“I like to be travelled”: Experiences of Reintegration and Psychosocial Wellbeing amongst Return Migrants in The Gambia

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May 2019

Thesis submitted as part of the Master of Philosophy Degree in International Community Health

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Trykk: Reprosentralen, Universitet i Oslo

Abstract

In the midst of what is often dubbed the 'migration crisis', The Gambia has consistently been among the top ten nationalities of irregular migrants entering Europe across the Mediterranean Sea, with over 20,000 citizens leaving The Gambia since 2016 along routes which are commonly known as the 'Backway'. In the wake of The Gambia recently ending 22 years of dictatorship, combined with the implementation of external EU migration policy, thousands of Gambians are returning to their home country with expectations of reintegration and new opportunities. Since the beginning of 2017, over 3500 Gambians have been assisted to return home. Return migration from the Backway can involve risks to mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, both from traumatic journey experiences and in reintegration. This qualitative study explores the experiences and challenges faced by return migrants and the ways in which return migration is impacting psychosocial wellbeing. It is based on three months of fieldwork in Greater Banjul District of The Gambia. Through the analysis of in-depth interviews and participant observation, the study explores how psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants is shaped through understandings of mental illness, relationships and social expectations, and perspectives of and from travelling. The findings suggest that the return migrants in this study are struggling with demotivation and a lost sense of purpose, and subsequently have not found any forms of psychosocial support for emotional challenges they are facing. The study also found that the psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants in The Gambia is shaped not only by return experiences but by the travel itself. The study has highlighted a disparity between the available opportunities, such as those provided through youth empowerment projects, and the accessibility felt by the return migrants in the research. The insights provided by this study suggest that providing spaces to validate and acknowledge the experiences and emotional challenges of return migrants would be beneficial for their psychosocial wellbeing. It also suggests that return migrants require more opportunities to feel motivated and to gain a sense of purpose, as returning to the same situation one left from can produce frustration and resentment. Finally, it is proposed that more collaboration between international organisations, government projects, and the grassroots associations which are filling the gaps for psychosocial support, shows potential for a more inclusive and further reaching process of opportunity building and youth development in 'The New Gambia'.

Keywords: *return migration, reintegration, psychosocial wellbeing, The Gambia, youth*

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank the return migrants who I met during my stay in The Gambia, who were all so willing to share their stories with me and open up about their reintegration experiences. Your stories have been invaluable to this research, and I am honoured that you took the time to talk to me and open up about what I can only imagine were extremely difficult trials in your lives.

My deepest gratitude also goes out to my beautiful host family, who took me in and treated me as their own kin. Without you this research would not have been possible. The knowledge and wisdom that I learnt from you all and the open-hearted home that I now have in The Gambia will forever be cherished. I look forward to seeing you all again very soon, and I very much look forward to sharing this research with you. A special thank you to Ndey, for always being available and eager to show me around; you became a true friend throughout my fieldwork experience.

I want to thank my supervisor, Benedikte Lindskog, for her endless support and guidance through this process. Thank you for always being present and investing so much time and interest in my project, your encouragement and advice throughout has been fundamental.

I would also like to say a special thank you to my local guide and key Gambian youth networker, Kebba. You opened your home to me and invited me into your family, actively sought to help with my research, and taught me all about your life in The Gambia. Thank you to Stephan, who showed me the power of youth groups such as YAIM for return migrants. Thank you to Salifu and all of the members of Mobee who took me in and gave me invaluable experience volunteering with their charity. Thank you to the "one-man office" that is behind the Association for Mental health and Substance Abuse who was very helpful during my project. Your eagerness for changing the mental health landscape in The Gambia is brilliant and encouraging. Thank you to Lamin for helping me apply to the Ethics Committee in The Gambia and for advising me and connecting me to many great people.

I am grateful to the Oslo Department of Community Medicine for providing me with funding to conduct this project. Thank you to the department and my fellow classmates for thought-provoking discussions and advice.

Finally, I am grateful to my parents for supporting my ambitions with endless encouragement, and to Tarikk, for your limitless love and optimism, and for looking after Lucifur whilst I was away.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

AVRR – Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration

DSM – Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

EU – European Union

GAMSA – Gambian Association of Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

IOM – International Organisation for Migration

MHLAP – Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Programme

MOFEA – The Gambian Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs

MOHSW – The Gambian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare

MRC – The Medical Research Council

NYC – The Gambian National Youth Council

REK – The Norwegian Research Ethics Committee

UN – The United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

WHO – World Health Organisation

YAIM – Youth Against Irregular Migration

YEP – Youth Empowerment Project

INTRODUCTION

> *On 2nd December 2016, Gambians with great courage, determination and dignity decided to take back their country after 22 years of dictatorship. During this period, the abuse of power and total disregard for our constitution, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights of citizens reigned supreme. This historic decision that ushered in the 'new Gambia' has created a seismic shift in our country's trajectory since gaining independence in 1965. It heralds a new chapter in our history and offers a renewed opportunity to build a modern accountable state based on the foundations of democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and security and prosperity for all. However, it also presents new challenges that need to be urgently addressed.*
>
> Foreword by H.E. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia (The Gambia National Development Plan 2018-2021)

The Gambia is a long, thin country that runs up The Gambian River located in West Africa, branded in tourism as "The Smiling Coast". As articulated in President Barrow's opening statement to the 2018-2021 National Development Plan, the country has recently undergone a political transformation which has ended 22 years of rule under the former president, Yahaya Jammeh. The vision laid out by the new government is to rebuild a country which encourages growth, both of human capital and resources, to provide opportunities for young people to develop and empower themselves in a modern democratic state.

Many challenges have been recognised in the country which must be urgently addressed. One of these challenges is the organised return of the exodus of youth that had left the country over the past two decades in search of better futures, many of whom have taken irregular and hazardous journeys towards or across the Mediterranean Sea in the hope of reaching Europe. From 2014-2017, an estimated 1.7 million people from countries in Africa have risked their lives fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea, and over 13,000 have died or gone missing (Action Aid, 2018). The Gambia has consistently been among the top ten nationalities of irregular migrants entering Europe, making up a disproportionate percentage compared to its population size of just over two million (International Organisation for Migration, 2017). Until recently, Gambian emigration has been thought to be partly a result of repressive government policies and a lack of political and civil rights. However, it has been recorded that since January 2016, over 20,000 Gambians have left their country on this

journey, commonly known as the "Backway", exemplifying that large-scale migration from the country is continuing (Action Aid, 2018).

Simultaneously, in the wake of political transformation and encased in the complex web of interdependent relationships between the European Union (EU), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Gambian government, thousands of Gambians are returning to their home country with renewed expectations of reintegration and new opportunities. Since the beginning of 2017, 3668 Gambians have been assisted to voluntarily return home through the EU-IOM Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration programme (IOM 2019). As reflected in their situational analysis, "IOM in The Gambia supports the reintegration of returnees through a holistic approach, addressing both migrants' and their communities' economic, social and psychosocial needs" (IOM, 2019).

Whilst migration is not always a determinant of mental health, the conditions and factors surrounding the process can increase health vulnerabilities (Davies, Borland, Blake & West, 2011: 1). This can especially apply to migrants who have spent time in immigrant detention centres and who have experienced traumatic experiences along their journey (Cleveland, 2013; Steel et al., 2006). Cleveland (2013) found that the loss of agency and empowerment experienced in immigration detention centres is a major predictor *and* characteristic of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Similarly, research on the mental health impacts on refugees and asylum seekers in Australia have found detention centres to be contributing to risks of PTSD, depression and anxiety (Steel et al., 2006; Silove, Austin & Steel, 2007). However, whilst much research has been done on the impacts of migration on mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in host countries or in immigrant detention centres, comparatively little attention has been paid to the psychosocial wellbeing of migrants who have returned to their country of origin (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015).

Return migration is a part of the migration process and involves the movement of people going back to their country of origin, whether from a host country or within territorial boundaries in the case of internally displaced persons. The definition of 'return migrant' is difficult to determine due to the complexity of reasons and methods used for return. For example, retirement and family reunification, extended stay with the intention to re-migrate, and forced or voluntary deportation. The lack of clear definition of 'return migrant' has made policy frameworks and assessments of needs for reintegration difficult to generate (Battistella, 2018: 4). Formulating a distinction of which category research is referring to within the groups of return migrants is necessary. As such, for this research I have limited 'return migrants' in The Gambia to those who have attempted to migrate irregularly along the

route which is locally called the "Backway", and who have subsequently returned either through the same irregular channels, through deportation, or through a voluntary assistance programme. I have not, therefore, included Gambians who have migrated regularly and lived abroad and have returned home for other reasons such as retirement or remittance-based development.

In September 2018, I travelled to The Gambia and spent three months collecting qualitative data from return migrants and people in the youth community who are experiencing the impacts and expectations of a country in transition. This thesis is aimed at exploring the psychosocial processes involved in return migration and the reintegration of young people to The Gambia. Although both men and women migrate and return through the Backway, the dominant percentage of migrants are male (Action Aid, 2018). The data collected in this research has focused mainly on the male perspective as a conscious choice, as I wanted to explore the associations that men make between their own wellbeing and the social expectations for migration, which has provided data for an interesting exploration of psychosocial processes. Through qualitative research methods, I have compiled an analytical exploration of mental illness, psychosocial wellbeing and the experiences of return migration and reintegration within the context of youth development in The Gambia.

The thesis begins by outlining the contextual background and situational analysis of both mental health and return migration in The Gambia, highlighting the absence of crossover in the literature. I then detail the research design and methodology, which provides transparency and rationale to my informed decision-making processes. My main objectives in the research were to capture the experiences of young migrants' returns and to explore the underlying social, cultural, political and economic factors that shape psychosocial wellbeing or the lack thereof. To achieve this, I have applied anthropological methods in combination with qualitative methodology from global public health.

The proposed aims of this research were as follows: To explore the psychosocial experiences of reintegration for return migrants to The Gambia; to investigate the relationship between psychosocial wellbeing and narratives and perspectives of migration among Gambians; and to consider the role of reintegration organisations and youth groups on the 'social imaginary' of migration. Below, I have outlined some of the literature that has shaped the conceptual frameworks of this thesis.

The concept of psychosocial wellbeing has a complicated range of definitions which combine physical, psychological, and social health under one umbrella. Psychosocial wellbeing has been closely connected to factors in life such as motivation, self-purpose and

goal achievement, as well as meaningful relationships and social support (Gough & McGregor, 2007; Wright, 2012). In the data I found a distinct separation between feelings that are described as *stress* and what is perceived as 'mental illness', and have explored this separation in relation to theory of psychosocial processes from Martikainen, Bartley & Lahelma (2002). The thesis also digs deeper into the theoretical interplay of return migration and psychosocial wellbeing, pulling on theory from Wright (2012; 2012a), Gaibazzi (2015) and Vigh (2009) who all suggest that the construction of wellbeing can itself travel or be affected by travel through an awareness of one's position in the global order.

The initial idea of return migration and psychosocial health being interconnected has stemmed from the notion of the "social imaginary" of migration (Vigh 2009: 93), a concept that runs throughout this thesis. Vigh (2009) explains that conceptually, the 'social imaginary' of migration addresses the shared hopes and possibilities that the prospect of travelling inspires for young would-be migrants, and the characteristics they imagine to be assimilated with migration. Simultaneously, he illuminates how their imagined futures are constricted by an understanding of the world order and closed borders, provoking feelings of *abjection,* as described by Ferguson (1999). I have taken this theory and applied it to *return* migration, illustrating how the process of return, which emphasises an uneven global order, is shaping the migrant imaginary in The Gambia in different ways. In turn, incited feelings such as demotivation or alternatively empowerment are impacting psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants.

Furthermore, I have taken this concept in combination with Wright (2012a), Benwell (2013) and Eriksen (2010) to think about how travel, wellbeing and ascribed identity are interwoven with what migration means for migrants themselves, and for the perceptions of migrants from others around them. Positive illusions, status and stigma have all been found to be attached to migration and to be shaping the return migrant experience.

The thesis goes on to contextualise the findings within a more political sphere, critically reflecting on the relationship between youth development and the new government, and a shared drive to "develop" the country. With a comparative gaze and using examples from Bratchet (2015), Koser & Kuschminder (2015), and Rodriguez (2017), I attempt to scratch at the surface of the complicated international relations involved in the country's development and return migration, looking at definitions of 'sustainable reintegration' and migration-related conditions of EU funding. I have also focused on how the involvement of international organisations could translate into feelings that shape the migrant imaginary and psychosocial wellbeing, for example the double-edged narrative of 'victimhood' which is

often associated with returned migrants (Giordano, 2014). Lastly, referring to Wedeen (2003), I have shown that out of political fragility the strength of citizen comradeship can be bolstered, leading to grassroots associations filling the existing gaps for return migrant psychosocial support.

Throughout the chapters of thesis, I argue that factors such as communication, motivation, sense of purpose, and a self-determined identity are fundamental to the wellbeing and reintegration of return migrants to The Gambia. The sea of literature on migration theory is vast and therefore necessitated selectivity. I have found the concept of the 'social imaginary' of migration to be fruitful in that it feeds into psychosocial wellbeing and return migration as well. As there is not much literature on the specific crossover of psychosocial wellbeing and return migration in The Gambia, I have found an eclectic use of literature to be productive for reflecting on my data findings.

In Chapter One I identify the gaps in perceptions of mental health and wellbeing, arguing that separations between *stress* and 'mental illness' are linked to fear and stigma. The chapter outlines the relationship between psychosocial wellbeing and travel, and how returning to The Gambia has altered perceptions of self-purpose and self-development.

Chapter Two closes in on the experiences and narratives of return migrants, focusing on their journeys and reintegration. By focusing on narratives, I have been able to begin to understand the relationship between narratives and identity; specifically, ascribed identities of 'return migrant' and of 'struggle' being identified with strength and how these narratives can thus shape psychosocial wellbeing. This chapter explores the social imaginary more in depth and how expectations and goals are involved with migration and wellbeing.

Chapter Three channels the findings from Chapter One and Two into the context of the on-going political transition, and the complicated relationship between national development and international organisation. This chapter shows a rhetoric of political optimism that was found in the data, and highlights some of the obstacles which are making it difficult for the government to restore public confidence amongst some of the youths I spoke to. I have focused on different youth groups and their interactions with return migrant reintegration, such as the government run Youth Empowerment Project and the grassroots association, Youth Against Irregular Migration.

By identifying gaps in perceptions of health, such as between 'mental illness' and *stress*, I argue that alternative solutions to limited national mental healthcare can be found which provide accessible and experience-acknowledging forms of psychosocial support for return migrants; such as youth organisations which could act as an intermediary space for

returnees to figure out their motivations and purpose. Furthermore, this thesis suggests that global rhetoric on migration policy and mobility governance could be impacting the construction of wellbeing for young Gambians, collectively and on an individual psychosocial level.

BACKGROUND

Below I have outlined the following background information to provide the context for a discussion on mental health, psychosocial wellbeing, and migration in The Gambia: A historical, sociodemographic, and political background of The Gambia; a brief introduction to the existing healthcare system; a more detailed overview of the current mental health landscape; an update on the on-going youth migration and return migration situation happening in The Gambia; and a brief description of each of the organisations that were involved in my research.

THE GAMBIA

The Gambia, officially the Republic of The Gambia, is a small country in West Africa, stretching 450 kilometres along the Gambian river, almost entirely surrounded by Senegal except for a 60-kilometre coastline along the Atlantic Ocean. With a population of about 2.2 million, The Gambia is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa at 176 people per square kilometre (World Bank, 2018). The country is divided into two municipalities and five regions: Banjul and Kanifing municipalities, and West Coast River, Lower River, North Bank, Central River and Upper River regions. The majority of my data collection took place in the Greater Banjul Area and the west of the West Coast River region. The Greater Banjul Area covers 88-square-kilometres, including the Capital of Banjul (on Banjul Island) and the Kanifing municipality. Serekunda is the largest urban development in The Gambia and is situated in the centre of Kanifing. Stretching the coastline, these two regions are considered together the 'tourist district', known colloquially as Senegambia. Whilst 'Senegambia' itself is only one small section of the district, centred in the hub of the hotels, bars and restaurants catering for The Gambia's booming tourist population, the name expands beyond its geographical location.

Visually, The Gambia is incredibly green and filled with fauna and wildlife. The sub-tropical climate has two distinct seasons, the dry season usually stretching from around October to June, and the rainy season from June to October. Surrounding the urban areas are wide and beautiful wetlands, large forests, and mangroves that stretch the entire river. Over 90% of the country's population live dependently on agriculture and the fishing industry, and

the country's biodiversity conservation is important to the development of the nation and provides a sustainable source of employment.

The official language of The Gambia is English, and there are at least eight local languages, the most widely spoken being Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, and Jola. In the area that this research was conducted, the main languages are Wolof and Mandinka, and usually people speak at least one of these two and another local language as well as English.

Figure 1: Banjul, the capital of The Gambia; a local yellow taxi cooling off its engine. November 2018

History and Politics

The Gambia, officially the Republic of The Gambia, shares its historical roots with many other West African nations which were part of the slave trade. Previous to colonial dominance, the area now known as The Gambia was part of the Mali Empire. By the mid-15th century, the Portuguese had reached the area and began to dominate overseas trade. Control of the valuable river region was fought over by colonial empires, first by the Portuguese and Dutch, and later officially became part of the British Empire in the late 17th century.

An estimated three million people were taken as slaves from the region during the three centuries of the transatlantic slave trade. Although the United Kingdom abolished the slave trade throughout its empire in 1807, slaving did not end in The Gambia for at least two decades afterwards – the most violent two decades of slaving in the nation's history, owing to the cut-throat nature of undocumented slaving. James Island, now called Kunta Kinteh Island, operated as a military base for slave ship interception. The nearby village and island now mark their history with excellent museums which attract hundreds of tourists a year.

The Gambia reached independence in 1965 as a constitutional monarchy within the Commonwealth. Five years later, the country became a republic within the Commonwealth led by their first president, Dawda Jawara. President Jawara was re-elected five times and remained in office until a coup d'état in 1994. The military coup was led by soon-to-be President Yahya Jammeh, who was elected in 1996.

Jammeh was re-elected for two decades, ruling the country until 2016. During this time, he became known for his strong views regarding neo-colonialism, acting to remove The Gambia from the Commonwealth in October 2013 and began to withdraw from the International Criminal Court in 2016. His regime saw the suppression of the press, exiled journalists, arbitrary imprisonment, forced disappearances, and the oppression of LGBTQ community amongst others human rights abuses (Sommerfelt, 2016; Zanker & Altrogge, 2017). It is estimated that the former government under Jammeh misappropriated over US$100 million in the last three years alone, leaving the country is economic destitute. Jammeh is now being sued for infamously claiming he could cure HIV/AIDS; instructing people to stop using anti-retroviral drugs and coercing them into violating and harmful unmedical treatments (Jammeh & Maclean, The Guardian, 2018).

In 2016, Jammeh was defeated in a democratic election by current leader, President Adama Barrow. Initially announcing that he would step down, Jammeh declared the vote to be void and refused to leave office resulting in constitutional crisis and his removal with the help of the ECOWAS commission (Economic Commission of the West African States). On the 20th January 2017 Jammeh stepped down and agreed to leave the country.

This is the third republic in the country's political history. The newly elected president, Adama Barrow, has declared a new chapter in the nation's history, with promises of stabilizing the fragile economy, reducing poverty, and providing new employment opportunities with an emphasis on the country's youth. The country is currently commissioning a new constitution, which will be the first amendments since 1996. The 1996 constitution had been written to benefit Jammeh's ruling, with no limits placed on his

position of power as head of state, head of government, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The new commission committee is rigorously travelling the country to collect data on what the population wants for its next constitution with regards to human rights, women's rights, religious rights, LGBTQ rights, children's rights, and the rights of the disabled and mentally ill.

This call for public contribution and the realization of government accountability is revolutionary for the country and reflects the political optimism spreading across 'The New Gambia'. There are projects and organisations within both government departments and civil society that emphasise this rhetoric, such as "Building a Future – Make it in The Gambia" and the "Youth Empowerment Project" (YEP).

Demographic and macroeconomic context

The Gambia is one of the poorest countries in Africa, with 62% of the population living below the current International Poverty Line (UNDP, 2018). In 2017, the country ranked 174 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index. Unemployment rates in The Gambia are very high and stood at 29% in 2012 across the whole working-age population (Action Aid, 2018). This figure is concentrated to an even higher rate (38%) amongst the youth population, who constitute 37% of all Gambians (Action Aid, 2018). Of the working population, 71% of those employed are in 'vulnerable employment' meaning that they may have unstable employment or are unpaid (UNDP, 2018). Most Gambian workers have no formal education, and the proportion of the labour force with technical and vocational education and training is low, around 11% (Action Aid, 2018). Poverty and lack of employment opportunity has been highlighted as one of the main push factors that triggers young Gambians to leave the country through irregular migration routes in attempt to reach Europe (Zanker & Altrogge, 2017).

