understand what each person saw and learned as if he or she had been there in person as well. It is this idea of *jokkere endam* or dental (unity) that comes up again and again as an affirmation of strength and potential. It is what allowed Fuuta communities to survive in the harsh arid/semiarid environment of the Senegal River valley. It is what many Fuutankoɓe might identify as one of their most valuable cultural attributes, maybe second to their devotion to Islam.

When NGOs arrive in Fuuta communities, there is a hope on the part of the community members that strong durable partnerships can form with such outside entities that can be the foundation for a broader sense of *jokkere endam*. The hospitality with which they welcome visitors is more than a matter of politeness or courtesy; it is an invitation to extended cooperation. Fuutankoɓe are ever ready to take up the duties of hosting guests, offering them milk, peanuts, and cookies to provide nourishment, while the serving of three rounds of tea provides ample time and space for discussion and conversation. However, the operational logic of NGOs makes it difficult for those who make visits to partner communities to accept such hospitality and the time that it takes to show full respect to one's host and the generosity that he or she offers. The brief
interactions between NGO workers and community members appear pleasant most of the time, but it is clear that Fuutankoɓe are not satisfied with this manner of communication and conducting business. Part of their frustration is that development assistance coming from NGO partners does not go far enough in meeting the needs of the community. Another aspect of their discontent is that the durable and ongoing partnership that Fuuta communities desire does not seem to be a priority of development organizations.

The reality is that there seems to be a good deal of pessimism amongst all the actors within the development domain, even though the nature of that pessimism may differ depending on the perspective of each actor. Regardless of the pessimism that they express, Fuutankoɓe cannot disengage themselves from development efforts. Their own survival is at stake; but beyond survival, they want to escape the poverty in which they have been mired for so long. They want to thrive as previous generations of Fuutankoɓe were able to do. In the absence of significant investment from the Mauritanian state, multinational corporations, or international institutions, many people feel that the best strategy is to start with their strengths – their thirst for knowledge and their tight-knit solidarity. Fuuta communities face enormous hurdles given all the external and internal challenges that the previous chapters have addressed. Even with engaged partnership, it will take steadfast and careful planning, coordination, and above all cooperation to convert the Fuuta from a backwater of the global economic periphery into a thriving environment for those who live there.
Chapter 6: How to Think About Development in a Region on the Brink

The outlook for tangible improvements to the material quality of life in the region remains as bleak as ever in the face of the macro challenges to development in Fuuta communities that I have highlighted in the preceding chapters. The problem of food security weighs heavily on people's minds, as households struggle to produce or purchase enough food to ensure their survival and long-term health. Beyond this, the state's practices of control over Fuuta residents threaten the continued existence of communities in the region. Today, the state is expropriating land in the region or allowing outside interests to expropriate it, transforming it into private property and pauperizing local farmers and herders (Sikhousso, Taqadoumy). As such, communities are losing their territorial autonomy. Considering that this autonomy has been the basis of Halpulaar life in the region for generations,¹⁹⁸ this is a major cause for alarm. While communities of the region have seen over forty years of development efforts and initiatives through national and transnational organizations, these efforts on the whole have not been able to transform the quality of life for Fuutankoɓe for the better. Even modestly successful development projects have only brought tenuous benefits. Like a sand castle on the shore, the rising tide of ecological, political, and economic forces can easily overwhelm and obliterate the positive results of such development projects. This leaves Fuutankoɓe in

¹⁹⁸ Cf. 66-74 and 275-285.
the desperate position of looking to development partnerships with outside organizations as their best hope for improvement while understanding at the same time that even outside help might not be enough to ward off disaster. Thus, the development process provokes a sense of anxiety among Fuutankobé. They experience a psychological trauma that feeds off of the material challenges and the unrealized hopes.