Economic growth in The Gambia is mainly driven by agriculture, the service and tourism industry, and remittances from Gambians abroad. Tourism makes up 30% of the GDP, with agriculture and remittances following with 22% and 20% respectively (Nshimyumuremyi, 2018; Action Aid, 2018). Farming and tourism are the country's main providers of employment, agriculture being the largest and employing the poorest proportion of the population. As a small country, the reliance on these economic sectors make the country vulnerable to external negative shocks, which have proved difficult in recent years. For example, climate change and insufficient rainfall created difficult farming seasons, and

tourism revenue fell significantly during both the West Africa Ebola outbreak and in the 2016 political turmoil, as it was at the height of the tourist season. However, these internal and external challenges are something the government have been addressing in the new National Development Plan 2018-2021 (MoFEA[1], 2017) and aims to tackle and strengthen against in the coming years.

Religion

Demographically, it is estimated that 95.7% of the Gambian population are Muslim, the majority being Sunni. An estimated 4.2% of the population are Christian, and less than 1% of the population constitute of other religions including indigenous religious belief (US Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, 2017).

For the past two decades, religion in The Gambia has been closely entwined with political agendas and tribal disputes (Sommerfelt, 2016). The constitution in The Gambia provides a freedom of religious choice and prohibits religious discrimination, establishment of a state religion, and formation of religiously bias political parties. However, many people in The Gambia have said that Jammeh created tension between tribes and openly favoured his own tribe and religion (Islam) above others, speculating that he aided them financial and politically (Sommerfelt, 2016).

Tribalism and religious disagreement are now being readdressed by the current government. In January 2017, President Barrow restored the country's status as a secular state, invalidating former President Jammeh's proclaim that The Gambia was an Islamic State. The current president publicly encourages tolerance between Christians and Muslims, making examples through beginning official events and ceremonies with both Muslim and Christian prayers, and he has assigned a special advisor for religious and traditional affairs.

HEALTHCARE BACKGROUND

The Gambian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) is the main provider of health services in the country. Primary Health Care (PHC) delivery is divided into three categories of health care: Primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary level consists of village

[1] The Gambian Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs

and community clinics; secondary level consists of minor and major health clinics; and the tertiary level includes the general and teaching hospital, The Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul. As of 2016, it is recorded that there are six general hospitals, one teaching hospital, 47 secondary level health centres, and 492 primary health posts (Barrow, 2016). Additionally, there are private clinics and NGO health clinics also providing services. As in many developing countries, The Gambia is seeing a shift in burden of disease from infectious to non-communicable diseases. According to the Global Burden of Disease (2017), depressive and anxiety disorders have been recorded to have increased significantly since 2007, yet mental health care has not shown equivalent expansion to compensate.

Mental Health

Mental Health services in The Gambia are not included in the Primary Health Care package available in primary care hospitals or secondary level health centres. The Gambia has one in-patient psychiatric hospital, named Tanka Tanka, and one out-patient psychiatric ward, known as The Polyclinic. Both units are located in the Kanifing and Banjul Districts. Tanka Tanka is a mix-gendered adult in-patient facility and covers all general mental health related issues from drug-related substance abuse to mild depression or severe schizophrenia. It has roughly 100 beds, but the residency figures fluctuate. For the population size, this equates to just 5.7 beds per 100,000 people (MOHSW, 2017).

The Polyclinic is located at the Teaching Hospital in a single room allocated for mental health services and is only open from 8am until 2pm, Monday to Friday. This means that for the provincial population, mental health services are almost non-existent as they are so inaccessible. In a situational report from the Mental Health Leadership and Advocacy Programme (mhLAP, 2012), 95% of respondents stated that mental health services were not available in their communities, some saying they had previously travelled over 300km to seek mental health attention for family members (mhLAP, 2012: 9). There are currently no rehabilitation centres in the country, for either mental health or drug use.

Mental Health Policy

In 2007, a Mental Health Strategic Plan for 2007-2012 was developed that outlined progress strategies, including: Strengthening national mental health services and professionals; raising public mental health awareness; and integrating mental health services into primary health care at primary and general hospitals (MOHSW, 2007). The vision was to provide equitable,

accessible and cost-effective mental health care for people living throughout The Gambia. However, many of the objectives in this plan were unattainable and never implemented due to a lack of funding and human resources. In another National Health Strategic Plan (2014-2020), the government again pledged objectives to provide equitable, affordable and accessible quality mental health services by 2020 (MOHSW, 2014). The "Roadmap to Revitalize and Scale-up Primary Health Care in The Gambia 2018-2022" recognises that mental healthcare is still not covered by the current Primary Health Care and once again sets out new plans to integrate mental health care along with other NCDs into the primary level care essential package. The repetition emphasises the failure to implement these strategies.

One key strategy pledged in the 2007-2012 plan was to reformulate the existing mental health legislation, recognising that it is outdated and fails to meet the international Human Rights standards. The legislation was initially formulated in 1939 during the colonial era. Yet, the last revision of this legislation, called "The Suspected Lunatic Detention Act" was in 1964 and has not been altered since. The government have pledged to draft and implement a new mental health legislation which would cover patient confidentiality, conditions in facilities, appropriate care using least restrictive methods, and equal opportunities for employment, housing and justice (Kretzschmar, et al., 2012; Esan, et al., 2014). The implementation of these plans has not yet taken place, but I am informed that relevant discussions have been included in new constitution commission.

Mental Health Situational Analysis

There is critical under-reporting of mental health data in the country. Delays in reporting from the psychiatric hospitals could be partly because all the paper work is analogue rather than computerized and takes a long time to process. The latest available nationwide Mental Health Situational Report is from 2012, thus current data regarding details of prevalence and composure of mental health disorders in The Gambia are not available. However, from 2004-2012 data it is estimated that about 7.5% of Gambians (aged 15 or more) suffer from severe mental illnesses, and a further 11.2% are suffering from moderate to mild mental illnesses (mhLAP, 2012: 5). These figures are thought to be underestimated; an opinion confirmed by current the Gambian Association for Mental Health and Substance Abuse (GAMSA) coordinators in The Gambia. From the MOHSW (2016) Health Management Information Systems report, a total of 12,840 mental health disorders were recorded by health facilities that year.

The estimated treatment gap between the number of people affected by mental health disorders and the number of people receiving treatment is very high. Whilst the prevalence rate in 2012 was estimated to be between 91,000 and 120,000, the maximum number of people receiving treatment was estimated to be 3,278 – about 3% of the population with mental disorders (mhLAP, 2012; Kretzschmar, et al., 2012). According to Kretzschmar, et al., (2012) there is also a contrast in prevalence of disorders data between hospital admissions and community mental health data, specifically highlighting a treatment gap for depressive disorders and anxiety disorders. If someone is struggling with a mental health problem that is not leading to violence or disruption for people around them, it is unlikely that they will seek help or know where to seek help as the general understanding is that 'it's not bad enough' for Tanka Tanka.

Furthermore, according to the MOHSW (2016) health management information systems statistical report, there are 17 psychiatric nurses in the country in the private and public sectors combined. During my research, only two psychiatric nurses were said to be on rotation at Tanka Tanka and the Polyclinic. This suggests that at least 15 of the country's psychiatrists work in the private sector, financially unavailable to the majority of the population. I was informed that there are no official psychologists working in the government system, but that there are three in the private sector. There are no occupational therapists in the country.

Drugs and alcohol abuse were highlighted as a serious contributor to increasing mental health issues in The Gambia, with 6-8 persons out of every 100 in the Kanifing and Kombo North Districts categorised as drug addicts (mhLAP, 2012: 6; WHO, 2007). Cannabis is the main drug of choice in The Gambia, given the availability and reasonable cost. Cannabis use is thought to be both a cause and result of unemployment amongst youths. Reports from Tanka Tanka from 2009 to 2011 state that 48% of all admissions were diagnosed with drug induced psychosis, although it was suggested during my research that these statistics may be unreliable due to obscured judgement from an untrained diagnostic team, as there is a serious lack of psychiatry-trained personnel. All of these diagnoses are admitted into the same facility, Tanka Tanka, and there is no separation of severity or in-patient treatment. The proportion of male to female admissions annually to Tanka Tanka is majority male, which has been postulated to be a consequence of higher male involvement in substance use and that women are less aggressive and therefore more easily managed at home (Barrow, 2016: 20). In 2012, 60% of the patients admitted were readmitted, suggesting a high rate of relapse and a lack of rehabilitation (Barrow, 2016).

Community Mental Health Services

A Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) existed officially in The Gambia until 2005, but with limited man-power and funding. The team's aim was to run mental health service clinics in the major health facilities around the country and provide outreach services to the prison. This form of mental health service delivery started in The Gambia in 1993 through a WHO-led project. The project ended in 2005, but the country tried to continue to use this model to deliver mental health services across the nation. In 2012, the team consisted of four staff, one registered nurse, and three auxiliary nurses to serve the entire population of 1.8 million people. They would travel to a handful of clinics in provincial Gambia once every 3-6 months to provide some level of mental health services to people outside of the Kanifing and Kombo Districts. Unfortunately, due to low prioritization of mental health funding allocation these trips are no longer being made (Barrow, 2016).

Today, GAMSA run as the main actor in mental health for the country, although it is officially a non-governmental organisation. One of GAMSA's organisers that I interviewed described the administrative level of the organisation as a "one-man office", as there are staff gaps to be filled for nearly all positions – Health Promotion Education Officer, Head of Community Health, Programme Assistant. He reported that they are waiting on the Health Ministry to process people into these positions. Regardless, the organisation is enthusiastically running with new mental health awareness campaigns and is working hard to spread knowledge about symptoms and safe and appropriate caring strategies to the Gambian general public. This will be discussed in Chapter One.

Mobee – Mental Health and Wellbeing Charity

Mobee, meaning "for everybody" in Mandinka, is a mental health and psychosocial wellbeing charity working in The Gambia. Their slogan is "Mental health is everybody's business". The organisation was initiated through the English mental wellbeing charity, Alternative Futures Group. The charity has provided basic mental health training for its staff and volunteers, many of whom are also training to be nurses or social workers. The team frequently volunteers at Tanka Tanka, counting for nearly half of the total facility staff and playing a large role in day-to-day care and interaction with the patients. The volunteers are responsible for bathing and dressing the patients, playing boardgames and football with them and generally spending time with them during the day. Mobee also makes follow up appointments with discharged patients to support them in their communities, a point I will return to.

Recent Updates and Current Progress for Mental Health

Although a reflection of the PHC plans (outlined above) show slow progress for mental health services in The Gambia, there have been some optimistic developments. I was informed that, with help from the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the National Youth Council (NYC), general practice nurses have received new training in psychiatry are now situated in the main hospitals and health clinics. This means that there are now thirteen different hospitals for mental health referral rather than the one Polyclinic as before. This is discussed further in Chapter One.

Deployment of psychiatric nurses had only been up and running for two months when I spoke to GAMSA organisers in November, but they report that people have been calling non-stop. Additionally, there are people within youth organisations such as NYC and the Youth Empowerment Project who have received training in youth counselling. Although positive developments, a lack of coordination between the different sectors became visible when speaking to separate organisation representatives. Each of the representatives was not aware of each other's psychiatric or counselling training, which could potentially hinder the accessibility and available information for seekers of mental health support.

In line with the 2014-2020 National Health Plan, GAMSA is working hard to raise awareness of risk factors, effects and management of mental and behavioural disorders through a "mass sensitisation package", discussed in Chapter One. The adverts they are releasing include symptom descriptions for different mental illnesses and advice for families on care and available treatment.

In specificity to return migrants' mental health, I was informed that "psychosocial support and counselling" is provided at the return migrant transit centre which they stay at for up to 72 hours before returning home. After the transit centre, the return migrants are given an "open invitation" in the form of a telephone number to call if somebody feels they want to talk about their health. If prescribed medicine at the transit centre, they are given a one-month clearance paper that allows them to go to any government-facilitated pharmacy to receive it free-of-charge. After this first month, mental health medication was not financially an option for some of the returnees I spoke to who had been through this process. Progressive steps are visible in the offering of psychosocial support in the reintegration of return migrants to The Gambia, however it seems that the implementation of the support may not be prioritising longer-term care.

MIGRATION IN THE GAMBIA

Migration has long been embedded within Gambian culture and history. Nomadic agriculture and West African trade routes have created common migration patterns around The Gambia and its neighbouring countries. Over half of the population (60%) is concentrated in urban and peri-urban areas, due to high levels of internal rural-urban migration (UNDP, 2018). However, during Jammeh's regime, intercontinental migration increased significantly, and The Gambia is consistently one of the top ten nationalities to arrive in Europe each year. In 2017, The Gambia made up 6.19% of the total arrivals to Italy, making it the sixth largest proportion of migrant arrivals and yet the smallest country (IOM, 2017).

Over the past three years the migration patterns have started to change, with a decrease in Gambian irregular migrants arriving to Europe. From January 2017 to March 2018, 8,681 Gambians were recording as having arrived in Italy and Spain, compared with 12,792 recorded to have arrived in 2016 (Action Aid, 2018). However, together this means that over 20,000 Gambians have left their country for Europe since January 2016, which is around 1% of the country's entire population. Most of these irregular emigrants are low-skilled young men, but there are many women too, some pregnant with the hope of giving birth in Europe. A lot of young men that are travelling in this manner are unemployed or have an unstable income, with hopes that the Global North holds the promise to a better future (Zanker & Altrogge, 2017: 5). The most common irregular migration path for Gambians to

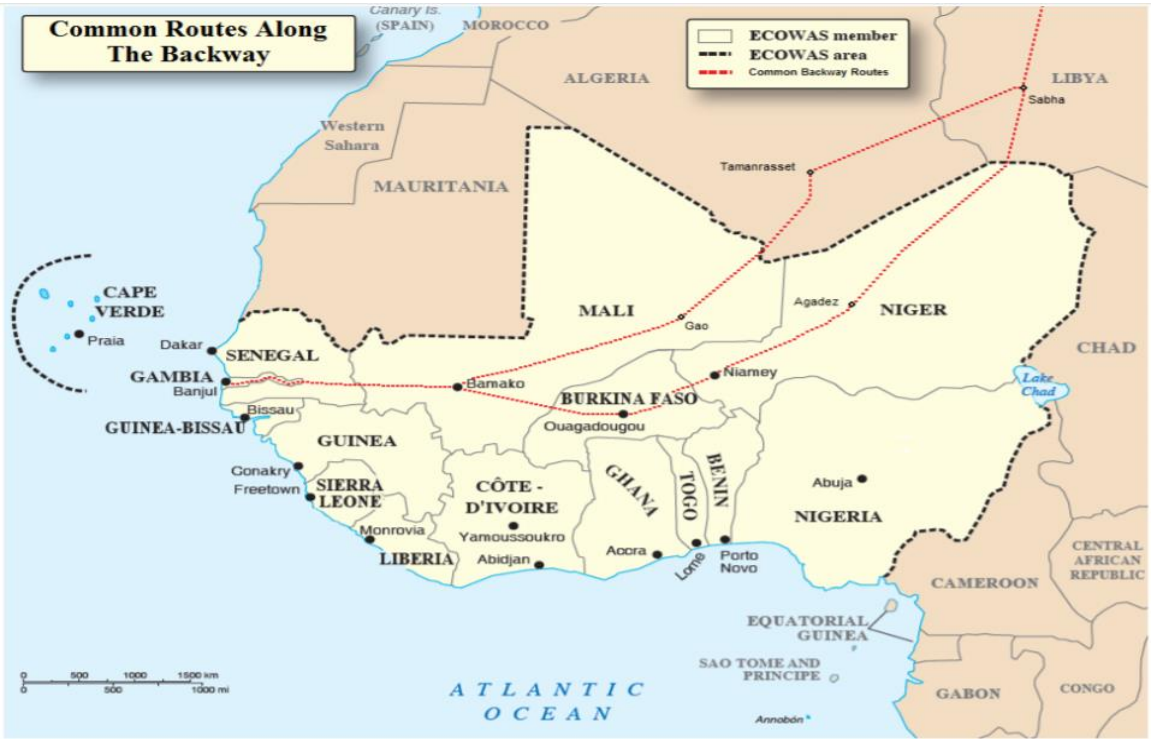

Figure 2: Map of common routes along the backway. "Based on UN Map No. 4350 Rev. 2 the map aims to demonstrate general trends of Gambian migrants reaching Europe via the backway based on a report by the FRONTEX Risk Analysis Unit (2017) " (Source: Zanker & Altrogge 2017: 5.)

take is the Central Mediterranean route (see *Figure 2*, above). It stretches up the centre of the continent through Mali and Burkina Faso, Niger, and into Libya, where many migrants spend extended periods of time waiting before attempting a boat crossing. Many migrants are arrested in Libya and are then held in large prisons or 'detention-centres', tortured, starved, or even enslaved and killed. The conditions of the so-called 'detention centres' have been reported as being a complete breach of Human Rights (UNICEF, 2017). This route is commonly known as the "Backway", meaning that it is a backway journey for entering Europe, and is renowned for being unsafe and expensive. It is not known how many Gambians have died crossing the sea to Europe, but on the Central Mediterranean route which the majority of Gambians take, over 8000 migrants have died from 2016-2017 (Action Aid 2018). For smugglers, kidnappers and border controls, this "Backway" journey has developed into a lucrative business, which Andersson (2014) dubs the "Illegality Industry". Nevertheless, for many this is perceived as the only viable option, as legal and safer migration options are not available for the low-skilled, often-unemployed youth of The Gambia.

Return Migration to The Gambia

As part of an international effort to manage the so-called 'global migration crisis' and to reduce the number of migrants becoming stranded or harmed through irregular migration, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has teamed up with the European Union to "voluntarily" return migrants to their country of origin through their Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration (AVRR) programme. This programme has been operating globally for over three decades to relocate displaced peoples, but officially established a national programme in The Gambia in 2017. The programme offers reintegration support which includes (but does not promise) financial, educational, and psychosocial aid. The nature of "voluntary" return will be discussed in Chapter Three.

In a report for the IOM by Koser & Kuschminder (2015), psychosocial support is mentioned as a form of reintegration assistance they wished to review as they recognised the impact of psychosocial support as a key research gap in the literature. "Individual factors", (which includes psychological problems, the inability to meet migration aspirations, tired of living as an undocumented migrant, and the feeling of not having a choice), was the second most cited category influencing the returns decision of respondents (ibid, 2015: 42). The first most cited category was "conditions of the destination country", including access to social

services and ability to work. Yet, in the questionnaire responses from returnees in their origin country, zero respondents reported having received any psychosocial support as part of their reintegration assistance (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015: 107). This highlights a fundamental gap in reintegration assistance and could suggest that psychosocial support is suggested on paper as a necessary form of support but is not being implemented.

Between January 2017 and October 2018, nearly 3,700 Gambian returnees have been assisted back to their home country (IOM, 2019). There has been an added pressure for The Gambia as the number of returned migrants has rapidly inflated. Increased refusals for asylum-seeker status has been linked to the change in political regime. The IOM are working with the Gambian government with the aim of strengthening migration policy and facilitating 'sustainable reintegration' of return migrants, under their own definitions of what this means. A discussion around defining 'sustainable reintegration' will follow in Chapter Three.

Organisational Support

Other than Mobee and GAMSA, there are many other organisational players advocating for youth development and social support. These include governmental bodies such as the Ministry of Sports and Youth, The National Youth Council, and non-governmental grassroot organisations such as youth employment associations and support groups for returned migrants. Whilst the National Youth Council have a key role in the organisation and advocation for Gambian youths, I was not involved in their work and I was unable to interview any representatives. Therefore, they have not been included prominently in my research. Below, I have highlighted the organisations that were incorporated in this research.

YAIM

Youth Against Irregular Migration (YAIM) is a youth lead organisation that was imagined and initialised from within a Libyan prison during two individuals' Backway journey. As well as being an acronym, "*yaim*" actually means "a surprise that amazes you", which fit nicely to the premise of their organisation which is to encourage young Gambians to seek out great opportunities in their own country before considering migration. The experiences that the YAIM founders had on their journey were both horrific and transformative, inspiring them to create something productive out of the misery they faced and prevent others from experiencing it. The two founders gained the support of 171 Gambians from inside the prison and collectively dedicated themselves to forming this association when they returned to their

home country. YAIM organised caravans which travel the country to encourage youths that they can *Tekki Fii* – "Make it here".

YEP

The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) is another organisation that is involved with Gambian youth and migration. Funded by the EU-Africa Trust Fund for 11million euros in 2017, YEP is a four-year project run by the International Trade Centre and the UN. The focus of the project is to address the economic causes of irregular migration, aiming to empower the youth across several sectors to encourage employment, skills development and business entrepreneurship. At the end of 2018, YEP reported having trained 2017 individuals, supported 442 micro-, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and created a reach of 63,861 youths all over The Gambia (YEP, 2018). The project works through outsourcing to businesses which provide skills-based summer camps, mentoring programmes, and apprenticeship schemes. YEP was a prominent name that kept arising during my initial groundwork and networking, illustrating itself as a prominent player in the joint mission for youth empowerment and emigration reduction.

IOM & NYC

As previously mentioned, the International Organisation on Migration (IOM) is leading player in the returning of migrants to The Gambia. Although prominent during conversations and appearing as a 'figurehead' of anything migration-related, IOM The Gambia were reluctant to allow me to speak to a representative regarding my research. The National Youth Council (NYC) were also referred to frequently in conversations and works closely with YEP. Their main role is to encourage and coordinate youth participation in the development of The Gambia. Nonetheless, both organisations have published work which has provided me with external sources of information and a backdrop on which to build an intricate picture of the different missions to reintegrate returning migrants and empower youth development. The NYC's National Youth Policy (2009-2018) states that the youth population classifies anybody ages 15-35, justifying a broad range as the transition from childhood dependence to adult independence may occur at different stages depending on socioeconomic and cultural contexts (NYC, 2015). This is the definition of 'youth' that I am referring to throughout this thesis.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research has several underpinning principles that differentiate it as a methodology from quantitative research. Undertaking research using qualitative methods encourages the researcher to pay close attention to the participant within their everyday environment, contextualising their experiences or behaviours in both their immediate surroundings and in a wider sociopolitical setting (Harding, 2013: 9-10; Kielmann, Cataldo, & Seeley, 2012: 8-9). As with any research, specific methods are used according to the context and type of the study focus. Brigden (2016: 344) argues that anthropological methods add value to studies of migration by revealing more the complex transnational processes that exist within this field. Building on this, many (see examples: Kleinman, 1995; Inhorn, 2007; Lock & Nguyen, 2010) support that medical research also benefits from anthropological methods as it infuses social, emotional, and physical processes within the domain of biomedicine. "Popular meanings and interpretations of healthy states are often inseparable from other moral, political, and economic domains" (Petryna, 2015: 571). Medical anthropology is interested in these health-related processes and the social, economic and political relationships with mind and body, especially relevant to psychosocial health. By combining these methods with the theoretical influence of global public health and policy, this qualitative research aims to understand and contextualise the relationship between mental health and migration experiences amongst youth in The Gambia.

Scientific responsibility is vital to any medical research. Validity and transferability are used as measures of scientific credibility in both quantitative and qualitative research. Assessing the validity of qualitative research can be done through following the development of knowledge and ensuring that it is a systematic and reflective process (Malterud, 2001: 483). Transparency of this process from the researcher can increase trustworthiness of the research, increasing the validity. Strategies for improving validity, for example, can be continual questioning of findings and interpretations, triangulation of data collection, and thinking about the effect of context and bias of both informant and researcher (Malterud, 2001: 483; Kielmann, et al., 2012: 16).

The qualitative research methods outlined below show the process of my research and decision-making. They have enabled me to gain an understanding of local knowledge and perceptions regarding psychosocial health and migration in The Gambia, and to map out the wider webs of meaning and context within which they exist.

RESEARCH SETTING AND LOCATION

The family home that I lived in was in an area called Pipeline; a neighbourhood north-west of Serekunda known for being a more affluent area. The homes in this area are known as compounds, as they often consist of one main house and multiple apartments, with garden areas or courtyards between them. Pipeline is very green in comparison to other nearby areas, with stretches of grassy lawns – or "Barbados grass" – outside many of the compounds, and roads lined with palm trees and flowery shrubbery. During my stay goats and sheep roamed the streets munching on leaves and flowers, locally owned but free to wander. The walls surrounding the compounds were high, with various home-made security measures along the tops, such as broken glass bottles or metal and glass spikes. Most of the compounds were one-storey and hidden behind large solid metal gates, creating security and visual privacy for the residents.

My host-family's compound consisted of a large single-storey main house, a large concreted courtyard and vegetable garden, an outside kitchen with a woodburning stove, and two external apartments – one of which I lived in for part of my stay. The courtyard had a huge avocado tree in the centre and banana trees sprawling out along the walls. The vegetable gardens became a project that the family and I worked on and shared together in the evenings, especially with the children and cousins.

It is from this home that I based myself for the majority of my fieldwork, going to and from interviews and meetings in bright yellow-and-green local taxis which run tirelessly along the main roads on either side of the neighbourhood. The taxis stop anywhere and pick up people along the roadside, a hop-in-hop-out system that works efficiently and affordably for most people, at 7 dalasi a journey. Further outside the central areas there were minibuses which would pack 15-20 people in and on them. Getting around was therefore fairly straightforward, although time-consuming due to traffic congestion and taxis always being full. Private taxis – 'town trips' – are also available at a price, which will then take you directly to your destination, used less by the majority and more by tourists or wealthier residents. For two weeks of the research I spent my time in different areas, travelling inland along the river to the 'up-country', visiting smaller rural villages and old colonial settlements. This provided some observations of the provinces and the contrasting lifestyles that accompany living outside the urban sprawl.

FLEXIBILITY IN THE FIELD: RESEARCH DESIGN FROM PLANNING TO PRACTICE

Prior to travelling to The Gambia, I wrote a project proposal outlining how I intended to conduct my research, who I aimed to include as participants, and the type of information I expected to find. However, it is common in qualitative research to develop the direction of the study based on the information the researcher finds in the field. As Moen & Middelthon (2015: 327-328) express, it is difficult to know ahead of time what will be the most pertinent information or most important to those involved. This is not to say that the research has deviated entirely from the original proposal subject, but that the flexible nature of qualitative research allows the fieldwork findings to shape the decision-making process and reshape research questions.

One of the biggest influences that shaped my decision-making and questions during research was the social impact of the 2016-2017 political reformation. At the time of writing the proposal for this research, The Gambia was one year into their new administration. Literature on the political change at the time of writing the proposal consisted mainly of journalistic pieces, which concentrated on the timeline of events and the immediate political changes that were being made such as appointments of ministers. Having followed the media, I was aware that there had been significant changes and that there would be more to come, therefore taking the new political climate into consideration for my research. However, it was not until I arrived that I learned how saturating the structural and social transformations were in people's daily lives. The profound significance of this moment in the country's history was felt among all the groups of people I spoke to, and it became quickly apparent that I had underestimated how prominent the political reform would be in my research. This was therefore one of the major findings that shaped my decision-making processes going forward.

SAMPLING, RECRUITMENT AND OBTAINING ACCESS

Return Migrants

In qualitative research, *sampling* refers to the process in which the researcher chooses to collect data from (Harding, 2013). For this study I used a combined process of purposive sampling and multi-sourced snowballing. Purposive sampling is used to select suitable participants for the purpose of the study (Harding 2013). The aim of my study is to explore the psychosocial wellbeing and reintegration processes of return migrants; therefore, the

predominant part of the sample consists of return migrants. In qualitative research the recruitment of purposive samples is often a flexible and evolving process (Maxwell, 2013). In the research proposal I had planned to gain access to returning migrants through the umbrella of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). However, due to UN protocol this was not a possible collaboration. Initially this felt disappointing, however, ultimately the decision steered me in a direction that lead to many more open doors and rich empirical data.

The only inclusion criteria for sampling return migrants was to be a Gambian under the age of 35 who had returned to the country after travelling along the Backway. I interviewed nine return migrants in-depth. The scope of the research and the process of recruitment did not allow for more selective criteria, such as time of departure or return, length of time out of the country, or method of return. However, these could be aspects to follow up in future research.

Throughout this process I was aware that recruiting using a snowballing technique or purposive sampling can create potential for a biased selection. To increase the validity of the research I have been reflective on the initial sources of the snowballing, questioning the motives of the participants and the networks they move within, and have collected data from varying groups of society (Maxwell 2013). Additionally, rather than following one thread of return migrants from a single source, I have diversified the selection of this participant group by reaching out through various sources and networks. Below I have outlined this process in more detail and some of the sampling limitations.

Contact with the first thread of 'returned migrant' participants occurred through snowballing from my host-aunt's niece. She introduced me to a journalist, whom I will call 'Dudu' (27). This journalist became a source of connection to a group of returned migrants who lived together near his old family compound. We visited the compound together and he introduced me to some men who had recently returned from the Backway, one of whom had acquired European asylum papers and had a wife there. Through Dudu, I also met a key informant who I will call 'Stephan', who is one of the founders of YAIM. Stephan and I had coincidently corresponded previously through social media after I had reached out to the public Facebook page of YAIM, and he volunteered to meet me. Stephan was a return migrant himself and ran YAIM on the back of his experiences.

The second thread of returned migrants snowballed out of meeting another key informant, who I will call 'Kebba' (32). Kebba became a local guide of sorts during my research and introduced me to countless people, including his family and friends. We met when he stopped me on the road one day to tell me about his youth employment association.

He was in the middle of trying to start an association to help youths gain skills needed for employment. He called it the "Youth Employment and Poverty Reduction Association". It caught my attention, we swapped numbers, and the next day he called me for a meeting. This connection started as an exploration of his youth association and what it meant to him and others, however, soon Kebba became interested in my research and began introducing me to and setting up meetings with return migrants from the Backway. Kebba had established a wide youth network for his association; a reflection of his overt sociable character. However, his network consisted of youths who he felt might need the association, such as those on the corners of streets with their friends, hustling, smoking weed, and drinking *attaya* – (a strong green tea which is drunk socially in groups). This was therefore a potential bias in this thread of my sampling selection and something I was conscious of during fieldwork and analysis. The third group of returned migrants were recruited through a contact of GAMSA who had a list of AVRR/IOM returnees from the airport. The contact from GAMSA contacted and organised with seven returnees who wished to come to meet me for a group interview, however only three out of the seven turned up on the day. I come back to these challenges below.

Community Members

Living in The Gambia for three months allowed me to immerse myself into local environments and meet people from many different backgrounds. The family that I was living with introduced me to their extended family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours, many of whom networked within similar circles and gave me an insight into a what in an English context would be described as a middle-class lifestyle. Both of the household leaders, 'Aunty Laila' and her daughter, 'Aunty Naomi' worked in high-profile positions, Naomi in a division of the UN, and Laila being a representative jointly responsible for rewriting the nation's constitution.

As mentioned above, Kebba acted as a local guide as well as introducing me to returned migrants. Kebba invited me into his personal life, showing me different neighbourhoods that he grew up in, and introducing me to his family and friends. This was an important aspect of my research as his family household became a space in which I spent a significant amount of time hanging out with his family and three-year-old son. Regarding sampling reflections, there was a socioeconomic contrast between the lifestyles of Kebba's

family and my host-family, which gave me an insight into different social aspects and priorities of living in The Gambia.

Representatives of Organisations

As the significance of the shifting political climate for my research topic became clear, the new direction of my research questions required me to examine multiple perspectives regarding migration and mental health. I wanted to explore the perspectives from within the 'system' that many young people had spoken of when referring to organisations they believed to be responsible for supporting the youth. I used social media to reach out to representatives of the National Youth Council (NYC) and the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), both integral partners to youth development in The Gambia. Through another family contact I was introduced to a representative from GAMSA, who I have called 'Mr Ceesay'. I subsequently managed to set up interviews with both YEP and GAMSA representatives, however the meetings I had arranged with NYC unfortunately kept being postponed and did not materialise. Both interviews were conducted at the offices of each participant. On reflection, the setting of these interviews created a more formal atmosphere and encouraged the interviewees to speak on behalf of their organisation rather than as individuals. However, this was not negative for my research as I was aiming to gain an overview.

I initially met Mr Ceesay at his office for GAMSA, a space shared by various mental health advocates at different times, situated in the Centre for Innovation Against Malaria (CIAM) building. Thereafter I frequently found others referring to him or inviting a connection to him through other meetings or events, a reflection of his mile-a-minute attitude to work and any mental health-related project involvement. Our contact throughout my research was insightful and enabled me to grasp at the general landscape of mental health services and psychosocial support in The Gambia today.

Additionally, I set up a meeting with Salifu, the director of Mobee, the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing charity previously mentioned. As later discussed, I have not used a pseudonym for Salifu as his work with Mobee deserves recognition for their actions in psychosocial wellbeing support and he consented to this. For the interview, Salifu invited me to his home where we sat and talked informally under his orange trees whilst drinking *attaya* and sharing homemade *benachin*, (a local fried-rice dish). I stayed for hours, chatting about different aspects of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in a Gambian context. Salifu had an interesting perspective as he has lived and worked in England for the past twenty-five

years in the field of psychiatry and therapy but visits The Gambia regularly to work with this end of the charity.

Tanka Tanka and Mobee

For the last two weeks of my fieldwork, I volunteered with Mobee for three days a week at Tanka Tanka. I gained access to volunteering at the hospital through the approval of the director of GAMSA, the director of the charity, and the director of Tanka Tanka. I was not given access to any information from the hospital, and therefore did not collect data about any patients or health staff at the hospital. Rather, I gained observational and conversational data from Mobee staff, who all gave both oral and written consent to partaking in the research. The team was a group of young men and women, ranging from 18 to mid-30s, all with no previous background in mental health but with a new-found interest and basic mental health training.

DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative research requires the researcher to reflect on their choice of data collection methods in the field (Moen & Middelthon, 2015: 328). Prior to beginning fieldwork, I had intended to conduct repeated individual interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. I have conducted individual interviews and participant observation, however there were some changes in the data collection methods. After the first round of interviews, I found that it was impractical and difficult to arrange multiple interviews with the same participants. This was due to a combination of factors, including local time management and organisation, and difficulties with transport. Additionally, after interviewing nine return migrants, the interviews had already reached an early saturation point and I made the decision to start speaking to different types of participants. This saturation is something I will be exploring in my analysis as a part of the return migrant narrative.

Individual Interviews

I conducted one-on-one interviews with eleven participants, each lasting 30-90 minutes. Six of these were returned migrants, and five were members of organisations or associations. The interviews were semi-structured and thematic, with some pre-prepared questions and

prompts, but no specific order. During my research I began to develop new interview guides and my questions became less structured and more open ended, allowing for topics to evolve and be developed by the participants.

All of the interviews were long and in-depth, covering many topics and often starting with a descriptive background narrative from the participant. It was important to let the participants speak uninterrupted and to listen attentively, as it builds trust between the two parties (Dickson-Swift, James, & Liamputtong, 2008). This was reflected in the return migrant interviews, as many participants expressed their appreciation of being able to tell their story and feel heard and led to them feeling able to share with me.

I went to meet all of the returned migrants at or near their homes. I travelled with Kebba or Dudu to the street or house where they hung out, and usually spent some time before the interviews "sitting" and hanging out with their group of friends. "Sitting" is a term used by Gaibazzi (2015) in his ethnographic depiction of Gambian life and has several metaphorical meanings. The term is applied as an embodied form of social participation and production; "Offering a chair or a place on a mat to a visitor is an act of hospitality and respect, the acknowledgment of the social presence of the guest and the first step towards establishing or continuing a social relation with him or her" (Gaibazzi 2015: 8). I have adopted this term throughout this research as it resonated with the social experiences I encountered and the symbolic reverence of *sitting* as a part of daily social interaction.

Some of the interviews were conducted alone, others included Kebba or Dudu. This was decided by what felt more natural in the situation and how comfortable the interviewee was. The groups of friends were all male with one exception, (Mattie, 28, was the only woman I met in this social setting) and would be sharing food and drinking attaya whilst *sitting* outside under the umbrella trees on the street corners.

Group Interviews

Focus group discussions are thought to reveal more diverse understandings of a topic through a group dynamic and shared communication (Liamputtong, 2011). One focus group was set up during my fieldwork, however, only three out of the seven invited return migrants attended. The discussion became more of a group interview than a focus group as the participants did not discuss among themselves. I did not find the group dynamic to be helpful or revealing, perhaps because one of the participants was particularly dominant in the group and the other two seemed intimidated by this. The narrative of the interview felt staged and

scripted, with the dominant participant steering the conversation in the direction of his own motivations.

Challenges of the Interviews

One of the main challenges in the interviews was learning to speak about 'mental health' and 'psychosocial wellbeing' in a way that could translate culturally and across a language barrier. At the beginning of my research, I found that mentioning 'mental health' would send the conversation in an agitated loop of the interviewee arguing that he was not "mad". Using words such as "psychology" and "psychosocial" were not useful, more than once we did not have the same meaning or understanding of these words.

> Me*: Mental health is about […] how you feel – psychologically…? You know?*
>
> Jamal*: How I feel like psychology?? [laughs a lot] Hahaha, no – No I don't have that kind of problem. [brushing off the question brashly] I am one-hundred percent. I'm not a psychology*

I learned that using more tangible aspects and symptoms of psychosocial wellbeing was a more effective way to communicate a mutual meaning. I used phrases such as "having difficulty concentrating", "do you sleep well?", and "feelings of anxiety or unease"; the latter soon translated unequivocally to *stress* or "feeling *stressed*" through a shared understanding of emic explanations. This discussion will continue in Chapter One.

Another challenge that required reflection was in regard to language. All of the interviews were conducted in English, however sometimes there were moments when the interviewee would speak in their local language to Kebba or Dudu, either to clarify a question I had asked or about things outside of the interview, for example to make more *attaya*. When they spoke about relevant topics, Kebba and Dudu would both translate what they had said, and the participant showed their agreement. In these cases, it was useful to have the third party in the interview, as they were friends and would bounce off one another to figure out the best way to explain what the interviewee meant in English. I also felt that there was an instant trust built by association of our now-mutual friend which helped rapport.

A challenge of the group interview has already been mentioned, which was that the conversation was steered by an ulterior motivation from one dominant member of the group. The feeling put forwards was the hope that I could potentially grant them access to funding or help them financially in some way, a topic which dominated much of the interview and made

me reflect on the motivations of their participation and interview answers, as well as my position as a researcher. This was a challenge that I have been critical of in my analysis.

Conversations

In addition to the one-on-one interviews and group interview, I spoke to many people regarding my research and gathered a lot of background information and community perspectives through both casual and in-depth conversations Parts from conversations were written down and all orally agreed to participate in the research after receiving information on what it involved and was about. These day-to-day discussions were particularly helpful in my reflection process, allowing me to actively challenge my own preconceptions and emotions which is an important part of the qualitative research process (Glesne & Peshkin, 2006).

Participant Observation

Volunteering with the mental health charity allowed me to spend extended amounts of time with a group of young social workers and volunteers who worked closely with mental health patients. I participated in a 'sensitisation talk' in one of the communities which was an interesting insight to the way that the charity is promoting mental health awareness. This consisted of us setting up a circle of chairs and a loud speaker in the market square of Brusabi. Once a small crowd had arrived and settled, members of the team began explaining the event in different local languages and English, then continued to speak about mental health awareness, symptoms and signs, the ways to care for and treat loved ones with mental illnesses. I was also asked to speak at the event about my experiences with mental health, generally and within The Gambia. This was a great experience as it connected me strongly to the team and made me reflect on what I had experienced so far. Spending extended periods of time within this group enabled me to learn about their perspectives on mental health before and after working with the charity, and also to experience the day-to-day social lives of a young group of friends in The Gambia.

In addition to this structured participation, I spent a lot of time 'hanging out' with different groups of Gambians, young and old, male and female, family and strangers. The Gambia is a particularly sociable country, and in my experience, it lives up to its reputation of being "The Smiling Coast of Africa". There was never a moment I was not approached by new people, asked about my work, given food, asked to participate, danced with, talked to, or told someone's story. Living with a Gambian family gave me the chance to observe and learn

about cooking, household chores, family life, religion, daily rituals. They taught me some about what it meant to them to be Muslim, and we had endless discussions about worldviews, culture, and gender roles. I was invited to naming ceremonies, birthdays, children's school recitals, shopping trips. I learnt to drive on the Gambian roads. I was sent on errands to fetch food, clothes, books. I went to the homes of uncles, aunts, cousins, partners and witnessed the coming-and-going of family living abroad and what that meant. All of these experiences were a part of my participation in Gambian life and filled in the picture of what Gambian life means to people.