Recurring Themes of Underdevelopment

This study as a whole has brought to the foreground a number of oppositional factors that contribute to the anxieties surrounding the failure of development to take hold in the Fuuta and bring prosperity to its communities. Perhaps the foremost opposition that the preceding chapters address is agency versus dependence, as Fuutankobé's historical accounts of the past century speak to a significant loss of agency when it comes to pursuing their livelihoods. The previous three chapters have examined how processes of climate change, political marginalization, and neoliberal globalization have eroded local agencies, increasing the dependence of communities on outside actors. This dependence on outside assistance opens up another unsettling dynamic, as Fuuta populations must contend with a loss in the regularity of the rhythms of their livelihoods in the face of the volatility of the climate and the randomness of outside interventions. This latter factor arises from the fact that outside organizations tend to approach communities with project ideas instead of responding to the requests that communities make for assistance. Relatedly, there is an opposition between an ideal predictability of development assistance that gives a solid foundation through which Fuuta communities can meet their
needs and the arbitrary nature by which outside partners actually intervene. The school
garden project that PAM supported\textsuperscript{199} is a clear illustration of the problems that can come
from arbitrary intervention. In such circumstances, development partners can pull away
saying that they have tried to help, leaving grassroots communities with the task of
dealing with the consequences, intended or otherwise.

The regularity/randomness and predictability/arbitrary oppositional factors that
underpin the development situation in Fuuta communities serve to compound the
agency/dependence dilemma. In the conversations I had with Fuutankoɓe, experiences
with development efforts have done little to restore the sense of agency that they have
lost through historical circumstances of the last half century. Their disillusionment with
respect to the potential for development interventions to improve the quality of life in
their communities points to the oft-made critique of participatory development. Behind
the collaborative rhetoric, one finds that participatory development in practice is little
more than a discursive move through which development organizations can don a mask
of responsibility while avoiding the entanglements of commitment to the survival and
growth of grassroots populations. Instead, the strongest commitments lie with those who
control the purse strings of development funding. Grassroots populations might not be
able to directly observe the dynamic of funding commitments, and they might not fully
understand the organizational and operational logics of development institutions, but the
lack of results suggests to them that the process does not really respect their needs and
interests.

\textsuperscript{199} Cf. 161-167.
Another set of oppositions emerges with respect to the unequal power dynamic between Fuuta communities and outside partners, concerning the responses of cultural identity in the face of continuing development setbacks. On one hand, Fuuta communities express a sense of victimhood given their lack of control over the macro factors that are putting pressure on their livelihood. Given the moral value that *pulaaku* places on the capacity to endure hardship and misfortune without complaint, expressions of victimhood carry strong potential for embarrassment, even when they look to elicit sympathy for their plight. On the other hand, Fuuta communities exhibit a belief that they can channel their cultural resiliency to overcome the struggles that they endure. They have shown themselves to be adaptable to changing circumstances and adept at putting new skills to use. Furthermore, sense of community is one of their greatest strengths and people express the need for communal ethics to be the foundation for effective development. One can view the tension between expressions of victimhood and expressions of resilience as a consequence of continued erosion of agency. As I will discuss below, Fuuta community leaders fear that the pendulum might be swinging strongly towards the former and away from the latter.

One last set of factors within the realm of psychological trauma concerning development setbacks is the opposition between movement and stasis. This oppositional dynamic plays out in both spatial terms and in socioeconomic terms. The nature of the agro-pastoral production complex throughout the Sahel region has depended historically on the ability for populations to move about in response to environmental and political

200 Cf. 77.
pressures. Furthermore, people move from one production activity to another based in part upon their calculations of the amount of potential benefit that activity will bring. This does not necessarily mean that this behavior of Fuutankoɓe can fall under the rubric of rational actor theory. People experiment with new activities and new production methods, seeking not only to improve their output but to gain new knowledge and skills, which aligns with Halpulaar notions of effective development. One looks to increase *gandal* (knowledge) and put it into practice as *gollal* (work) that ensures and (hopefully) enhances livelihood.