ANALYSIS

Analysis is a process of interpretation by the researcher to add meaning to the data within a given context (Kielmann, et al., 2012: 64). The interpretative nature of qualitative research means that it is important to contextualise the data and be perceptive to individual's meanings to avoid misrepresentation and misunderstanding (Richards & Schwartz, 2002: 136).

The analysis of my data has followed a methodical process which has been both inductive and deductive. Analysis is an ongoing process that occurs at all stages of the research project (Moen & Middelthon, 2015). As discussed above, the research design of this thesis was partly shaped by informed-decisions made whilst still in the field, such as the importance of the immersive political rhetoric, and by the prior theoretical framework that was presented in my protocol, the social imaginary of migration (Vigh, 2009). However, the majority of making sense of the data and occurred after I returned from the field.

Initial inductive analysis took place through thematically coding the transcripts and fieldnotes, noting descriptive and analytical themes. I identified 31 recurring themes and subthemes that became codes for further analysis. As such, rather than searching for pre-determined themes, the inductive coding led to themes emerging from the data I had collected (Harding, 2013). Examples of codes for descriptive themes were 'mental health services', 'Backway journey narratives', and 'financial situation'. Some analytical themes were 'understandings of mental illness', 'coping with stress', 'return migrant identity', and 'perceptions of political situation'. Further coding included emic language, such as *stressed*, *hustling*, and *attaya*. I classified all of the themes and subthemes in to categories which then became the foundation for the chapters of this thesis: 1) understandings of mental health and psychosocial wellbeing; 2) return migration in the youth community; 3) attitudes towards the

government and reintegration organisations. After I had identified my main themes, I started to conduct database searches to find relevant literature that would build upon my findings. Initial theoretical frameworks that began to shape the structure of the thesis came from Vigh (2009), Gaibazzi (2015), and Wright (2012; 2012a).

Anonymised transcripts were also peer-reviewed during analysis workshops to critically compare themes and highlight contrasting ideas and questions. This process presents the opportunity to recognise the taken-for-granted assumptions we might have made both in the fieldwork and afterwards, and to analyse what was missing from the data and why. As Moen & Middelthon (2015: 365) explain, it is just as important to inquire into epistemological questions about what we do not know as well as what we do know in order to explore all the avenues of reasoning in your findings.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before conducting any research, I applied for and received ethical clearance from the Medical and Health Studies Ethical Research Council of Norway (REK), and the Gambia Government/MRC Joint Ethics Committee. These committees ensure the protection of participants' rights and wellbeing and that the study meets the criteria of ethical medical research. I received ethical clearance from REK before entering The Gambia, however, due to unforeseen processing times, I did not receive clearance from the Gambian Joint Ethics Committee until a month into my stay. Therefore, for the first month in the country I gathered groundwork observations, acclimatised myself with local information and established connections with people I hoped to interview in the coming months.

Vulnerability and Mitigating Risks to the Participant

Some of the participants in my research were considered vulnerable under the CIOMS[2] guidelines (2016), and therefore special considerations were required regarding their safety and wellbeing during the research. Often sensitive information was disclosed, and the interviews involved an emotional investment from both the participant and the interviewer. The open-ended nature of qualitative interviews means that topics that could cause distress or

[2] International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subjects (2016)

anxiety are not reliably avoidable (Richards & Schwartz, 2002: 136). It was important that I was sensitive to this and followed the participant's lead on how much information they wished to disclose. At no point did I prompt participants to talk about traumatic experiences.

When interviewing the return migrants, I had with me a list of telephone numbers for mental health hotlines at different hospitals all over the country. I had received this list from the Gambian Association on Mental Health and Substance Abuse (GAMSA), who had recently been training nurses in psychiatry and mental health support in hospitals and healthcare centres. It was important to have these telephone numbers at hand during the interviews as it allowed me to give appropriate advice on available mental health services and to provide a tangible way of accessing these services whenever they wanted. More than once this advice was highly appreciated, and every return migrant I spoke to was previously unaware of these services. Additionally, setting clear role boundaries and making sure of a shared acknowledgement that I am not a medical professional and cannot provide direct benefits or medical services was an important ethical mitigator (Richards & Schwartz, 2002: 137).

Consent and Participant Protection

Informed consent is vital before any medical research can be conducted. This involved both written and verbal information given at the beginning of every interview about the purpose and scope of the study, the methods of anonymisation, the right to withdrawal, potential harms and benefits of the study, my role as a non-medical professional and student researcher, and who will have access to the information received. All of these topics were talked through at the beginning of each interview, with confirmation of understanding through asking if they had any questions and asking them to describe back to me what they understood. The participants then signed either their name or initials on an informed consent form before continuing with the interviews.

It is crucial to this research that all of the return migrants are unidentifiable. I have therefore used pseudonyms for each return migrant included in the research and have changed the names of places and countries in their narratives. For all of the organisation representatives I have also used pseudonyms, with the exception of Salifu, the director of Mobee. The decision to identify Salifu came through mutual agreement that the charity and the work they are doing in The Gambia is specific to psychosocial wellbeing and recognition could be valuable. Salifu provided written consent agreeing to be identified and for the

charity to be named, as we were both confident that this would not have a negative impact on him, the charity, or any of the charity members.

Recording and handling of data

I used my mobile phone to record the interviews, making sure to have it in flight-mode as to secure the data from the internet. I then uploaded the recordings to a secure home-area on the University of Oslo server and promptly deleted each one from the recording device. I used the saved audio recordings to write the transcripts with pseudonyms, and nobody else has had access to the files. At the end of this project all files will be deleted.

REFLEXIVITY & TRANSFERABILITY

The process of producing valid and methodical qualitative research requires an epistemological approach to knowledge production. Donna Haraway's (1988) metaphor for situating knowledges through embodied vision describes the ways in which we, as researchers, should reflect on our position and learn to attach objectivity to our pre-existing theoretical and political comprehension. When acquiring new knowledge or understanding, situating these knowledges allows researchers to become answerable for what they learn and how they see. This also helps to prevent appropriating or misrepresenting understanding or vision, especially of those in a less powerful position (Haraway, 1988: 582-584). By reflecting on one's position both personally and epistemologically, the researcher strengthens the validity and ethical value of their work.

Whilst in the field I was conscious of this process, continually challenging myself to be critical of my own preconceptions and apparent 'truths' and power relations. For example, the power imbalances that occur in health research have potential for researcher exploitation (Richards & Schwartz, 2002:136). To account for this, I was very clear to explain my role as a researcher and not as a medical professional. This is particularly important in the study of mental health in The Gambia, as to talk openly about psychological and emotional feelings with an outsider is uncommon and associated with mental health services. Additionally, I provided each return migrant with the names and numbers of professional counsellors had they wish to further discuss their feelings on the topics raised.

Scientific and theoretical frameworks that one learns prior to the research are inherently carried with the researcher as they enter a new setting. In an aim to be open to

other understandings and truths, I focused on acknowledging my prior assumptions and noting them down in a diary alongside my fieldnotes. This is a way of avoiding researcher bias (Malterud, 2001, p484).

For any researcher in the academic field of migration, it is necessary to reflect on the privilege of their own status of global mobility (Andersson, 2014a). "Waiting, insecurity and eventual refusal have all come to characterise border experiences for those without economic, social, and cultural capital needed to deploy 'flexible citizenship' in a world on the move". (Andersson, 2014a: 796). Traditionally, part of being an anthropologist is immersing oneself into 'local worlds', but this can present a stark contrast between the researcher and the participants in a country with limited mobility. This was an ethical consideration in the planning of my research, however global mobility is beyond the researcher's control and therefore I could only plan to recognise my role and be reflexive of it. I had an enormous respect and appreciation for the people of The Gambia for inviting me into their country and continuously showing kindness and hospitality.

Often people would reflect on my position and ask, jokingly and seriously, if I could "take them with me" or provide a formal invitation to visit Norway or England. It often felt that I was viewed as a 'possibility' – a 'potential way out' of The Gambia. The power imbalance imbedded in my option of leaving when I was finished was obvious to both me and those around me, and it compelled me to reflect on the cultural expectations that each of us had. Maintaining humbleness and expressing value in what I was learning from people was a constant and key aspect of my research process.

In qualitative research, the aim of transferability is to produce knowledge that is useful beyond the context of the study setting (Malterud, 2001). For this study, I am exploring the sociocultural processes which shape the construction of wellbeing among return migrants, focusing on the psychosocial support which is available to them. Although the experiences found in the data are specific to The Gambia and Gambian return migrants, the ways in which social processes such as the recent political transition and narrative construction are influencing those experiences may be transferable beyond this setting (Maxwell, 2013). For example, the findings from this study may be applicable to experiences of return migration and reintegration in other West African countries, or perhaps in other explorations of social determinants of psychosocial wellbeing.

CHAPTER ONE

Psychosocial Wellbeing and Constructions of 'mental illness'

This chapter explores different aspects and processes that have been identified from the data material collected in this project about mental health and psychosocial wellbeing in The Gambia. The chapter paints a landscape of the current services, ideologies and understandings of mental illness and psychosocial health through three broad sections, which are then broken down and analysed in depth within the existing body of knowledge. The first section sets out the current knowledge and understandings of what 'mental health' means to the people I spoke to, and how these perceptions and the language that is used to describe mental illness have translated into societal behaviours and treatments. The second section focuses on exploring local constructions of 'psychosocial wellbeing'. One of the most important factors that was identified in the research for an improved wellbeing among returned migrants was having a sense of purpose and motivational goals. The third section lays out the on-going developments in mental health services that were identified during the research. This section explains why sensitisation and awareness campaigns are vital to a developing mental health system, and describes the goals and role of the up-and-coming Psychosocial Wellness Centre.

Throughout the chapter the terms 'mental illness' and 'psychosocial wellbeing' are used frequently, and for the purpose of this thesis require some definition. However, as I have found during this research, the definitions of these terms do not exist in a vacuum and they are infused with sociocultural perceptions and contextual applications. For example, if we look at the inconsistency of psychiatric diagnoses over time, from homosexuality to female hysteria, it is clear that mental illness cannot be disassembled from societal contextuality (Davies, 2013). Kleinman (2012), highlights this is in his paper on the medicalisation of grief as it became diagnosed a mental illness in the DSM IV. It is important to make clear that the purpose of this chapter is not to draw a line between what is a diagnosable psychiatric illness and psychosocial or emotional distress, or to claim any part of this spectrum is more or less valid. In addition, I argue that the blurred line between the psychological statuses outlined above provides a space for reflection on which services are helpful, needed, and wanted for the wellbeing and reintegration of return migrants.

When writing about 'mental illness' I am referring to the understandings and perceptions that the people I spoke to had on the topic, of their constructions of what constitutes as 'mental illness' and what lies outside of this category. The construction of 'wellbeing' is also an important focus of this chapter, taking lead from Katie Wright's (2012; 2012a) application of the Human Wellbeing Analysis into the academic field of international migration. Again, it is not my aim to determine a definitive answer to how wellbeing can be achieved in a Gambian context, but rather to explore the different psychosocial and emotional processes that are perceived to construct a sense of wellbeing for the people I spoke to. Psychosocial and emotional distress can be closely linked to diagnosable mental illnesses; however, they can also remain as human responses to life events. "Not all psychosocial exposures […] need psychosocial explanations" (Martikainen, et al., 2002: 1092). This distinction is important because it is an unclear line that leads one into the other, and it is within the blurred edges of this line that the social experience of wellbeing exists.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF MENTAL ILLNESS

Through analysing the empirical data from this research, I have identified several shared understandings and perceptions of what 'mental illness' means to some people in The Gambia and how it is talked about in their communities. The initial themes that came out of the findings were: Fear of 'mental illness'; the distinction between *stress* and 'madness; the relationship between 'madness' and 'idleness'; and the stigma of 'mental illnesses'. A commonality that ran throughout these findings was the active separation of 'mental illness' from society. I have placed 'mental illness' in quotation marks because I wish to emphasise that it is not one specific definition of mental illness that is the topic of this discussion, but rather the varying perceptions of 'mental health' and 'mental illness' that people have which has shaped their language and behaviour in a way that actively pushes the *idea* of 'mental illness' to the fringes of society. By pushing the 'mental illness' to the side-lines, I argue that stigma and silence are created and coping mechanisms becoming challenging. The process of separation is what I will be discussing in this section.

Fear of 'Mental Illness'

As Barrow (2016) discusses, there are traditional beliefs in The Gambia in which some view mental illness as a spiritual or religious infliction. One of the four causes for mental illness that he found people related to was "external power", described as including "demons, evil spirits, magical powers such as witchcraft and fouled wind" (Barrow, 2016: 50). This idea creates a lot of fear around mental illness. When speaking to people during my research, I too found a relationship between mental illness and bad spirits, which also included the notion of contamination. 'Mental illness' to some people was believed to have the qualities of a contagious disease, even to the extent of physical objects from the psychiatric hospital, for example, carrying dangerous spiritual contaminants and therefore must be kept away from their communities. When I was speaking to members of Mobee about working with mental health patients, one expressed that their family was worried about him working there as he could become sick or mad. He told me that he had grown up believing this himself, and that it was not until he began basic mental health training sessions that he started to feel less scared of being at Tanka Tanka. He had been encouraged to start working for Mobee through friends who had already started, as many of the volunteers were from the same community. The fear that they felt as young people had been learnt from their elders but became less prominent once they began to learn that mental illnesses are noncommunicative and often treatable.

The fear of 'mental illness' as a contagious disease which may be caused by "external powers" creates a stigma of those inflicted with mental health problems. The fear created by these beliefs contributes to a physical separation of those with mental illness from society, illustrated by some of the traditional treatment that occurs, such as tying or chaining patients up (Barrow, 2016: 61), or sending people to the confines of Tanka Tanka. The social separation was exemplified by a Mobee social worker who said patients often do not receive any visitors at Tanka Tanka. She believed their families were scared and that there was a lot of fear attached to mental illness because they had not been taught the medical causes. Her relationship with the patients at the hospital showed that she was not scared. I observed that she did not treat them differently as 'sick people', but rather spoke to them as she did to other staff and her friends. She was kind and clearly cared for the patients, spending long periods of time playing games and chatting with them in the occupational therapy room.

Transforming perceptions

In Herring's (2016) discussion on wellbeing as being vulnerable to social determinants, he talks more generally about the transference of custodial authority over social values and beliefs about health from religious leaders to medical professionals. Religious and spiritual influence permeates Gambian culture as it has always been a predominantly religious country. Barrow (2016: 59) explains that religious and traditional healers are very respected members of society, often being consulted not only for health treatments but also for settling disputes and other social issues in the community. Simultaneously, a biomedical rhetoric exists that also gives authority to medical professionals for health treatments. Barrow argues that the mental health treatment path depends on the belief of cause for the illness. Whilst my research did not fully encompass the relationship between religion and medicine or the epistemology of health-related knowledge, the way that some people I spoke to talked about mental health highlighted the medical plurality that exists and the changed perceptions of 'mental illness' that they experienced from one institution to the other. For example, one Mobee social worker, Musa, spoke explicitly about new mental health knowledge transforming his perceptions of 'mentally ill' people, as well as how he felt about taking care of them:

> *I knew about mental illness before but not things like now. Before [my mental health training] I see people when they were walking [along the roads], we call them… (hesitates) …like lunatics – I see them and I think, ah, I don't see any future for these people – I feel so sad, when I see my brothers and sisters making those kinds of behaviours. […] The very day I went to Tanka Tanka I was crying. I felt so sad.*

The same social worker spoke about traditional healers and families with mentally ill members and the way that some people are treated. He described this treatment as what Mobee is aiming to change with their awareness and sensitisation talks:

> *We have awareness talks in the village. If you have mental illness in your family, we ask them 'how do you support them?'. They say […] they tie their arms, sit them in one place and don't give them food and things like that – and we tell them no, that is very bad. Because they should be in their normal life. Because if you isolate from them it is going to be difficult for them. But thank god, now, many people here they are [becoming] more aware of mental illnesses.*

Now, he says, he looks for ways which he can help the situation; what the process of help is for the people he sees suffering and how he believed things have changed since Mobee has

been doing awareness talks in villages and going to family homes to spend time with the patients:

> *Many of them nowadays they are living their normal life, when they need medication, they just come to Tanka Tanka, take their medication and go. They live their normal life like before. Before, people didn't know about these illnesses, and now it helps them very much. […] Before here, it was terrible. You would just see patients, roaming around here, I felt so sorry for them. But even now, today, I saw someone I know and they were taking their trousers down – I stopped – I know her very well so that's why I stopped and I just put her trousers back on.*

Musa spoke lovingly about numerous people he goes out of his way to help with providing companionship, going to their houses to help them tidy, to make green tea (*attaya*) and listen to music with them. He explained that previous to being taught, he believed there was no hope for people suffering from mental illness. "It's the devil that gives it to them, or a family member who is disturbing the person. That is the belief. And now we don't want people to have those kinds of concepts".

However, wrapped up in the custodial authority that people place on either of the institutions, be that religious or biomedical, the findings indicate the belief still exists that mentally ill people are unable to participate as full members of society without the conviction of a healer or doctor. The excerpt below shows the authority Kebba, organiser of a youth organisation, places in doctors regarding the social separation of the mentally ill:

> *It's not advisable, there has to be a report from the doctor – saying he can work. He can come and train with the people now, he can do what people are doing. Cos you know, the brain, the brain is everything. When you lose your brain, I feel that you cannot work. You cannot join the people. That is why the people take you to the place [Tanka Tanka]. When you are okay, the doctor can confirm that you are okay and bring you to the people.*

This is an important point because it exemplifies how even though the trusted social authority may be coming from religious leaders or biomedicine or a combination of medical pluralism, there is still the sense that 'mental illness' is an entity that requires separation, physically and socially. As Musa highlighted in our conversation, he believed that more people are learning to treat people with mental illness normally and recognised from his mental health training that isolating them can worsen their illness. The basic mental health training has helped people like Musa to unlearn the fear they had felt towards mentally ill patients. But whether the knowledge he has gained was from a 'biomedical' institution, was based on sociocultural values, or was situated in religious teachings did not matter. I suggest that attempts to place

boxes around epistemology in this way is not useful. Stacy Langwick (2007), in her work on culturally translated definitions of *degedege* and malaria in Tanzania, argues that in practice there are interdependent relationships rather than discrete differentiations in the existing medical pluralism, and concludes that "attention to such situated connections not only contextualizes absolutist claims [on disease and illness] but also opens up a space to imagine less hierarchical, possibly more democratic translations" (Langwick, 2007: 112). I believe that her statement here is paramount to the development of mental health awareness in The Gambia and communicates well that knowledge systems need not be defined as mutually exclusive but as embedded within one another and are practiced to this effect.

So far, I have explored the different ways in which people create a separation in both a physical and ideological sense of those suffering with mental health problems being separated from society. Learning through a combination of knowledge systems has provided Mobee workers with the tools to try and create awareness and reduce fear of mental illness. Below I will continue to discuss how the separation of 'mental illness' from what are considered to be 'fixable' psychosocial factors has been created through language. Later, I further this discussion towards the notion that this separation is not clear-cut, and explore the potential difficulties surrounding coping strategies and accessibility to health services. A blurred line between psychosocial wellbeing and mental illness could allow for a space to reflect on what is needed to improve an individual's situation and his or her feelings.

Separation Through Language

The data collected in this research has highlighted a purposeful distinction in the language used to talk about mental health and the way that people feel. The most common word used to describe feelings of despair, worry, sadness, loss of concentration, overthinking, being unable to sleep or speak to people was the word *stress*. This word has come out of the data as an emic term, used frequently by return migrants and other interviewees. Although all common symptoms of diagnosable mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety (DSM-5, 2014), the word *stress* tended to be used in a way to differentiate these feelings from what people believe to be 'being crazy' – words they associate with mental disorders and people needing to go to Tanka Tanka. The reasons that return migrants gave for these feelings of *stress* could range from worrying about how much money they lost, how they could not find work now, thinking about traumatic experiences from their journey, or close relationships breaking down.

Many of the return migrants I spoke to said that these 'big *stresses'* had stopped them from being able to talk to people, had led them to smoking a lot of marijuana, or had reduced their self-confidence to the extent of barely having reason to get out of bed in the morning. Sometimes they would talk about *stresses* in reference to the experiences they had on their Backway journey. Different experiences of excessive violence and disempowerment were talked about, from watching people being executed to being tortured and starved by rebel forces or kidnappers. Sometimes it was the mental brutality of crossing the desert without enough water that took its toll on some of the returnees I spoke to. However, each of these stories and explanations had one thing in common, and that was the sense of having endured a difficult experience and how this relates to separating them from being 'crazy'. It is this connotation of 'crazy' that people relate to 'mental illness' as opposed to how *they* are feeling. Mahid expressed this explicitly: "I have *stress*, you know. But my head is strong. It's not that I'm crazy. The money spent is just too much".