Yet, as Fuutankoɓe evaluate their circumstances today, they feel that stasis has set in as they lose their adaptive response capacity. No matter how much effort they put forth, the returns are dwindling. In a spatial sense, Fuutankoɓe face increasing restrictions to movement. This hampers pastoralists, who find the bureaucratic procedures of crossing national borders a major hindrance to their herding practices. Restrictions to movement also affect the internal migrants who look to leave the region in search of employment or educational opportunities. These particular restrictions have come about through the Mauritanian state's practices of security and citizenship control. Likewise, Fuuta residents who are Halpulaar have a difficult time gaining permission to travel abroad to Europe or the United States. But stasis is not just a spatial matter. People fear that poverty has become a permanent condition of their reality. Mauritania's sociopolitical order tends to block upward social mobility for Halpulaar communities, while the absence of jobs in the Fuuta limits income-earning potential.
To summarize, the grassroots perspective on development among Fuuta residents reflects degrees of psychological trauma resulting from the failure of development efforts to improve life in their communities along with the reversals in fortune that they have experienced over the past few decades. Instead of greater agency, they are more dependent; instead of a greater capacity for movement, they are mired in stasis and stagnation. These oppositions embody a loss of freedom, and development has been unable to create new freedoms or expand pre-existing ones in a way that satisfies people's needs or hopes. Furthermore, people express an erosion in the amount of control they have over the forces at work in their community. Regularity of rhythms has given way to randomness, while predictability has given way to arbitrariness. As such, Fuutankobe vacillate between expressions of victimhood and expressions of cultural resiliency, unsure of which position – if any – can bring positive change. But the more development efforts fail to provide the “human security”\(^{201}\) to support the livelihoods of Fuuta communities, the more difficult it becomes for them to maintain the collectivist ethos that embodies cultural resiliency. Indeed, Halpulaar society in the Mauritanian Fuuta is in the midst of a major existential crisis.

The lyrics of the second half of the Ndiaye Seydou song that I invoked throughout Chapter Three challenge Fuutankobe to maintain their equanimity through the difficult times and disappointments. The first half of the song laments the deplorable conditions of living in the region, the decay and despair. The singer weeps along with the people of the

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\(^{201}\) To refer to Feltault’s use of this term, cf. 7.
region, exclaiming “ndaw baasal, kooni ndaw baasal” (“o poverty, what poverty”). The next stanza makes clear the gravity of the situation, the desperation which people feel.

*Kono baasal so yetiima fitaandu yetiima katuudi* What is the end of poverty but death? Oh, what *Ndaw ko yurmini kono ndaw ko hulbiini hande* sadness! Oh, what terrifying conditions prevail *ender reedu Fuuta* in the Fuuta today!

One could understand the “terrifying conditions” to be the tangible manifestations of poverty and underdevelopment along with the crippling droughts that afflict the region. One could also interpret these lyrics to refer to the forces at work that create and sustain these manifestations: the loss of agency, loss of movement, and the loss of predictability in dealing with their environment and maintaining at minimum a subsistence-level economy. Regardless of which interpretation Ndiaye Seydou implies here, the lyrics tell us that disaster awaits if communities are unable to make headway against poverty:

“What is the end of poverty but death?”

If this is not bad enough, the most alarming aspect of the situation, according to the singer, is that people have begun to act as if they have accepted or even embraced the death of their society. In the second half of the song, Ndiaye Seydou addresses and criticizes the tendency to completely give up hope of survival, let alone the possibility of working towards a better future. Instead, mourning has become the primary preoccupation of the community.
**Ene ngulli ha joorni kine**  
They cry so much their noses run

**Ene ngoy ha bonni gite**  
They cry until they've ruined their eyes.

**Mbele ndeen sunaare ko dumontoode**  
Will this persist for days, for weeks?

**Ndaw kaawis e nder reedu Fuuta**  
There is much that astonishes in Fuuta today.

**Hoɓe nana ngara**  
Guests come to the ceremony

**Njewe ko ɓe jimanoobe wa foboobe**  
Most of them griots.

**Hoɓe naata galle gooto ɓof yoobo ndaande**  
They enter the houses of the deceased and begin to wail,

**Be njokondira e tawaɓe**  
They join and intermingle with the mourners –

**Daade geloode bura welde ndaande**  
A bystander would say the voice of a duck has more melody.

The imagery of a society that has become well-accustomed to the rituals of mourning points to a society that has begun to see itself primarily as victims of circumstances beyond their control. Rather than fight those circumstances through their capacity for resiliency, they find it easier to devote their cultural resources towards expressing their despair, their victimhood.

The next step beyond expression is identification with this sense of victimhood, as Ndiaye Seydou's lyrics depict the atmosphere of mourning giving way to an atmosphere of almost hedonistic celebration. Over the next several stanzas, he uses an extended metaphor comparing the festivity of funeral observances to what should normally be reserved for marriage celebrations.
Day and night, they are fixing their appearance, Putting on lotion and cologne
Gossiping with one another, slapping hands.

The cows and the goats are prepared for slaughter
Grain is measured out to be milled
Rice is measured out and set aside
The oil is measured, and tomatoes are not forgotten.

People have locked their own doors, forgetting their houses until the end of the mourning period
So much excitement, as if it was a wedding.
The mourning tent is set up before the person dies
Everyone puts their affairs on hold.

They wait for food to appear to sate their appetites
They will savor the milk and the coffee
Not to mention the tea they will drink.

Rather than working together for collective benefit, the mourners become parasites
draining the provisions of bereaved families. The mix of solidarity with the sense of victimhood hastens the demise that Fuuta society faces.
Ndaw baasal e Fuuta
   Such poverty in Fuuta!
Mbasa neddo ma mbaasa ngure ma
   Along with the loss of a family member
Ko fotno wonde lebbi diđi moje e balde diđi
   A household loses its store of food
   What should last for two months will be consumed in two days.
Hoñe ngaray hodde ma njilane passuji
Leeli yawi koko arata
Wadtaama fodde
   The guests must receive their taxi fares
   Whether today or tomorrow, they will get it – This is the custom.

In essence, Ndiaye Seydou's lyrics warn of what might lie ahead if people finally let go of any hope that life will get better for them. Once they reach that point, there would be little use of holding on to the pragmatism that has allowed them to be adaptive in the face of changing circumstances. Instead, people without hope for the future are apt to throw caution to the wind and indulge in whatever excesses are available to them. This includes the potential for resorting to violence against their perceived oppressors, the Bidhane elite and their presence in the Fuuta. However, the song is not speaking out against the injustices that Halpulaar communities in Mauritania have endured.

The song is an exhortation for these communities to persevere and not lose sight of the potential to improve their lives. His description of the funeral guests and their behavior is meant to instill a sense of shame for those who hear the lyrics. He is trying to clarify the difference between recognition of the gravity of their current circumstances and giving in to despair at those circumstances. The last three stanzas of the song point out that they have not lost everything yet, and if people adopt a healthier perspective they might even avoid losing everything.
The only difference between a funeral and a wedding is the party
But if things continue as they are, even this will be the same.

The only difference between the village center and the graveyard
Will be that no one would play card games in the cemetery

If nothing is done, we will all be celebrating amongst the buried corpses.

Let's stop and take off this garb in which Fuuta has adorned herself
For we stand on the point of ruination
Let's remember the difference between happiness and sadness
Let's give everything its proper due.

This call to keep going and keep working for a better future that is consistent with their own cultural vision resonates powerfully among Fuuta listeners, no matter how frustrated they become at their own poverty. As people come together as a community, they repeat the mantras of pursuing knowledge (gandal), forging unity (dental) and building solidarity (jokkere endam) in the service of development (bamtaare/yelitaare). These mantras serve to remind themselves of their own capacity for resilience and away from going too far in recognizing themselves as victims of climate change, of political injustice, or of economic forces.
Herein lies what I believe to be the most important shift for development partners, be they state or transnational organizations: participatory development amongst grassroots populations must understand, engage with, and in some cases adopt local perspectives and ideas concerning what constitutes a good life, what constitutes improvement, and what strategies are most likely to be effective in pursuing those goals. Furthermore, this close engagement must take place before any concrete project ideas move forward. If organizations come in seeking to implement projects or initiatives that have been tried elsewhere (successfully or not) without taking on-the-ground realities into full consideration, then their efforts are likely to exhibit the randomness and arbitrariness that accompany the loss of agency of grassroots communities with respect to development. Community consultations have to be more than survey questionnaires and gathering of statistics. A shared language should emerge between communities and their development partners that can become the basis for planning and laying out objectives. This is more than the ability to communicate across language barriers; each side must be able to understand the conceptual vocabulary and frameworks of understanding of the other side. Development institutions must understand the emic perspective of local communities rather than trying to impose the institutional knowledge and *modus operandi* onto these communities. NGOs can learn a lot from their partner communities if they are willing to learn from the knowledge and experience that people possess.