The separation between *stress* and 'mental illness' tended to focus on the understanding that the different *stresses* in their lives were things they believe could be 'fixed' – money, employment, family relationships – rather than what people understood to be diseases of the mind such as schizophrenia or psychosis, which require medical attention and may never be 'fixed'.

This finding is supported by Barrow's (2016: 48-50) research which identifies two categories of conceptual definition for mental illness: Reversible and irreversible. As a native Gambian, Barrow was able to translate directly some languages to English. For example, as Barrow explains, in Mandinka the phrase *sundomi kurao* translates to "sickness of the mind" and is often used to refer to changes in personality or the way people act that others find strange, whereas *nyamato* refers to an irreversible concept of mental illness which carries a lot of stigma. According to Barrow (2016: 49), the behaviours described with the word *nyamato* are associated with shame or degrading acts "of the body", such as being violent or undressing in public.

During my research I asked some of the Mobee team who had received mental health training to explain how 'mental illness' translates into local languages. The basic mental health training implied a degree of shared understanding of how mental illness is defined in western medicine. I found a similar separation in the language surrounding mental illness and where conceptual divisions lay, but variations in the translation of specific words. Receiving translation from Mandinka and Wolof into English as a non-native speaker presents reliability challenges which may reduce the significance of these variations; however, I feel that they

are worth exploring. The word *nyamato* was translated to me as a Mandinka word used to describe someone suffering from severe mental disorders but does not specify the type of illness or the cause. Similar in meaning, in Wolof to say *doff* or *ha doffla* refers to somebody displaying behaviours associated with mental illness – usually behaviour that, as Barrow (2016: 48-50) also found, is seen as disorderly and shameful.

According to Musa, the Mobee social worker whom I spoke to more in depth about local language translations, people also separate mental illness into two categories of cause in local languages: illness as a result of drugs, such as drug-induced psychosis, and illness they believed to be as inherited, such as schizophrenia. The two words above, *nyamato* and *ha doff* are usually associated with drug-or-alcohol-related behaviours and therefore stigmatised mental illnesses. The relationship between drugs-and-alcohol and disruptive behaviours which are associated with mental illness could be creating some of the stigma attached having mental illness. Relating to religious belief, consuming drugs and alcohol in Gambian society is outwardly perceived as a shameful behaviour.

The contrasting translation between this research and Barrow's (2016), was that *nyamato* in Barrow's thesis translates into the 'irreversible' mental condition, whereas in my research it is used to relate to drug-and-alcohol-related mental conditions which would imply that it was 'reversible' through a termination of drug-use. One explanation for this discrepancy is that it is not the mental illness that is being referred to as reversible or irreversible, but rather the shame attached to the acts people are committing. Barrow explains that *nyamato* is a degrading and stigmatizing word, and people with mental illnesses often do not accept this term. As such, this suggests that the separation lies in the social value attached to certain behaviours which can be associated with mental illnesses.

In parallel to Barrow's findings, the return migrants I spoke to repeatedly wanted to separate themselves from those deemed as having 'mental illness' when speaking in English about how they were feeling, the reason being could be because that word translates to their understanding of *nyamato* as shameful.

Furthermore, other distinctions were made when asked about what people mean as *stress*. For example, Musa explained, *nyam a kai*[3] can be used to describe somebody that is always isolating himself, and *nyam bok a fi* means that the person does not want to be with

[3] These translations and spellings may not be accurate and do not necessarily reflect Wolof or Mandinka languages correctly. The translations I received were from one source, and unfortunately, I have not been able to cross-reference them with other native speakers.

anybody. Another phrase, *kula ba okono* – that there is something inside that the person does not want to share – is what Musa described to be "what you could call stress or anxiety" as he understood it in English.

Here I have outlined a distinction that is being made by the return migrants I spoke to about their own mental health. By using the word *stress* they are referring to a tangible aspect of their life that they feel is fixable, whilst also separating their stress-related behaviours such as over-thinking, worry, lack of sleep, and reclusiveness from the stigmatised perceptions of 'mental illness'. It can be noted that these behaviours are also inherently private, usually not causing a scene or attracting the attention that may come with what are seen as more 'shameful' behaviours such as undressing in public or shouting loudly in the streets. As the criteria for psychiatric diagnoses revolve largely around deviant behaviours (Barrow, 2016), it appears appropriate that a separation been *stress* and 'mental illness' exists in the language. This is also an example of the blurred line that exists between diagnosable psychiatric disease and emotional or psychological distress, and emphasises the difficulty in knowing when psychosocial experiences need psychosocial treatment (Martikainen, et al., 2002). I will follow on with different ways that people are coping with their own definitions of *stress* and the varying levels of treatment people desire or need.

Coping with 'stress'

From looking at the data, the way that the return migrants I spoke to were coping with their own psychological or emotional feelings of distress and anxiety highly depended upon their own sense of purpose and wellbeing. The construction of 'mental illness' as something undesirable, stigmatised and that should be separated from society impacted the way that these people were constructing their own coping methods for improving their psychosocial wellbeing.

One of the reasons that there is a division in how people define 'mental illness' and separate those who are classified as mentally ill from being active in society is the criterion that are used for recognition. As Barrow (2016: 71) found, the only criterion for perceiving someone as mentally ill is deviant behaviour. This creates a very narrow scope for how people recognise mental illness and therefore excludes other forms of mental illness. Experiencing *stress* in the form of over-thinking, isolating oneself, feeling anxious, feeling overwhelmed, reliving traumatic memories, and feeling demotivated are all symptoms that could be associated with treatable mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety, but are not

recognised as such in a Gambian context. Based on my findings, I would suggest that this deliberate separation between *nyamato* – the mentally sick – and people struggling with *stress* is one of the reasons that people do not feel that there are services available to help them**.** By not recognising mental health issues which do not present outwardly deviant behaviour in society, people are being excluded from treatment or even knowledge of their own mental health.

Possibly because of the stigma attached to people's perceptions of what 'mental illness' is, the return migrants who are suffering from *stress* all said that they found it very difficult to talk about how they are feeling with anyone. Connected to Gaibazzi's (2015: 8) embodied explanation of "sitting", drinking and making *attaya* (a strong green tea) is also a ritual in daily life which creates space for conversation. The process of making *attaya* is slow, it takes about fifteen to twenty minutes to brew and involves the therapeutic action of pouring it back and forth between small cups until the sugar is mixed in. When it is ready, people share it around – it is a very sociable and inclusive activity. Musa described using *attaya* to help patients from Tanka Tanka:

> *I buy* attaya *and sugar and give it to him. So sometimes we just go with his family members, sitting, drinking* attaya*, and we used to wash his clothes, clean his house. Now when we go to his house it is comfortable. He is the one making* attaya *for us. You know people say when you're making* attaya *it makes your mood calm. That's why it's very common here.*

Figure 4: Making* attaya*; waiting for the tea to brew with family. November 2018

Figure 4: Making* attaya*; pouring the tea back and forth from height mixes in the sugar and creates foam.

I also found this to be true throughout my research experience, as whenever I met up with people or hung out in groups, *attaya* was being made. The offering of *attaya* acted as an inclusive invitation into intimate social settings.

However, some of the return migrants said they could not or had not talked about their journey experiences with anybody, some because it was "very long and very sad", and others because it was too painful. One return migrant said that when he returned, he could not talk to anyone because he was always on the brink of crying. One man said that he could not talk about the journey because his family assumed that he would not want to: "Like they think I'll go mad or something".

This connection between talking about trauma and 'going mad' is an interesting point. Throughout the data, both in conversations with return migrants about themselves and with other individuals talking about their impression of returned migrants, there are links that people make between how they are feeling now, about being *stressed*, and the perception that 'madness' was impending if nothing about their situation changed. For nearly all of the returned migrants I spoke to, the things that they believed would stop their slow transition into 'madness' were connected to tangible fixes, such as money and employment, and most prominently, to a sense of purpose and motivation. Having agency over one's life and the motivation to pursue goals are thought to be fundamental factors in psychosocial wellbeing (Wright, 2012; Gough & McGregor, 2007).

Lastly, one of the most prominent 'coping strategies' that I found in this research was the use of cannabis as a way to "de-stress". All of the return migrants that I spoke to, and nearly all of the youths that I spent time with who were "sitting" would smoke cannabis on a regular basis in combination with making *attaya*. The perceptions of cannabis were varied, some of the men had thought consciously about their intake, whilst others considered it an ordinary part of daily life, behaviour passed on from their fathers and uncles.

Barrow (2016), found that cannabis use was believed to be one of the leading causes for a rise of mental illness amongst youths, and as an immoral behaviour, could therefore place the cause of the illness into the responsibility of the individual. He argues that as a result, individuals may delay or not seek treatment for fear of being labelled immoral or blamed for their illness (Barrow, 2016: 73-74). As such a high percentage of in-patients at the psychiatric hospital in The Gambia are admitted with a diagnosis of drug-related psychosis, it seems a plausible belief that cannabis has a negative effect on mental health.

However, in the lack of social services available for people to turn to regarding their emotional distress or psychological wellbeing, and the alternative is facing the stigmatising

label of 'mental illness', cannabis use is a cheap and readily available option that some of the people I spoke to feel is supporting their wellbeing. Mahid, one of the returned migrants, expressed that unless he smokes *ganja* his brain is too busy: "When I smoke it relaxes my brain you know, it's not easy. It calms my brain, so I can sleep a little bit. But when I don't smoke, ohhh its crazy". I would argue that for some people, their reliance on smoking cannabis could be in relationship to the lack of support they can receive elsewhere. When I asked Mahid if he would appreciate having someone professional to talk to about his migration story and how he is feeling, he responded by shouting: "Yes! Yes! That would have been very good". He started laughing and said: "I want to talk it all out. If I was talking to anyone back then [on return] I was about to be crying. I want to talk".

Another example is from Musa, the social worker from Mobee. He said he had experienced return migrants who were "smoking from morning to night", but by talking to them about his own coping strategies for *stress* – going running, walking on the beach, listening to music, talking to friends – he said, "thank god he is not smoking like that like before […] he reduced smoking and he promised me he will try to stop". This may suggest that if alternatives were available people might be open to cutting their consumption or at least attempt to curb their reliance.

The first section of this chapter has examined the ways in which *stress* as an emotional burden has been constructed as something that can be dealt with individually without the stigmatising connotations of 'mental illness'. Also highlighted are some difficulties caused by separating 'mental illness' from *stress*, especially when trying to cope with the latter and not finding applicable support. The connection that some people make between the idea of *stress* transitioning into "madness" without intervention or mediation highlights the potential positivity of psychosocial services being available to provide encouragement towards talking about these feelings. I argue that in the absence of available services, other mediating mechanisms such as drinking *attaya* and smoking cannabis with friends are valid and necessary coping strategies which people appear to recognise as substitutes for something more productive. The following section will unpack what return migrants consider productive for their own psychosocial wellbeing.

SENSE OF PURPOSE AND MOTIVATION

> "Human wellbeing refers to a state of being with others, where human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals and where one enjoys satisfactory quality of life" (Gough & McGregor, 2007: 34).

This description of wellbeing tries to encompass the interplay between material, perceptual and relational domains of satisfaction. These categories intersect through factors such as socioeconomics, identity and self-esteem, psychological states, and social relations (Wright 2012a). This section first describes how having a sense of purpose is important for returning migrants' wellbeing; it goes on to critically analyse how one's own sense of purpose can be determined by travel and "social remittances" (Levitt, 1998). The section ends with examples of how some youths have found their sense of purpose in the development of others and the country and how this has helped their wellbeing.

Practical Activities – "having something to do"

The leading response from the returned migrants in my research when asked what would help their *stress* and improve their situation was *having something to do.* This sounds simple enough in theory, but the environment in which most of these youths live does not provide much inspiration for daily activities (Rodriguez, 2017). Without employment or household responsibilities (which were mainly fulfilled by women), a lot of the young men I spoke to said that they struggled with daily motivation. Mahid, a returned migrant who lived at his family compound with his sister and her children, explained that having somewhere to go each day where people would be expecting him would really help improve his *stress*: "At least I can do something you know! Better than sitting down in one place – that will give me more *stress* you know. When I sit alone and do nothing that can make me mad".

Motivation towards achieving goals and having a sense of purpose in life is a fundamental part of wellbeing. This was something that was recognised by Kebba, an advocate of youth development whose association aimed to alleviate unemployment and poverty amongst youths. The way that Kebba spoke about his aims for his association and what he hoped to do was inspiring. The second time I met him, we were walking across a swampy area behind a local food market which led to the office he was borrowing. As we hopped from one concrete-filled burlap sack to another, Kebba commented on the strong smell of sewage that saturated the air: "The smell here - this is the type of thing our

association will help to change you know, getting youths to volunteer - all the worst jobs need volunteers".

When talking to Kebba about how the people in his association feel towards volunteering for projects to help with their mental health, he responded:

> *We tell them okay, it will be hard today – because you are doing nothing. But when you start doing something, things will come better! And things they are coming – you're changing the environment and the people you with and stuff - you know, you can even change your life through experience and chatting and stuff like that. People change people! By talking, you know. So, [at first] they feel very bad… (laughs) – but they get to understand.*

Return migrant, Mahid, agreed with this idea of volunteer work being positive. Mahid became stuck in Libya for four years with his wife whilst trying to reach Europe. He came back to The Gambia with the IOM Returns project. He used to be a mechanic but was not working when we met. When I spoke to him, he was struggling with overthinking and worries about talking in social situations. He was not sleeping well and his marriage had broken down due to him being unable to provide for his wife or her family. When asked about volunteering rather than being employed, he responded:

> *At least I can do something you know! Better than sitting down in one place – that will give me more* stress *you know. When I sit alone, I do nothing. That can make me mad or make me do something I do not like. […] Even if it is voluntary. That one will help me also. Just to wake up to do something. Better than sitting one place. That will make me more* stressed *you know.*

Mahid communicated feeling frustrated by not having somewhere to be each day, by not being connected to a group of people or being able to work. Wright (2012) defines three fundamental needs that must be met to achieve psychosocial wellbeing: autonomy, relatedness, and competency. These needs were not being met in Mahid's situation, as he felt socially isolated and frustrated that he lost his job by trying to migrate. By suggesting that he would like to volunteer in a job, understanding that he will not get paid, I argue that this shows how important having a sense of purpose is for day-to-day psychosocial wellbeing. Following on, I describe the impact of travelling on local constructions of self-purpose and wellbeing.

A Travelling Construction of Wellbeing

Remittances into The Gambia averagely make up over 20% of the yearly GDP (Action Aid, 2018), and the material displays of wealth of that income are blatant. New expensive housing developments, swimming pools, big cars, big televisions – the westernised and more materialistic lifestyle is making an impact in Gambian homes. The enticement of potential financial wealth as witnessed through these expenses is part of what Vigh (2009) describes as the social imaginary of migration, showing alternative possibilities and thus impacting the wellbeing of those who believe they need to migrate to achieve.

However, the realm of possibility is opening up to individuals not only through financial remittances but through "social remittances", a term coined by Levitt (1998: 926), which refers to the cultural diffusion of sociocultural values and norms, behaviours, opinions and social capital, flowing from sending to receiving countries through migration and diasporas. This, Wright (2012) argues, is influencing a global construction of wellbeing. As Wright explores the relationship of migration and wellbeing, she uses the WHO Quality of Life definition that an individual's life satisfaction is defined by their perception of their position in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live in regard to their goals and expectations (Wright, 2012: 11). By applying this in the context of migration, she extrapolates that as social remittances find their way across borders and intermingle with new cultures, people's frame of reference as to their own position changes. Wright emphasises that human wellbeing is constructed globally and therefore travels as people do.

Furthermore, as has been highlighted by many migration scholars (Ferguson, 1999; Vigh, 2009; Rodriguez, 2017; Gaibazzi, 2015; Andersson, 2014; De Genova, 2013), the growing awareness of people in developing west African countries of their globally governed immobility status is, understandably, creating a youth culture full of frustration and demotivation. Referring to Ferguson (1999: 236) who captured this feeling of being a "second-class" global citizen in the term *abjection* – "a process of being thrown aside, expelled, or discarded […] being thrown down" – Vigh (2009: 95), argues that Bissau youth feel that they have a "life without sauce". According to Vigh (2009: 93): "They are stuck within a global order which does not seem interconnected at all but rather stratified – separated along lines of colour, race, and social position". This description from Vigh aptly describes my own feelings when speaking to Gambian youths, especially those who had attempted the Backway and who were feeling disheartened and frustrated at their position of immobility and lack of national development.

I propose that return migration to The Gambia is inflating this feeling; swelling a bubble of frustration and demotivation as people become even more aware of their inability to move across international borders in the same way as the flocking tourists that fill the hotels each year do, or people like me who have hopped on over for a few months of fieldwork. Wright (2012a: 467), writes, "in an age of increasing global interconnectedness, deepening our understanding of transnational processes has become an important agenda for research", but I argue that simultaneously, the age of 'second-class citizens' is unfortunately more blatant than ever.

The perceptions that people have of their own position in the global society are travelling along migration trajectories in both directions, including along halted and incomplete journeys, and therefore constructing new meanings of life satisfaction and wellbeing. For some this results in feelings of abjection and demotivation. Whilst for others, this is the feeling that fuels their ambition and fiery determination to develop their own situation towards the progress they see elsewhere.

A Purpose Found in Development

A sense of purpose can come from individual perceptions of their own position, and can also be shaped by a changing social environment. The political change in The Gambia means that for many this will be their first time living in a democratic system, and there are high expectations and hopes for the delivery of promises and youth development. For many of the people I spoke to, this has sparked a new sense of optimism and has provided many people with a renewed sense of purpose in developing the country and becoming leaders of change.

This is the case for Stephan, who left The Gambia through the Backway and has now returned and is part of YAIM (Youth Against Irregular Migration). Before deciding to migrate irregularly, Stephan had trained in The Gambia in software and hardware engineering and had received a scholarship to study computer science abroad. Due to political altercations, Gambian scholarships were withdrawn from the programme before Stephan was able to leave the country. This is when he decided to try and get to Europe to study instead. After arriving in Libya, he was caught and imprisoned, eventually he returned with the IOM programme back to The Gambia. Stephan now works to prevent young people from taking the Backway by sharing his experiences and telling the truth about how hard and disempowering the journey can be. His mission is to empower youth in The Gambia to

believe they can make something of themselves there and develop the country to become a place people want to live:

> *[We have] a program with what the people want and what they need right now. Because for us we have the courage and ability of talking to our fellow youths and make them understand – isn't it. Because we are among them. We are hungry for – to become something. For the future. When we talk to them they listen. So we consider ourselves good role models here in The Gambia.*

Stephan's aim for the group is to inspire other people to *Tekki Fii* – "Make it Here", in The Gambia, and says this has been a therapeutic journey for him. The group travel around the country to warn others about the Backway and share their experiences, and he explains that this acts as a double service as it provides a space for returned migrants to talk about their stories and open up about how they are feeling as well as 'sensitizing' other youths. Stephan's family were not initially supportive of him using his time like this, as it is not creating a household income. This could have been difficult for Stephan, but he conveyed that he was "lucky to have a family that will always accept me in any way, at any time, in any condition - they will accept me". This is an important aspect to the foundations of his purpose and wellbeing, as Herring (2016) argues, wellbeing can be understood, in part, in terms of our relationships to others and support we receive from them. Stephan believes his mission is more important in the long run for the development of The Gambia than making money now, and this purpose motivates him to keep going.

In a similar position is Kebba, who has not himself taken the Backway, but understood the struggle that some of his friends have been through since getting back and recognises the difficulties that encourage young people to take the Backway in the first place. As mentioned previously, Kebba had also decided to set up an association to help young people find employment but was struggling to get the group up and running without funding. Kebba's energy was so ignited and positive towards the association and the ambitions that he had for it. He talked passionately about changing the lives of youths who are vulnerable to negative influences and desperate acts of boredom – "being criminalised" as he called it – and recognised that having something to do and work for is vital for people's mental wellbeing. "Being criminalised" is a term that will be returned to in Chapter Three. For Kebba, his role as the leader of his youth group and the new political optimism for developing the country is key to his motivation and sense of purpose:

> *The youths come in, we enhance them, and then they get something like, that they can do something. […] We tell them they have to be doing something […] it's better than sitting around doing this and doing that you know? […] Otherwise, they (the state) will criminalise them. They (the youth) will do something else, from what they're supposed to be. And that's not the ideal. So that's where we come in! To take all those people, to guide them. The drop-outs, the deportees, the illegal migrants. […] So we show them the ways of how to live, how to earn, how to do things to be part of the system.*

This section shows that for some, a sense of purpose can be built through focusing on the development of others. Although returning from the Backway can in some situations ignite feelings of despair, *stress*, and loss of purpose, the journey for Stephan inspired him to want to make a difference for his peers and to focus his energy in trying to develop The Gambia into a country that young people want to stay in. The following section begins to paint a landscape of the on-going developments towards raising mental health awareness and how this impacts the social constructions of 'mental illness' and *stress*, as well describing how the new Wellness Centre initiated by Mobee, may provide a physical space for people to explore their own sense of purpose and psychosocial wellbeing.