One person from my field interviews invoked this orientation towards development, citing the need for *jokkondiral* (partnership), *faamondiral* (mutual
understanding), and fibondiral añaaji mumen (alignment of interests). The Pulaar language utilizes a number of prepositional infixes, including -ondir- which gives a meaning of reciprocity to a word containing it. Thus, faamde (to understand) becomes faamondirde (to understand each other). The fact that this community leader defined development using these three terms with the -ondir- infix is quite significant. Others mentioned how their communities are not just looking to receive help, but also willing to offer help in order to strengthen the bonds of partnership. While they did not specify what exactly they can do to help outside partners, the point is that cooperation leads to an alignment of interests which helps build jokkere endam which in turn is the foundation for effective development, in the eyes of Fuutankobe. In some circumstances, community organizations have stated that they will refuse to work with any outside partner that will not closely engage with the community, noting that such assistance will not bring sustainable improvements. Many communities might not have the luxury of turning down assistance offers, but they might nevertheless value the principle of working with outsiders on more of an equal footing.

This desire for closer partnership and engagement – for a path towards solidarity – is just one example of the role that culture can play in altering the development process in a way that responds more faithfully to the needs of local communities and addresses their needs for human security. Kelly Feltault has already made the case that local culture's significance in development practices goes far beyond the realm of artistic expression and the tourism economy that often circumscribe the role of folklorists in local development. In her engagement with impoverished and economically endangered
communities, she noted a desire for “more equitable ways to engage state officials” and adopt “a rights-based development approach that considers their livelihood and its connection to the environment and natural resources” (Feltualt 95). My own conversations with Fuuta communities echoed this desire, with Fuutankoɓe highlighting the importance of social capital, the role of jokkere endam, and how it connects to past and present production practices in the region.

One critical role that development folklorists and anthropologists can play is to help shift the terrain of participatory development away from the loci of institutional power and towards the forms of engagement that are more familiar to local communities. Collaboration and consultation require a regularity of interaction at the site of intervention. The hospitality practices and consensus approach to forms of engagement such as the Kawral association's monthly meeting (baatu gure) embody this shift in terrain. Outside partners come to these meetings and participate within the framework of discussion that the grassroots organization has established. Folklorists and anthropologists can highlight and foreground such instances where culture intersects with the political and economic dimensions of development, bringing the institutional apparatus to the grassroots in service of the latter's needs, rather than vice versa.

Through closer engagement within these emic dimensions to grassroots development, emergent solutions and strategies become a real possibility, allowing local communities paths or options for overcoming the challenges they face. Development organizations need to move away from their tendencies to use a one-size-fits-all model or

202 Cf. 100-115.
to attempt to reproduce successful interventions from different contexts. Kevin Healy, a
development sociologist and former Peace Corps volunteer, highlights some of the follies
that have resulted from these tendencies, such as an attempt to cultivate “improved”
varieties of potato in Peruvian highlands, when the seeds had been developed from
varieties grown in lowland terrains (2). Incidents such as this demonstrate not just the
short-sightedness of a top-down approach to development, but also the way that the
process shortcuts local expertise in development matters. Local expertise might have
recognized the problems that would arise from using a potato variety from another
climate zone before even going through the trouble to try it out.