DEVELOPMENTS IN MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

As shown in the introduction, the developments in mental health services in The Gambia have been slow, but one aspect that is gathering steam is sensitisation and awareness of mental health problems. Whilst it is recognised by the Gambian mental health team that it is very important to raise awareness and service accessibility of severe mental disabilities, it has become equally apparent to raise attention to other forms of mental illness such as stress and anxiety which are not recognised in society and separated from 'mental illness' due to stigmatising and degrading perceptions. This section discusses the different ways that those working with mental health in The Gambia are trying to raise awareness and reduce the stigma of mental illness, and describes the process of the Wellness Centre trying to use 'psychosocial intervention' to create a mediating space between for people to improve their wellbeing.

"Mass Sensitisation Package"

A big part of the process to developing mental health services in The Gambia is increasing the demand. In order to increase demand of a solution, people must be made aware of the problem. This is the idea behind the on-going 'mass sensitisation package' which is a campaign being run by GAMSA and Mobee. Mr Ceesay from GAMSA explained that the sensitisation campaigns are helping people to recognise symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as other more well-recognised mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. He further explained that to speak to people about 'mental health', you first have to define what that means. Mr Ceesay differentiated between 'mental health' and 'mental ill-health', the former meaning you can function emotionally and socialise in society, and the latter meaning when you are unable to function because of a poor mental status. He believed the campaign is paying dividends, and that as more people learn about the symptoms of 'mental ill-health' and psychological distress, more 'mental illnesses' are emerging in communities where they supposedly did not exist before. They did exist before, he related, "you just didn't recognise them! They were already there!"

Wider theory on the demand-side barriers to equitable, accessible healthcare (Ensor & Cooper, 2004; O'Donnell, 2007) supports the notion that people will demand better healthcare services if their conception of what it means to be healthy changes. Anthropologists such as Kleinman (1988), Fabrega (in Ahmed, 1979), and Hacking (1999), argue that 'illness' is a category of behaviour and is therefore socioculturally constructed. Through Fabrega's explanation, both the 'formal body of knowledge about illness' and the 'informal body of knowledge', i.e. folk knowledge, are products of cumulative cultural experience and the shape of their medical system (Ahmed 2012: 2-3). Applying this understanding to the 'mass sensitisation' in The Gambia, raising awareness and teaching people about the medical taxonomy of mental health through everyday media exposure will increase the society's formal body of knowledge and shape the local construction of mental illness. The incentive of this process for those working in The Gambia is to be able to provide support through a range of psychosocial and mental health services. To do this, people must be aware of a range of psychosocial and mental health problems.

In an effort to raise awareness and understanding of mental health and what mental illness is, GAMSA and Mobee are working together with a number of strategies to target as many different populations as they can. They have posted videos on Facebook describing different types of mental illness and the symptoms associated with them. These videos are

posted in three or four different local languages, as well as English. To cater to an offline audience, GAMSA have radio and television adverts which also talk about the symptoms of different mental illnesses and who/how to contact if you are worried about anything at all. The symptoms they describe are aligned to western psychiatric manuals such as the ICD IV, but the advice that they provide is tailored to the country's current perceptions and treatments of 'mental illness', such as encouraging families not to isolate or constrain people displaying such symptoms but rather to support them emotionally and seek help from health clinics or hospitals.

Furthermore, Mobee and GAMSA are working with the new constitution committee to change the parliamentary legislation to protect mentally ill persons' rights. Changing the "Lunatic Act" that has been in place since 1939 and not altered since 1964 will be an important step towards a safer and healthier mental health system.

The Psychosocial Wellness Centre

The mental health charity that I was working with, Mobee, are in the process of building their community Wellness Centre in the Brufut municipality (see *Figure 5***Error! Reference source not found.**, &**Error! Reference source not found.**). When speaking to Salifu, the director of Mobee UK and Mobee Gambia, he described the centre as a "psychosocial intervention". Having worked in the UK for a long time providing therapeutic services for mental illnesses, Salifu and his UK team have seen the benefits that psychosocial therapy can produce, as an alternative or in addition to psychotropic drugs. This is the message that he wishes to bring to The Gambia.

By "psychosocial intervention", Salifu described a two-sided process to mental health support services in The Gambia. The Wellness Centre aims to act as a space in which people can receive support and rehabilitation after mental health treatment, either from Tanka Tanka or the Poly Clinic. It will also be a place that people can go before they reach 'break-point' as he described it, to gain community support and to try and encourage people to talk about their emotional health and psychosocial wellbeing. He hoped that this might reduce the rate at which people with mental illness in developing countries are medicated and sedated as a first resort rather than a combination of medical therapies.

The Centre does not intend to have any medications available for patients, but to have open therapy sessions where people can go and speak to trained counsellors about how they are feeling. Mobee will organise for their team to have basic mental health training, so that

they can be proactive in knowledge-sharing with people who come in. Although the leaders of Mobee witness the benefits and necessity of medication for those with severe mental disorders, they also have experience that people with less severe forms of mental illness are over-medicated before they get the chance to tackle their problems any other way. Salifu expressed a reservation towards the medicine that is readily available, worrying that is often a first-stage version and the side-effects can be quite severe. As Salifu conveyed: "The people with mental illnesses do not want these side-effects any more than you or I", and therefore alternative treatments such as psychosocial therapy should be available to try.

The Centre will provide opportunities for people to actively spend time with new people, with families, and with members of their own community – in an effort to create circles of support for anybody with feelings of stress or anxiety. It is also important for Salifu that it is a community lead project, and the land that the centre is opening on still belongs to the community of Brufut. "It is a community first centre, about connecting people through action and activities" (Conversation with Salifu). This means that no matter how long Mobee manage to stay working at the Centre, the people of Brufut will have the place as their own as a centre of the community.

In addition to providing a space for psychosocial wellbeing and recovery, Salifu and other Mobee staff are keen to offer opportunities for employment and community volunteering. The Centre will have a community garden, which will need maintaining and harvesting. The food from the garden can then be used directly in the Wellness Centre community kitchen, which will also require some chefs. These types of opportunities will be open to mental health patients and people vulnerable to mental health problems, such as return migrants. These kinds of opportunities are exactly the type of roles that the returned migrants I spoke to were after, whether they are paid or volunteer – people want places to go and roles to fulfil in their daily lives. This was one of the main findings reported to be fundamental for people's wellbeing.

The final section of this chapter has outlined the ways in which mental health and psychosocial health services are developing in The Gambia through creating spaces for talking about psychosocial issues which are creating *stress*. This chapter has explored local understandings of 'mental illness' and *stress* and highlighted some of the potential difficulties surrounding the dichotomy which has been created. Coping strategies for symptoms that were described as *stress*, such as smoking cannabis and not speaking about emotional problems, could potentially lead to more severe forms of mental illness. Ironically, this is exactly what return migrants fear will happen if they do not find alternative and motivational activities to

provide support. The Wellness Centre and other projects such as this could be a great form of psychosocial support which is open, destigmatised, and involves building relationships and a sense of purpose through action. By raising awareness of western medical diagnoses and descriptions of mental health and mental illnesses, mental health advocates such as those working for Mobee and GAMSA are encouraging a wider social acceptance of mental illness narratives and decreasing the associated fear.

Figure 5: The Wellness Centre; the planned-out plot for the vegetable garden. Some local farmers have started to plant nursery beds ready for transplant. November 2018.

Figure 6: The Wellness Centre; plans for new activity and therapy buildings. November 2018.

Figure 7: The Wellness Centre; the kitchen mid-build. November 2018

CHAPTER TWO

Return Migration and Youth – 'The Social Imaginary'

In Chapter One, I firstly outlined a collective understanding of what 'mental illness' means for the groups of Gambians I spoke to, and the fundamental factors that make up an individual's sense of wellbeing. I highlighted a contrast between people's sense of 'wellbeing' and its separation from 'mental illness', showing that mediating factors such as communication, purpose, and motivation are important to the psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants in The Gambia.

Another feature of psychosocial wellbeing is related to social factors influencing an individual's thoughts and behaviours (Martikainen, et al., 2002; OED 2002). In their definition of psychosocial health, Martikainen et al., (2002) convey that psychosocial factors can be seen as operationalizing *between* social and individual levels, meaning neither only one nor the other. The individual level, in this case, is referring to what one might call 'the self'. The self can be analytically dissected and defined in many ways, but for the purpose of this paper I will take note from Eriksen's (2010: 56-59) discussion and attempt to set some parameters of what I mean when I refer to 'identity' throughout this paper.

The self is a dynamic construct, not externally definable within a specific time or space. Goffman (1978 [1959]) sociologically laid the foundations for distinguishing between a public and private self. The concept of 'the public self' is often metaphorized as a play; as a performance of the role one wishes to present, sometimes but not always within the limitations of a social status (which can further be *ascribed* or *achieved* and varies across as well as within cultures) (Eriksen, 2010). Eriksen summarises the private self as being "the 'I' as it sees itself from the inside, which is not available for direct observation of the anthropologist" (Eriksen, 2010: 59). Identity, then, shall be viewed here as a combination of the public and the private self, as a situationally malleable construction of how one sees oneself, and how others see you. People can hold multiple achieved or ascribed statuses and roles which form different parts of their identity, and importantly, the perception of an individual's identity may differ according to different people or according to that individual. The formation of one's identity includes social relationships and a sense of purpose and is an important aspect of psychosocial wellbeing (Martikainen, et al., 2002).

What does this mean for Gambian youth and migration? For example, as a young individual who has migrated or attempted to migrate abroad and has subsequently returned,

an identity of 'return migrant' may be *ascribed* to them in relation to the status of their return. However, 'return migrant' may or may not define their own notions of identity, or their own *achieved* status. Furthermore, *how* the status of 'return migrant' is defined and what that means may vary from individual to individual, or collectively as a self-defined group identity. This chapter will begin by exploring these varying aspects of identity and how different meanings of 'identity' impact the psychosocial wellbeing of this group of people, individually and collectively.

In order to investigate how notions of 'identity', 'relationships', and 'self-purpose' have shaped the construction of psychosocial wellbeing of Gambian return migrants, it is necessary to situate these matters within their individual narratives of migration, return migration, and reintegration. As Petryna (2015: 572) reminds us: "From an anthropological perspective, health problems and social problems are inseparable". It is for this reason that the first section of this chapter begins by sharing some of the stories that were conveyed to me and discusses why these narratives are important to the construction of psychosocial wellbeing amongst return migrants. In the second section, I discuss reintegration and the expectations which impact the wellbeing of migrants when they return. The final section looks at how a 'return migrant' identity has been applied both autonomously and externally, simultaneously creating status and stigma. Throughout this entire chapter I attempt to analyse the individual narratives alone and also within the migrant imaginary of migration (Vigh, 2009) which exists across different parts of society. I argue that this has influenced both the individual migration narratives and the reintegration process, thus impacting the identity of return migrants and their psychosocial wellbeing.

MIGRATION NARRATIVES

When I started to speak with people that had returned from Backway migration, there was a commonality in how they fervently shared their experiences in the form of detailed storytelling. When I met each of the returned migrants, I began by introducing myself and explaining the topics of my research. We would talk through voluntary consent and the purpose of the interview. The topics I described and explained as a part of the research aim were 'reintegration after returning from the Backway', 'mental health in The Gambia', and 'psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants'. After, as a way of introduction, I would ask them to tell me a bit about themselves. In every interview, the response to this question was

to begin laying out the timeline of their migration narrative: When they left The Gambia; which way they travelled; how long they spent in Libya; and whether or not they made it to Europe. This stood out as interesting as it showed an initial insight into how they identified themselves with their migration narratives. To later lead the conversation toward their experiences of being back in The Gambia required specific prompting, not appearing as a familiar topic of discussion.

Some of them started their journey story from before they left, others began from the first day that they left for the Backway. All of the return migrants I spoke to were young men between the ages of 22 and 35, and all of them had returned to The Gambia from an irregular migration journey. The date of return varied, as some returned from their Backway journey as far back as 2012, and others had travelled far more recently and returned after Jammeh had been removed from office.

When conveying the narratives of others in anthropological or medical research, there are considerations to be mindful of regarding voice, power, and interpretation. One aspect of qualitative research is that it has the potential to raise the voices of the marginalised and vulnerable social groups and empower them to construct their own narrative. Contextually to The Gambia, this is particularly pertinent as previous to 2016, Jammeh had become increasingly repressive and brutally silenced critical voices (Zanker & Altrogge, 2017). On the other hand, it is important to consider how voices are portrayed and interpreted when writing *about* them. Eastmond (2007) presents an argument reminiscent of Clifford's (1986) *Writing Culture*, reminding us that narratives are an interplay of experience, expression, and interpretation; that "past experience is always remembered and interpreted in the light of the present as well as by the way the future is imagined" (Eastmond, 2007: 249). With this in mind, the situational power relationship that existed between me as a researcher and the return migrants as narrators opens a complex space for interpretation which I have negotiated through my analysis.

The return migrants' narratives have been interpreted in this research through the use of three main themes: struggle and strength; motivations for leaving and returning; and financing the Backway. These sections help to identify the processes which are operating to shape return migrants' own sense of identity, which in turn impact psychosocial wellbeing. This first section navigates the web of reasons behind the narratives being presented as they were and how those narratives build a perception of one's own identity, internally and as a presentation of self.

Suffering and Struggling

We sat in the shade under the trees in Mahid's compound. Two of his friends sat in the windowsill of half-finished building foundations across the yard whilst another gathered the ingredients for making attaya. Mahid, a thirty-year-old migrant who had returned from Libya, lives in the compound with his sister and nieces and nephews, who ran around playing whilst we talked. He lived in Libya for four years whilst trying to reach Europe, moving between the 'ghetto' (areas of densely migrant-rented derelict housing on outskirts of Tripoli) and prisons as he attempted to cross the Mediterranean and was subsequently arrested.

> *They jail us, selling and buying people when they catch you. Before you get to Libya as well, it's not easy you know. Very hard. People are cutting people, they jail you– they'll cut you there and jail you and treat you badly. Making you suffer. Two times I tried to cross the sea, but the boat had problems and they brought me back. And then I'm suffering, no work no money. That time I was with my woman. So after, I said to my woman, we have to go back [home]. Because it's not easy. So many times I had tried to cross but I cannot cross. Any time you sit there [Libya] you can die, any time, cos that country is not safe. So, I had to go back.*

> *They would give you food once every day, three o'clock. And then the next day, three o'clock. Once a day, with small water, and a small small cut of bread. Or like spaghetti, and you eat once. And they give you the telephone and tell you to call your family for money, you know? And if your money doesn't come, if it comes late – then every day they will beat you. Every day the Arab people come and if your money hasn't come, they beat you. They can use their guns, plenty of migrants they killed them, they shoot them with their gun, they lose their legs, some they lose their arms, some they lose their body you know. Plenty, plenty. People are suffering there. It's not easy, not easy. And that time I was there with my wife you know. So I tell her, let's go back [to The Gambia].*

Throughout the conversations with the return migrant men, a commonality struck me in their wish to share their stories of what most described as traumatic experiences. The stories they told were not only about suffering and trauma, but each contained elements of both and often elicited an emotive reaction in me as a researcher. Below I have included a brief critical discussion on trauma narratives and the "suffering subject" (Robbins, 2013), as focusing on trauma and suffering in anthropological studies can be considered constrictive, yet, I argue, in this case necessary. I suggest multiple reasons behind why these young men wanted to share with me their struggles and hardships on their Backway journeys, and this will be something I continue to discuss throughout this section.

Recent arguments in mental health research and migration studies point towards the potentially negative mental health consequences attached to migrants talking about past

traumatic experiences (De Haene, Grietens & Verschueren, 2010). Being aware of this ethical challenge during my research, I purposefully avoided inviting any of the men to open up about traumatic events on their migration journey. Yet, in each conversation they did just that and did not hold back on speaking openly regarding violence and imprisonment. De Haene, et al., (2010: 1666) discuss the ethics of beneficence in studying refugee narratives and conclude that such research should actively promote the wellbeing of participants, moving beyond only minimising harm. By providing contact information and explaining the purpose of counselling and mental health services to the return migrants I spoke to, I believe the interview process was beneficial to their wellbeing as it extended an understanding of talking about being *stressed* with someone who could possibly help. Three men explicitly expressed that the interview was helpful and allowed them to share openly as they wanted to.

Robbins (2013: 449-459), critically highlights a trend of anthropology focusing on the "suffering subject" in replacement of the "primitive other", arguing that defining people by their sufferance can remove an element of agency for the studied group over both what 'suffering' is defined as, and how people strive and struggle for a better version of their existence rather than only 'suffer'. This is important, as the extracts that are included here from the interviews with return migrants do express suffering, trauma and pain, yet are also deliberate expressions of individuals showing their struggling. "struggling, [is] working to construct a liveable world on the other side of their experiences" (Robbins, 2013: 459). I therefore argue that the sharing of these struggles was purposive to the narrative that these young men were building around their identity as return migrants, and thus should be read as such.

Struggling is strength

Gaibazzi (2015), provides an interesting insight into how struggle and endurance socially shape boys into men in his ethnography on Gambians who choose to 'stay behind'. He says that choosing the life of being "bush bound", as he coins the hardships of rural life in the Gambian upcountry, carries with it status of endurance and struggle, both qualities that are part of young men's trajectory to adults (Gaibazzi, 2015: 182). I would argue that this trajectory equally reflects on young Gambian men who have chosen a different path, but in the same direction, and therefore suggests reason for the men that I spoke to wanting to display their own hardships.

Thirty-something Gambian, Jamal, spent months travelling to get to Libya, where he spent a year before managing to get on a boat to Europe. He recalls the time he spent there as very tenuous:

> *It was almost four months or five months to get to Libya, because you know they stop you in some places - we had to spend one or two weeks like this before you get a connection you know. It's like that. The smuggling ways take such a long time. At that time they were fighting Gadhafi you know - and so nobody could even go outside to find food to eat. Everybody was feeling lonely you know, because everywhere you go you are hearing noise - guns and people dying. And for us, the Arabian people used to catch us and put us inside the prison. They treated us very badly. They would take us to work but not pay us. They give you nothing. Maybe they would give you some food if you had a good person… But it is very hard, the Backway you know. It is very hard.*

This depiction recalled by Jamal contains characteristics shared by others' experiences of Libyan migrant life, namely that life was very difficult, the inclusion of racial slurs and branding of 'Arabs' treating them badly, and that they had endured a long and strenuous time on this pursuit.

Bachelet (2018), discusses similar traits being important to the irregular West African migrants he encountered in Morocco. His article leads the rhetoric around irregular migrants in a more agency-driven direction, focusing on the building of strong yet fragile relationships of trust that migrants (self-described as "adventurers") experience whilst travelling together, which were built through having "the right mentality" to achieve their "objective" (*mbeng*), which was to reach Europe (Bachelet, 2018: 2). He goes on to describe what the adventurers believe "the right mentality" is and explains that "having to endure what adventurers euphemistically referred to as 'the conditions' (e.g. violence) was inherent to adventure" (Bachelet, 2018: 8). Having "the right mentality" referred to acknowledging obstacles and being prepared to overcome the difficulties of the journey rather than giving up.

This explanation in Bachelet's research continues, describing that maintaining the right mentality in the face of hazardous everyday life was strenuous, and that his informants expressed fears of "becoming mad" (Bachelet, 2018: 10). This is a direct reflection to the discussion I had in Chapter One, adding contextual and narrative depth to the fear that the return migrants in my research felt towards 'going mad', as one can start to comprehend the endurance and mental strength required to tolerate life on the Backway, added to which are the frustrations of returning home. In Chapter One I mentioned that the return migrants linguistically separated themselves from 'being crazy', which was used in opposition to "my head is strong". The connection between 'being crazy' and 'mental illness' that I described in

Chapter One can therefore be related to the idea of losing a mental *strength* which is required to endure the Backway conditions.