Healy's collection of case studies in Bolivia leads him to suggest that what
development partners should be doing is cultivating the forms of local expertise and
facilitating the connection of such expertise to global markets to benefit grassroots
producers. He cites, among others, quinoa, organic chocolate, and alpaca fibers as
successful examples in which impoverished Bolivian producers have been able to tap into
a demand for these products in wealthy countries. In my mind, Healy is too uncritical of
the neoliberal market forces at work in these examples, and these forces can produce
ruinous consequences for grassroots producers. However, I do find appealing the strategy
of taking what people already do, the skills that they already possess, and figuring out
how they can use those skills to create new opportunities for themselves. After all, this
aligns with the Fuutankobe conception of development as the enhancement of gandal
(knowledge) to foster greater productivity in gollal (work).
One final point for consideration in this discussion is that development organizations should understand the local communities with which they work as singularities that have come to be through the sedimentations and transformations of specific historical, political, economic, ecological, and cultural forces. One can look to Arturo Escobar and his discussion of the complex phenomenon of difference in political ecology. He highlights the singularity of each locale and cultural entity, arguing that:

people mobilize against the destructive aspects of globalization from the perspective of what they have been and what they are at present: historical subjects of particular cultures, economies, and ecologies; particular knowledge producers; individuals and collectivities engaged in the play of living in landscapes and with each other in distinctive ways (2008, 6).

The particularities that he identifies in the Pacific region of Colombia do not correspond with those particularities that exist in the Fuuta of Mauritania, even if there happen to be similarities. The difference lies in the ensemble, in the way in which the various elements and forces come together in different contexts. Escobar sees strong potential for ethnography and social theory to trace the contours and interrelationships of all the factors at play and understand how they fit together (2008, 6). This could provide outside partners with a map, so to speak, that allows them to see how they can intervene productively within a locality instead of intervening destructively. Again, as I have noted, Fuuta populations are well aware of this possibility and connect it with their understanding of jokkere endam.
Which brings me back, in conclusion, to the emic conceptions of development that I gleaned from my discussions and experiences among Halpulaar communities in the Fuuta, as well as among diaspora groups living in the US. The notions of what constitutes improvement in the quality of life and the capacity for living among Fuutankoɓe bear all of the complexities that Escobar highlights when elaborating a political ecology of difference. Escobar does not use the term development in this instance, and he has previously argued for a critical move beyond development.\footnote{See Escobar 1994.} His earlier provocative suggestion to take up a post-development critique generated strong controversy and disagreement among development scholars, feeling that he had overreached.\footnote{See, in particular, Wainwright (8-10). Healy also offers a critique of Escobar's position, but in doing so reduces and distorts Escobar's arguments to overly broad assertions that ignore the problems that Escobar wished to address (400-402).} And yet, he cannot completely throw away the term, similar to the fact that Fuuta communities and impoverished communities all over the world cannot not want to improve their situations. “Political ecology of difference” might seem like a nice substitute for the dilemma, but only at the conceptual level. In emic discourses, such a substitution takes one further away from the immediate, from the tangible, and from what needs to be done. Emic conceptions of development, in my mind, are a valuable and important corrective to the Western universalizing notions of development as well as other tendencies to define the concept in overly abstract terms. Halpulaar communities in the Mauritanian Fuuta have their own ways of expressing what development means to them, as well as the processes by which they can achieve development. The bigger issue, the one that continues to plague their minds, is if they will find a way to do so before their challenges overwhelm
them completely. They understand that they will not resolve their existential dilemmas all at once. The process is step by step, and they would certainly appreciate the presence and efforts of anyone who would like to take that journey with them.
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Appendix A: Glossary of Pulaar Terms

Note: The Pulaar dictionary is organized as follows: a, b, ɓ, c, d, ɗ, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, mb, n, nd, ng, nj, ŋ, o, p, r, s, t, u, w, y, ų

awo: fishing

baatu gure: inter-communal meeting

ɓaleejo: black, a term that can refer to non-Arab Mauritanians, to Haratins (capaato ɓaleejo), or to Halpulaar individuals specifically

ɓamtaare: development

ɓeydaare: increase, advancement

cadelle: problem

capaato (pl. safaalɓe): Bidhane or Haratin

ceedu: hot season, generally late March through July

ceerno (pl. seernaabe): religious scholar/teacher or title of respect

cossan: tradition/heritage

cubaalo (pl. subaalɓe): fisherman/woman

dabuunde: cold season, from December through February

dental: unity

dieri: upland, sandy-soil plains where farmers plant rain-fed crops

dimaajo (pl. rimaayɓe): free peasant
dimo (pl. rimbe): noble
fedde (pl. pelle): group, organization, or age cohort
feere (pl. peeje): strategy, method, or plan
gandal: knowledge
gawri: millet, sorghum, or generic term for grain
gaynaako (pl. aynaabe): herder
gollal: work
haako: leaves; in cuisine it refers to a stew of bean leaves (haako ñebbe) with meat, fish, or peanuts, served over leccere
hayki: yesterday or yesteryear
hegge: famine
jalo: hoe used for tilling
jambere: ax
jayde: education, to study or read
janinde: to teach
janinoozo (pl. janinooobe): teacher
jokkere endam: solidarity
jokkondirral: connection, cooperation, or partnership
jom wuro: village chief
kawral: consensus or agreement; name of inter-village association in Ganki commune
kodo (pl. hobe): guest
kosam: milk
laamu: government, state, centralized political authority

ladde: bush, country-side, wilderness

leccere: fine-grained couscous made of wheat, millet, sorghum, or rice flour

leñol: kinship, lineage, ethnicity

leñam-leñolmaagu: racism, ethnocentrism

liingu (pl. liddi): fish

maaro: rice

maccudo (pl. maccube): slave

muñal: patience, forbearance, nursing/breastfeeding

nehdi: behavior, character, manners, upbringing

ndema: agriculture/farming

ndemoowo (pl. remoobe): farmer

ndungu: rainy season, from August until mid-October

ngaynaaka: herding

ngesa (pl. gese): field

njaatige: host

paale: cultivated terrains adjacent to river

pulaaku: ensemble of social values, beliefs, and behaviors that Halpulaar speakers uphold as the core of their cultural identity

pullo (fulbe): a Pulaar speaker, a herder/pastoralist, or a member of the Fulɓe leñol; also, distinguished as fulɓe dieri (nomadic/transhumant) and fulɓe waalo (sedentary)

sebbe: warriors/soldiers
seemtende: shame

tokara: namesake

torodo (pl. torodɓe): one leŋol that comprises the nobility of Halpulaar society (along with the Fulɓe) who are renowned for their religious scholarship and preaching

waalo: the floodplain of the Senegal River and its tributaries, characterized by hard clay soils and broad, flat terrain; used for recessional agriculture during the cold season months.

wuro (pl. gure): village or town

yelitaare: development
Appendix B: Ethnolinguistic Groups and Subgroups of Mauritania

Bidhane: Arabo-Berbers, known as *maures blancs* in French and *safaalbe wodeebe* in Pulaar, speakers of Hassaniya dialect of Arabic, approximately 25-30% of Mauritanian population

subgroupings:

*Hassan*: warrior tribes

*Zawaya*: religious clerics and scholars (marabouts)

*Znaga*: tributary tribes

Haratin: Former slaves and descendents of slaves, known as *maures noirs* in French and *safaalbe baaleebe* in Pulaar, speakers of Hassaniya dialect of Arabic, approximately 50% of Mauritanian population

Halpulaar: Pulaar speakers, known as *peuls* in French and *kewri* in Hassaniya, approximately 15-20% of Mauritanian population

subgroupings:

*Fulbe*: pastoralists/nobles

*Torodbe*: religious scholars/preachers/nobles

*Sebbe*: warriors

*Subaalbe*: fishermen/women

The percentages in this section are highly speculative, given the lack of recent official figures and the fact that each different group contests the validity of demographic data.
occupational groups: artisanal producers, muscians, griots

_Rimaaybē_: free peasants

_Maccubē_: slaves

Soninke: Known as _sarakuleebē_ in Pulaar and _kewri_ in Hassaniya, approximately 5% of Mauritanian population

Wolof: Known as _jollofbebē_ in Pulaar and _kewri_ in Hassaniya, less than 5% of Mauritanian population

Bambara: Known as _bamarankoobebē_ in Pulaar, less than 1% of Mauritanian population, present primarily in communities near the Malian border

Westerners: Known as _nṣāranī_ in Hassaniya, _toubakoobē_ in Pulaar, and _toubab_ in other languages

Arabs: Referred to as Arabs (_arabeebē_ in Pulaar) or by nationality