Following this line of analysis, the connection between mental strength and migration leads to what many migration scholars highlight as the idea of migration defining or shaping masculinity in young men (Rodriguez, 2017; Gaibazzi, 2015; Vigh 2009; Benwell, 2013; Bachelet, 2018). Rodriguez, in her critical examination of EU funded risk awareness campaigns within migrant communities in Senegal, defines the risks and obstacles involved in migration as being integral to the migration narrative: "The ability to overcome these risks is even becoming part of a hegemonic definition of masculinity" (Rodriguez, 2017: 11). I suggest that the collective narrative of suffering and hardship whilst on the Backway journey enables young men who have returned to claim their own identity of masculinity and status as people who have come up against obstacles and endured even though they have returned, thus justifying their return by emphasising having developed virtuous traits of manhood.

For some, the construction of this identity can present a contradiction of intentions. For example, Stephan, who returned and now strives to make a better life for himself and others in The Gambia, has tried to use his epic tale of desolation, as written below, as a deterrent for others thinking of taking the Backway. Simultaneously, the narrative presents his own strength and showmanship of masculinity for having endured such an experience, which is paradoxically supplementing the growing social imaginary of migration providing positive opportunities for young men in society:

> *We got caught by the soldiers in Tripoli, on the 14th January. That was the day we got arrested… in our home… On that day, if you tried to escape, they would shoot you. They killed a lot of people that day. After removing us from our houses they burnt everything. And some people… We were staying in a compound just like this one, a compound for Blacks, full of single houses. You get it through an agent. They burnt every house down. Because they wanted to end this migration, you know, irregular migration. We lost everything. And some people, some people were even hiding… they didn't even check if some people were remaining inside, they just burnt. On that day there were more than a hundred deaths. From there they took us to prison, it is a very hard prison. They even jailed some of their own citizens there, and they beat the criminals. They took us and we spent some nights there, then later they transferred us to a detention centre. But that detention centre was just like a prison, a very hard prison. There were lots of people there, thousands of migrants. Like these big warehouses. […] If you're standing in one corner here, the last person in that corner over there cannot even hear your voice. And there's no toilet in the big room – no toilet!*

However, Stephan follows this description up by stressing an interesting point. These experience narratives that return migrants tell do reinforce the image of endurance and strength that is associated with migration and masculinity. But for Stephan, this display of physical and social endurance is not what people expect it to be when considering taking the Backway:

> *They don't know what's out there, what is really really out there, they won't. Because if someone is explaining it to you, you might think that maybe this is a movie you know. But if you actually go through it, oh my god. The moment you step from this border, Gambia – you lose your dignity. Nobody considers you outside of here. On this Backway – without proper documents you are nobody, nobody. Even if you make it to Europe you are nobody without documents.*

For Stephan, this aspect of being treated as worthless defined his experiences as something that nobody should have to go through. He believes that the notion of Backway migration showing strength should change, which is part of his mission in YAIM.

This insight into the loss of individual identity that Stephan felt once he was an undocumented migrant speaks volumes within the popular migration narratives that often portray irregular migrants as a sea of bodies collectively trampling down national borders. Furthermore, by no means does the analytical angle that narratives of struggling and endurance reinforce the prestige of migration take away from the dangerous realities that the return migrants have faced during their journeys. The hardships that have been experienced and for some continue to plague the minds and bodies of irregular migrants are nothing less than extreme and dehumanising. Bachelet (2018: 7, 14) argues, one of the main contributions of anthropologists to current debates over migration is to highlight how those who embark on perilous journeys are not only subjects of imposed vertical power but are striving to be the actors of their own destiny through resilience, resourcefulness, and hope. By illustrating the meaning and motivation of telling migration narratives, this section shows how return migrants are constructing their own identity as powerful and resilient too.

Motivations for Leaving and Returning

Another aspect of the interviews with return migrants that deserves attention is the narrative around motivations for leaving and returning to The Gambia. Placing the focus on the individuals' own voices for why they decided or had to leave and why they decided or had to return is important in the dominant global discourse on the 'crisis' of irregular migration,

which tends to limit itself to "bird-view depictions of a threatening mass" (Bachelet, 2018: 14). Policy frameworks often rely on classical 'push-pull' theories of geo-economic flows from poverty to affluence, and in doing so neglect the complex social motivations of transnational movement amongst irregular migrants, reducing them to "simple economistic logic" (Vigh, 2009: 92).

In Bachelet's (2018: 7) interviews, in-transit migrants often explained that their adventure was to escape socio-economic and political issues and to "look for one's life" or "look for one's self". Similar reasons were given by the men I spoke to, illustrating a complexity of motivations more than only financial:

> *I just want to change environment, I want to meet different people, different culture, see a different system! I was born into poverty, I was born into no good condition, no good feeling. I am just getting to know myself now [after travelling], I am much more now. I like to be travelled; I like to meet good people.*

This extract is from Jamal, who is one of the migrants who managed to reach Europe through the Backway and has returned to The Gambia on what he hopes is a temporary stay until his visa is sorted. This comment from him highlights the social and cultural capital that motivates him to travel, rather than focusing solely on improving his financial situation.

Azis has travelled twice to Libya through the Backway, the first time making it to Europe but being deported for reasons he described as "stubbornness" and a want for "fast money". When asked what motivated him to leave a second time he replied, "the system [here] makes you want to get up and go, you know?". He said he felt regret for being deported the first time, and that when he went again, he went with more patience. "I want to see new people and new cultures. Travel makes you experience a lot, you see many different types of people". This conversation presents development in Azis's motivations for travelling, suggesting that his travels thus far have changed his view of migration from being a financial venture to one of self-development and looking for one's self. Now that he has returned a second time, he says he wants to find a way to travel as a regular migrant. In this way I would argue that some migrants who have returned to The Gambia, whom I spoke to, are seeking the same objectives in figuring out their purpose as those who are in-transit or in Europe such as those Bachelet interviewed.

However, for some of the other men their attempts at the Backway have changed their motivations and perceptions of travelling and returning. As shows in Stephan's conversation in the previous section, one of the aspects that eluded some of the men's expectations of

taking this route to Europe was the dehumanisation they were exposed to from other national groups, again igniting feelings of abjection and the awareness of unbalanced global order (Vigh, 2009). Ozzi expressed that he considered his status on the road to be lower than animals: "Even the dog is better than you there, cos if the dog is dead, at least they can identify the owner [laughing a lot], but for you… you are nobody!!" Bachelet (2018: 7) notes that the epic tales of adventure and strength that was told by the migrants he met was far from the reality he witnessed, whereby their everyday lives were rhythmed by fear and boredom in dilapidated ghettoes. For men like Mahid, who spent four years in Libya, the 'stuckness' of this life must have been mentally grating. Now that he is back in The Gambia, Mahid expressed his views on the Backway now to be very different: "I would never, *never* take the Backway again. Even if my darkest enemy was thinking to take the Backway I would stop him, I wouldn't let even my enemies go that way now". He said he appreciated The Gambia as his home, that he can make a life for himself there which is better that risking that way again.

Wright (2012a: 474), raises this too in her findings from Peruvian families with relatives in Europe. She expresses that migration helps to reaffirm the value of the life migrants were already living in their home country. In line with Wright (2012), and grounded in my own findings, I argue that this process is occurring on incomplete migration journeys as well as for those she highlights, who have created new lives in a host country. The Backway experience produces both positive and negative forms of social remittances which influence migration motivations and may enlighten just as strong motivations to return to The Gambia as there were to leave.

Financing the Backway

Financial problems were one of the main material reasons that the return migrants gave for the *stress* as explained in Chapter One. A lot of this *stress* has been built up through the amount of money people tend to spend on Backway migration, which many then consider lost or wasted once they return. Hearing about the ways that people finance their migration gives us insight into how important the journey was for them and the difficulties that have arisen from money which impact psychosocial wellbeing such as family ruptures.

Between smugglers charges, kidnappers' ransom, so-called 'detention fees', and general costs of travel and living, travelling through the Backway costs Gambians a significant amount of money. Some of the men said that they managed to *hustle* for enough

money to leave the country, but would have to work along the way to keep moving. Jamal described a bit about his experiences financing the journey:

> *I just do hard work, business – construction, fishing, hard labour work. And any money I had I would hide this money, you know what I mean, until I had about 10,000 dalasi. But that 10,000 dalasi wouldn't take me to Libya. Because when I went to Libya we took this big bus, so sometimes we used to clean the bus, inside the bus – do that and then they would take us to Libya.*

For the most part, getting a large sum of money together in The Gambia can be a difficult task, as the money people earn is usually put into family expenses. As Jamal shared, he had to hide his money until he had enough to leave. Once on the journey, many of the men said that they were made to pay a lot of money to smugglers or kidnappers, sometimes having to call their families or friends to pay for them. Most of the migrants I spoke to were unsure where the money they received on the journey came from and shied away from these questions. Mahid mentioned that he would ask people to loan him money to keep going:

> *The time I go, after, I call them [my family] and tell them I'm in Libya now. My family they don't have money to help me, that's why I can't go forward you know. I used to call people to credit me. It's not easy. They [kidnappers] used to catch you and buy you, someone would buy you. If they [family] didn't send the money, they would not feed you.*

Thus, when these young men return, sometimes they have not only been unable to make money for their families but have spent and therefore lost a lot of money along the way. This can also produce feelings of guilt and worry, sometimes causing family rifts, especially if family money had been provided to help on the journey. At least four of the return migrants I spoke to were currently experiencing difficulties in their families because of borrowed money. One boy said he was unable to pay his father back before he died and so his brother was no longer speaking to him. Another said that his mother had sent money for him in Libya and expressed currently feeling guilt for getting deported from Europe. Another man's wife has gone to live with her parents because he cannot provide for her. The combination of being unable to achieve their goals of migrating, being financially unable to provide or give back to their families, and feeling lost or rejected from a social unit are all interplaying factors that construct a sense of purpose, or the lack of it, and therefore contribute to a negative wellbeing. Mahid talked about problems in his relationship relating to the money spent abroad:

> *Yes we are still married, but we have problems. Because of money, lack of money. And the travel, after we come back we have problems. After, she went to live at her parent's house. Cos she's not gonna sit here with no food, no work, no nothing. The marriage, it is just like half-half – not [whole] like before. It is different now, it is spoiled. I have* stress *you see.*

The problem for many return migrants, therefore, is that they are afraid of losing face in front of their families when they return empty-handed (Zanker & Altrogge, 2017: 10). For example, for the man who hid his money from his family to finance his Backway attempt, he says only his mum will talk to him now. Communication that breaks down with close family members can cause a lot of stress and high emotion for these young men. Strong and trusting relationships are one of the key elements to achieving psychosocial wellbeing and are important aspect for reintegration (Wright, 2012; IOM, 2017).

In the first half of this chapter, I have shown how the interrelationship between past and present factors were involved in constructing the experience narratives that were expressed about the Backway during the interviews in this research. The notion of identity-loss experiences exemplified by Stephan and Ozzi are, I argue, being countered through constructing strong identities on returning, which in turn helps to build a resilient and purposeful collective identity for some return migrants. This is an important aspect of psychosocial wellbeing as it builds a sense of self-esteem and self-purpose regarding their own narratives, and for some returnees, it serves to balance feelings of failure and demotivation also often experienced in return migration.

REINTEGRATION

When Backway migrants return to their country of departure – in this case, The Gambia – the International Organisation for Migration have repatriation and reintegration policies in each country that enable them to provide various levels of support to returnees.

According to the IOM report on reintegration recommendations, reintegration in general is understood as:

> "the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of his or her country of origin or habitual residence. It is a multidimensional process that requires the re-establishment of economic and psychosocial ties" (IOM, 2017a: 2).

This section will be discussing the research findings concerning what return migrants expect on their return, and family support and relationships. By doing this I will be laying out the context within which the individual narratives discussed above are imbedded and explore how individual expectations and family expectations both enhance the social imaginary of migration and shape psychosocial wellbeing.

Expectations of Return Migration

Through the 'EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration', the IOM Gambia has, since 2017, had the official capacity to build governance and help manage return migrants, providing assistance and support to reintegrating Gambians. However, in a newspaper report from Refugees Deeply (Camara & Hunt 2018), IOM Gambia admitted the agency had struggled to respond to the rapid increase in demand for voluntary returns, as their office was still being established. "We were coordinating emergency returns from Libya every month and it was technically impossible to provide all those people with both returns and reintegration support at the same time" said a spokesperson for IOM West Africa (Camara & Hunt 2018).

This is reflective of the responses that I gathered from return migrants, who largely felt let down by the IOM in their efforts to provide support. In their reintegration 'package', the IOM Gambia can provide immediate cash support to 'vulnerable returnees' to cover costs of transport or immediate housing but most of the support that they provide is in kind, for example through equipment for setting up a small business or for fishing or farming (IOM 2019). Yet, each of the return migrants I spoke to had different ideas of what the IOM or the government (as most people spoke of them interchangeably) could or *should* be offering them, and none of them seemed to know where the information they knew had come from. For example, Ozzi was told that he would receive money on his return. When I asked him where from he said: "I was told from sources – I'm not sure where. Friends had money when they returned, it was commonly said we would get money". But he told me he did not see any money. "See the struggle?" he said, implying a sense of disappointment and expectation.

Stephan reflected on his own return journey with the IOM, which happened in early 2017 before the operations started to grow to what they are today. He reminisced that the government were not ready for them at the time: "They don't think ahead. In the Gambian constitution there is no law or policy on migration, none at all. But I think they will amend that now in the new constitution". When he returned, he said many people that he had gathered together in Libya were discouraged because there was no support when they got home: "A few of us were still strong and believed in what we discussed, with or without support". But Stephan told me about explaining to the IOM what returnees were expecting when they returned, like temporary housing, medical assistance and phone calls: "It's just those basic things – it's just basic Human Rights you know!"

Again, it was the expectations that returnees had for their return that was highlighted. I asked Stephan where he thought the expectations for financial aid were emerging from:

> *We got a lot of promises from inside the prison that when would arrive to our country there would be a package waiting for us […] The Libyan soldiers told us. Also the EU delegates used to come almost every week and tell us there would be a package waiting for you. They tell you not to use that package to come back here. Because many people they go home and get that money and use it to come back on the Backway. So they were advising us not to do the same. But when we arrived, they only gave us fifty dollars, around 2400 dalasi. That was all that was given to us. So everyone was very surprised and disappointed.*

From this and other conversations during my research, I found a common narrative circulating the return migrant population, of 'returnee money waiting for collection'. This heightened the expectations of return migrants, in turn amplifying their disappointment on arrival when it is not as simple as financial hand-outs. These expectations invited me to question the reasons for this collective thinking process. One possible answer is connected to the identity of 'strength' from the Backway and these men forming a collective identity of having *earned* a payment for their efforts. Benwell (2013: 244), describes a similar attitude towards international migration in Mongolia, whereby migration is equal to 'success' as those people are seen to be "seizing opportunities and actively improving a family's livelihood" regardless of their actualised success financially or in happiness.

Another possible explanation is a more critical suggestion from Rodriguez (2017), which is that the EU are inadvertently creating these expectations through publicly funding big-budget returns programmes, such as those lead by the IOM, incentivising would-be-immigrants to return to their home countries and engage in local development instead. The funding is not always directly earmarked for reintegration packages, but rather is for

'awareness of the risks of migration campaigns', however these details are not particularised in the narratives that expecting return migrants hear, as exemplified in my interviews:

> *We come back, the government uses our names for the EU to show they are helping the youths – but there is no help, no money, they are doing nothing for the youths. Just promises. And there is a lot of money that Europe delivers to The Gambia, but the youths are not benefitting.*

And it was not only return migrants who had these expectations regarding the EU and the Gambian government. Some of the other young people I spoke to also shared speculations about EU funding, like Kebba and his friend who said his contacts from Germany had been told there was money for returnees: "Apparently in Senegal and Nigeria people are given money at the airport, that was the deal with the EU for returnees. But our government isn't giving it to the Gambian returnees. Our Backway boys aren't getting anything!"

This set-up has morally dubious motivations, as argued by Rodriguez (2017), as it enables EU governmentality of mobility through control technologies and power apparatus. She highlights that externalised EU policing measures in North and West Africa make it difficult for people to circulate in their own regions, and force migrants to spend long periods in transit countries such as Libya, which again relates to the production of feelings of physical and existential immobility and entrapment (Rodriguez, 2017: 2). This is a topic I will return to in more detail in Chapter Three.

Family, Relationships, and Social Expectations

One of the main factors highlighted to be crucial to psychosocial wellbeing in reintegration is relationships (IOM, 2017a; Wright, 2012; Zanker & Altrogge, 2017). The reaction of friends and family of return migrants should be focused on as their perceptions on migration and migrants have an important role in the construction of how migration is viewed in society. Similarly, the expectations on different members of family impacts the perceptions of what migration can mean for them.

For many young men in The Gambia, the sociocultural expectations are that you will provide for your family or household financially and carry responsibility in your life (Gaibazzi, 2015: 94). Zanker & Altrogge (2017), found that the reasons young Gambians gave for wanting to migrate are complex and not only financial, but that many young men believe they have a better chance of providing for their families from a different country. When they have attempted to emigrate, often through irregular means such as the Backway,

and have returned for one reason or another, feelings of failure and social pressure are inevitable. Vigh (2009: 103), comments that for interviewees from Bissau living in Lisbon, the shame of going back home empty-handed outweighed the struggle and loneliness in their life abroad.

Kebba expressed his impressions of the social pressures many young men feel to provide for their families, and that without that ability the only other option for them is to take the Backway:

> *You know, Africa is different to other places – I don't know if you understand what I'm talking about – African people – when you are a kid your parents look after you. But when you are a certain age you have to look after your parents, do you understand? You have to. That's how we're living! You have to take care of your family – you have to be the breadwinner of the family. So if you cannot do that for your people, of course you cannot stay here! So you must take the Backway to go!*

Zanker & Altrogge (2017) also note that return migrants can face a lot of stigma and displacement from their families on return, which can negatively affect psychosocial wellbeing. I have already mentioned above the impact that financial problems can have on family and relationships which often cause rifts and stress for returnees, which could be heightened if they are expected to be providing money for their household. Feeling unable to achieve their expected goal of being a financial support in their family, the relationship domain of satisfaction is not being fulfilled, which is a vital category of human wellbeing and impacts mental health (Gough & McGregor, 2007; Wright, 2012a).

Wright (2012a), discusses a similar operation of applying social pressures to migrants who have not 'succeeded' in making a life for themselves abroad. She explains that in her research, families in Peru would actively "filter" negative information about the challenges of migration so that the belief that migration was a positive life choice remained dominant. Social categorisations based on personal qualities or characteristics exist, which separate "good" migrants from "bad" migrants. For example, flaws such as being lazy or spoilt would be seen as reasons for migrants not succeeding in finding happiness and wellbeing abroad, rather than the larger structural forces which they know are at play. Wright (2012a: 480), argues that people selectively use information to construct a discourse to reinforce the positive illusion that people without these defects will be able to fulfil their dream of enhancing the wellbeing of their families through international migration.

Attitudes such as these also resonate in The Gambia, especially towards migration being an alternative to young men's laziness and being spoilt by their mothers. Stephan's

opinion was that: "People here are lazy because men are raised not to have to do anything in the house. Everything is done for us". But, he said, men are responsible for other things, like 'money making' and he further related that: "Women are the heads of the household, but their sons are supposed to bring them income". He expressed that this is what he says as the problem for young men, because he feels they are allowed to be lazy if they have tried and failed to make money. Similarly, if they have tried to migrate and returned, being lazy and unmotivated is a reluctantly accepted alternative. I would argue that if this is the case, allowing this attitude to be socially acceptable is negatively draining the motivation out of young men as they would feel useless and unnecessary having 'failed' to fulfil the only role set for them, which again is a key factor impacting the positive or negative affects towards psychosocial wellbeing.

However, most of the return migrants I spoke to expressed that their families' immediate reactions were, naturally, of relief and happiness to see them alive. These kinds of positive reactions are often overlooked in the literature on return migration or repatriation, possibly because they do follow the dominant narrative. When I asked Stephan how his family reacted to his return, he answered, "I was relieved because I freed my family from stress and worry. My mum didn't hear from me all that while, nor my family or my friends – so they were happy to see me alive". So why then, if families are aware of the dangers and obstacles of the Backway, does the optimism surrounding migrating remain positive enough to put all the family money into the journey? Both Wright (2012a), as mentioned above, and Benwell (2013), consider this same question as they discovered similar paradoxes in their research, as I will discuss further in the next section.

THE 'RETURN MIGRANT' AS AN ASCRIBED IDENTITY

The findings in my research suggest that to be a young man who migrates, on the Backway or by other means, presumes an elevated 'status' that extends through the social migrant imaginary in The Gambia. As shown in the first section of this chapter, describing the endurance and struggle of their precarious and uncertain journey gives these young men a collective identity associated with masculinity and strength. In the second section I have outlined the aspects of reintegration which are shaping the migrant imaginary and impacting the psychosocial health of returnees. This last section will look at the contrasting identities

which have been ascribed to return migrants, showing the differences between the identity perceived by return migrants themselves and the stigma that is attached to their ascribed identity from other members of society. Both sides of this 'return migrant identity' are impacting the psychosocial wellbeing, in positive and negative ways, and should therefore be addressed together as below.

Elevated Traveller Status

Even though other young members of society have knowledge of how dangerous it is to leave through the Backway, the effort to try to reach 'something better' for their families outweighs the potential harm. Wright (2012) attempts to explain a similar paradox in her analysis of families in Peru, who continue to believe that international migration is a beneficial goal for their relatives despite understanding the challenging realities of achieving 'wellbeing' in a new country. She explains that the friends and families of migrants actively "filter" information on the negative aspects of migration through the psychological process of "positive illusion" (Wright, 2012: 479). Positive illusion can occur through enhancing self-esteem via downward comparisons with others, believing that your own families' efforts will succeed because of their superior strength and determination.

Benwell (2013) discusses a similar process operating in the 'social imaginary' of Mongolian wives whose husbands have migrated. She describes the active imagining of migration being positive, even in the knowledge of this not being the reality. Benwell describes the paradoxical imaginary of wives who are left behind in Mongolia are thought to be "lucky" to have husbands in Europe, even though everyone silently knows that their husband will never be coming home or might even have a new family abroad. "Migration of a spouse is made meaningful by hiding the loss and devastating aspects of the separation" (Benwell, 2013: 244). The social capital that is gained by becoming a 'world traveller' outweighs being unsuccessful or poorer on return. Those who choose to migrate are seen as "achievers", as people who are actively striving to improve their livelihood, and therefore returning empty handed is disappointing but the status of someone who has *tried* remains strong (ibid, 2013: 245). In Benwell's case in Mongolia, those who have decided not to migrate and work at home are often not conceived to be "successful" because they are seen as immobile. "Those who travel gain status as someone important and culturally rich" (Benwell, 2013: 247). She concludes that migration in this case is ironically praised whilst inadvertently triggering poverty and uncertainty for those who stay behind.

The perception of gaining social capital through migration was reflected in The Gambia amongst return migrants, who considered themselves to have gained a traveller's status regardless of their 'voluntary' return. Many of the return migrants I spoke to felt they had seen 'something different' to The Gambia that had changed their perspective and sense of self-worth. The way that Azis talked about his travels shows how the idea of travel is perceived as socially important:

> *I travelled you know, Europe. I've been to many places you know. Denmark, Sweden, I've been to Finland you know, Austria, Italy, France – I have never been to Spain yet. I want to go to Germany. Travel teaches you a lot, you see many different types of people.*

Furthermore, managing to reach Europe did not matter for some returnees who were pleased to be able to say they had seen something outside of their own country, as many Gambians never manage to travel even to Senegal, let alone North Africa. One returnee compared The Gambia to Libya and explained that now he has seen how Libya is run he thinks The Gambia is "too small, too small to run well. Libya was a nice country, like it would be a nice country if it didn't have so much violence. If people didn't have guns then it would be a good country, its big and has lots of money". This type of comparison of The Gambia to other nearby countries, mostly to Senegal, was very common in general conversation. People who had travelled at all often compared The Gambia to Senegal as if it was a younger sibling in the shadow of success. Kebba, for example, seemed animated by seeing Senegal and hoped to progress his association to match the success he saw there:

> *Yeah I went to Senegal and I saw how people are there, and I saw how associations are working there. I went to a seminar in Senegal about the moringa tree – you know the moringa? It's for medicines. We had the tree before, but we didn't know the tree. We got sensitized by these people and now we know!*

Another conversation, this time with Stephan, illustrated why he believed people consider being "travelled" to be of a higher social status. His opinion was that Gambian people do not have faith in their own country: "Gambians are not self-confident. Even though we have all the skills here and people that will work well, Gambians will trust other people to do the job instead. Nigerians, Arabs, Senegalese… Never Gambians". He believed that the only way to change that is to empower the youth and get people to buy local instead: "Gambians can make things themselves! Everything now is imported".

This section has shown that there is a degree of hierarchy constructed within the social migrant imaginary, which construes return migrants to have a certain level of social capital that others who have not travelled appear to lack. The direction in which this idea transmits is, however, debateable. It was not clear in my research whether *other* people considered return migrants to be of a higher status, but rather that the return migrants themselves felt as though they had gained a different perspective which to them sits above those who have not left. This relates back to the travelling construction of wellbeing discussed in Chapter One, which argued that immobility is looked down upon in the 'global order' and therefore creates feelings of abjection. Vigh (2009), advocates that migration is a technology of the imagination. "From Bissau, the perspective is one of decline and destruction that characterizes their city in relation to the peace, prosperity and progress they see elsewhere" (Vigh, 2009: 94). The perspective that is gained on migration journeys grants return migrants a sense of what they believe to be higher understanding. This can both boost and degrade psychosocial wellbeing as I have shown in the contrasting cases of, for example, Stephan – (who has used his new perspective to grow and develop YAIM and his hopes for The Gambia) – and other migrants who present feelings closer to Vigh's (2009) description of abjection: discarded and demotivated by how they feel Gambian life is destined to be.

Return Migrant Stigma

Above, I exemplified how return migrants construct psychosocial wellbeing through identity of being 'travelled' and having gained social capital on their journey. However, these opinions are not shared by everyone and some return migrants and other community members feel that there is a lot of stigma attached to being a "Backway boy" or "returnee". One return migrant, Ishmael, expressed this in his explanation of what being a "returnee" meant for him. He had been trying to set up another association for return migrants but had been finding it difficult to engage the public. As he explained to me:

> *In Gambia we have one concept. If you go hustling - if you went outside, abroad, and you came back with nothing, the society will type you as very useless. I mean – we have one thinking here in Africa. If you left for hustling, you go abroad, they deported you back with nothing, no business no money, people will type you as a low profile somebody.*

For Ishmael, these directly stigmatising thoughts have had an impact on how he has coped since coming back and reflected on his views of mental health in relation:

> *In the society, nobody will respect you. And the society will look low upon you. If you don't control your mind you become, you know, off. You become mad. Because you don't have anybody that you link up with [to help]. People will type you that you are somebody very useless.*

This expression of 'controlling your mind' as to not 'become mad' relates back to Chapter One where I discussed people's understandings of what causes 'mental illness' and what can improve psychosocial wellbeing. This example illustrates how stigma and people's impressions of 'return migrants' when ascribed as an identity can directly impact psychosocial health. The connotations of 'uselessness' and 'low profile' being attached to the identity of return migrants can be damaging for an individual's self-worth, motivation and wellbeing.

However, for young people who have actively chosen to stay in The Gambia rather than take the Backway, I found that a mutual frustration exists towards the returnees. I asked Ndey, a late-twenties Gambian who I frequently spoke to about return migrants and general Gambian youth culture, if he had ever thought about taking the Backway. He replied that he had once, but that his path had taken him in a different direction. He believes he was "supposed to stay here for now to be productive". Ndey works in education, a job he proudly speaks of as "not a selfish job – there is a lot of benefit for others and there is a lot of sacrifice". Ndey is openly a very devout man, and strongly believes his path is set for him. However, his choice of words – "a lot of sacrifice" – implies that he believes he is working hard towards something at the expense of other, possibly in his mind easier, choices. He also expressed regularly that he did not respect people who expect to be given something for nothing; when talking about return migrants being deported, he said: "Nobody asked them to spend all their money on something illegal and the Backway never guarantees success". This sort of attitude was not uncommon in my research, especially among youths who had chosen an alternate path and stayed in The Gambia. Rodriguez (2017: 7), suggests that immobility causes frustration and resentment towards those who have migrated. She found that the social status of migrants is thought to be higher, and this is frustrating for those who have worked hard at home. This is both applicable and not applicable in the instance of Ndey, who acknowledged that there are sacrifices involved in his choice to work in The Gambia, but also his frustrations lie not so much with a resentment of social status but rather that these return migrants had chosen a dangerous and therefore unnecessary path and thus should not feel like they are owed any sort of status when returning.

This highlights a discontinuity between return migrants' own feelings of 'being travelled' and *achieving* a higher status in their identity of 'return migrant', as compared with Ndey's view which suggests that he does not see their return as a successful qualifier of achieved status. However, it must also be noted that Ndey has travelled himself, having spent over a year abroad living with his American family, which therefore implies that his own social and economic capital is sufficient enough for him to feel that the Backway is an unnecessary and careless journey. This opens the question of how intimately economic capital and the social imaginary of migration, and by extension return migrants, are related; an interesting topic for further research.

Throughout Chapter Two I have discussed the importance of past and present narratives for return migrants, highlighting that narratives enable individuals to ascribe characteristics to their own identity as a 'return migrant', such as strength, endurance and 'being travelled'. This is an important aspect for some returnees in maintaining a positive outlook and motivational purpose. In contrast, there are stigmas attached to having returned seemingly empty-handed which are tied to social expectations and family responsibilities, leading some returnees to feel demotivated and lost. These ascribed and achieved identities are shaping the social imaginary of migration and what it means to young people to migrate, and I argue that those expectations in turn impact the psychosocial wellbeing of individuals who are returning from the Backway.

CHAPTER THREE

Filling the Gap: Youth Groups and Psychosocial Wellbeing

> *They're back. Because we believe, we believe now that we can make it here. It is a new belief after seeing how other countries survive.*
>
> (Stephan, from YAIM, talking about return migrants).

In 2016, Yahya Jammeh was elected out of office through a historic democratic vote of the Gambian people, the first political change in 22 years. Hope resonates across the country that the new government will have a significant impact on development and progress, and for the first time there is a significant focus on migration and the Backway migrants. President Barrow's surprise win has been anecdotally linked with his promises to concentrate on reversing Gambia's exodus of youth (Zanker & Altrogge, 2017). The past three years have therefore been a transformative time for The Gambia and Gambian return migrants, many of whose returns have been interconnected with the election either through choice or changes in asylum-seeker criteria. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have played an important role in this process, assisting Gambian migrants' return and reintegration. However, the relationship between the IOM and the Gambian government is far more complex than simply assisting their citizens with reintegration support, and, as I will show in the beginning of this chapter, heavily interrelated to global mobility governance and the political rhetoric within the country on Gambian youth and migration. Specifically, I will discuss the implication of IOM support on the contextualised meanings of 'sustainable reintegration' and 'voluntary return'. I will also introduce the idea of 'victimhood', which when present in the IOM rhetoric used to discuss 'return migrants', displays a precarious relationship between IOM rhetoric and longer-term psychosocial wellbeing.

Since 2017, there has been an on-going Commission of Inquiry into the corruption, finances, and breeches of human rights associated with the former president and his government. A Commission of and of Truth and Reconciliation and Reparations is also on-going, encouraging people to speak out against former president Jammeh. The feeling in The Gambia at the time of my research reflected this process, as thousands of victims were able to speak out for the first time, to claim their voice and ask for justice. Additionally, the overthrowing of Jammeh meant that many people, especially journalists, were able to return to their home country from previous exile without fear of persecution. For most of the

country's youth, this has meant freedom of speech is being experienced without persecution for the first time in their lives. An optimistic, sometimes even idealistic, rhetoric of a new beginning was pervasive in all of the interviews and conversations I had in the three months I lived in The Gambia.

This chapter will explore the rhetoric of political optimism and nation building that I found was very prevalent among the people I related to during my research, predominately from the perspective of the youth, including return migrants, and the impact that it may be having on the social imaginary of migration and the psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants. I will discuss the rhetoric of nation building that has been used by the government throughout their National Development Plan and in public governmental speeches, which is a useful technique to unify the country and focus national attention on development. The direction of flow between political rhetoric and public discourse is difficult to follow or analyse, and beyond the scope of this research. The importance for this chapter is that there *is* a rhetoric of nation building and political optimism, both in the political and public sphere, and there appears a mutual desire to build a country with decent opportunities and a better overall quality of life.

However, from my research findings it seems there are still deeply rooted feelings of distrust and disbelief towards 'the government', regardless of who is the current figurehead. This is exemplified in return migrants' interviews and with youth development advocate, Kebba, who felt alienated through seemingly empty promises of government funding. Following Mitchell's (1989) theory of the state, I argue that for the youths I spoke to in The Gambia, a line has been drawn in their minds which separates the state and the citizens into two opposing spheres, but that in a Gambian context, rather than opposing one another, they are actually fighting for the same cause. The roles of youth groups such as YAIM and the employment association Kebba is attempting to progress, play an important role in the optimistic development discourse amongst the youth and for reintegration of return migrants and their psychosocial wellbeing. As I will show, they also highlight the gulf of miscommunication and frustration that exists between youth ideology and government promises. I argue that these grassroots organisations are filling in the on-the-ground networks for return migrants which larger organisations such as the IOM do not appear to be providing. Experience sharing and social solidarity as part of return migrant networks are an important aspect of feeling supported and improving psychosocial wellbeing (Majidi, 2013).

THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR 'MIGRATION', OR 'GLOBAL MOBILITY'?

The International Organisation for Migration is the second largest migration management agency, secondary to the UNHCR[4]. The IOM, recently partnered to the United Nations (in 2016), has situated itself at the core of coordinating and managing global migration; as of May 2017, the institution had a global expenditure of $1.55 billion and was running in 166 member states (Hirsch & Doig, 2018: 683). Their operational capacity is mostly funded by wealthy destination countries, mainly EU member states, the United States and Australia, surmounting partly to countless criticisms towards the IOM for actively implementing external migration policies and catering to the demands of their stakeholders over the rights and humanity of third country nationals (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; den Hertog, 2017; Reslow, 2017; Ahouga, 2018; Hirsch & Doig, 2018).

The EU External Migration Policy works through Mobility Partnerships with third countries. The central idea is that there is a trade-off between legal and illegal migration, whereby non-EU countries agree to cooperate with the EU in preventing irregular migration in exchange for being rewarded with greater legal migration opportunities (Reslow, 2017: 157). This global paradigm of 'third country cooperation' is an important part of the EU Commission's agenda on migration which aims to "put in place concrete measures to prevent [migrants undertaking] hazardous journeys" (Reslow, 2017: 156).

Without the operational capacity of EU member states to execute this alone, implementation of these policies has therefore been outsourced to International Organisations such as the IOM, forming interdependent relationships of funding and policy action. Agreements such as the "EU Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa" – The EU-Africa Trust Fund for short – is an example of the policy-driven migration management systems that are being coordinated "to render international migrations predictable and beneficial for all stakeholders" (Ahouga, 2018: 1524). These partnerships have been heavily criticised as neoliberal governmentality over mobility (Ahouga, 2018; Rodriguez, 2017; Brachet, 2015).

One of the critical arguments that I have chosen to highlight is to what extent the IOM play a political role in the migration policy decisions of third countries, like The Gambia (den Hertog, 2017: 7). The role that the IOM presents is that of an 'technocratic' implementation

[4] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

organisation which is apolitical and acts only in the interests of its donors on specifically funded projects (den Hertog, 2017; Brachet, 2015). However, not only has this type of technocratic migration management language been criticised for depoliticising highly political issues of inequality and conflict which is driving irregular migration and displacement (Hirsch & Doig, 2018: 684), the IOM's role in migration policy is far more complex. There is a myriad of literature (for example, Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; den Hertog, 2017; Reslow, 2017; Ahouga, 2018; Hirsch & Doig, 2018; Brachet, 2015; Georgi, 2010, to name a few) dedicated to this very interesting argument, but unfortunately going into depth here falls outside the scope of this thesis. A collective conclusion can be summed up by Juliet Brachet (2015: 124-125):

> "The projects put into practice correspond to the expectations of their sponsors, in other words the wealthiest countries, although these expectations are in turn strongly influenced by the IOM [through technical expertise knowledge]. […] Despite its financial dependency on member states, the IOM thus proactively generates a certain type of migration policy, by spelling out the terms of the debate. […] once the terms of the debate are set, the IOM primarily acts as an institutional lever for the governments of these countries to implement, abroad, migration policies that might be challenged by their own citizens, i.e. by part of their electorate"

Brachet (2015) goes on to illustrate her criticism through analysing how the IOM responded to the 2011 Libyan conflict, accusing them of enabling the externalisation of European migration policy – forcibly stopping migrants from entering Europe – whilst simultaneously using humanitarian language and top-down "locally cooperative" control.

In relation to The Gambia and Gambian reintegration, this argument serves to contextualise the following discussion: To explore the nature in which 'sustainable reintegration' and 'voluntary return' have been defined by the IOM and operationalised in The Gambia as part of their funding partnership with the EU.

The IOM's action plan for return migrant reintegration into The Gambia is often intimately linked with the notion of sustainability, as exemplified in their definition of reintegration;

> "While there is no universally agreed definition of successful reintegration, for the purposes of this paper, IOM asserts that reintegration can be considered sustainable when returnees have reached levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allows them to cope with (re)migration drivers. […] In the long term, reintegration assistance also aims to mitigate drivers that could eventually lead to the necessity to re-migrate"
> (IOM, 2017a: 3).

This passage in their introduction to reintegration recommendation paper infers that 'sustainable' reintegration results in returnees no longer feeling the need to migrate.

In a report published by the IOM, Koser & Kuschminder (2015) discuss the existing literature relating to reintegration and sustainable re-migration, concluding that whilst a singular definition does not yet exist, the terms reintegration and sustainable re-migration are used interchangeably by development organisations such as the IOM. They also found that the most commonly used indicator for success of return programmes is the extent to which returnees do not re-migrate and how their return dissuades others from migrating irregularly.

From their research, they argue that the terms 'reintegration' and 'sustainable return' are independent and are not necessarily reliant on one another, as re-migration may be driven by factors other than those related to return and reintegration (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015: 9). This was also exemplified in my research, such as with Azis who re-migrated after his first return because, amongst other things, he "likes to be travelled". As shown in Chapter Two, social capital and the desire to learn from travelling can be just as strong of an influence on irregular migration as material drivers, and a lack of regular migration routes are not preventing people from pursuing self-development adventures. Furthermore, there has been little empirical research done on developing indicators to measure sustainability in re-migration, and the diversity of definitions being used creates a difficulty in measuring sustainable reintegration at all (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015: 15). With this in mind, one might suggest that the IOM are displaying organisational traits of "organised hypocrisy" (Lipson, 2007: 6) by trying to measure 'sustainable reintegration' as the deterrence of re-migration and simultaneously reporting that sustainability and reintegration are not dependent on one another in practice. By doing so, the IOM is responding to the conflicting pressures of their major funding partners and their acting beneficiaries simultaneously.

Conflicting pressures between benefactors and beneficiaries can be difficult to negotiate for international organisations, but Ahouga (2018), criticises that the IOM manage this by creating discourses which 'include' local actors in global mobility decisions, thereby creating predictable and controllable global migration. Ahouga (2018: 1527), argues that a hierarchy has been created through such discourse whereby the 'global' is perceived to be above the 'local', which is again linked to Vigh's (2009) theory of the migrant 'social imaginary'. By reifying the 'global' as something attainable within which they must 'manage mobility', I suggest that the IOM could be inadvertently reproducing the feeling of abjection

that Vigh (2009) and Ferguson (1999) speak of, especially when migrants are *returned* to their country of origin and encouraged to stay put.

Following this idea, it could be suggested that a similar discourse is illustrated in the Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration (AVRR) schemes which allow "for the 'orderly return' of unwanted migrants" (Koch, 2013: 65). AVRR is advertised as a preferable choice to deportation and allows migrants to 'choose' to return and in exchange receive reintegration support. The Gambia, as an origin country, is involved in helping migrants in Libyan detention centres and in other transit countries to voluntarily return home, and in an indirect exchange, receives funding from the EU to help reintegrate them. AVRR can be a welcome option for many migrants wishing to return, such as Stephan and some of his members of YAIM for example who wished to return from the desolate conditions in Libya and develop themselves in The Gambia instead. On the other hand, the notion of 'voluntary' in AVRR becomes compromised when there are no other options to choose from. Stephan also reflected on this in our conversations:

> *Right now, I understand why they say voluntary, but I used to deny it. Even some of my fellow returnees, my members, they will tell you that you didn't volunteer to come [back to The Gambia]. Because they provide only one option – either you go back home or you stay in prison. But they cannot free you from there [prison]. So, it was not voluntary, because our mission was not to come back home empty handed. When I was [there] – my wish was to be free and see myself in Europe, not coming back to Gambia. And that was, for all of us, a lesson – because there were people who were shot, badly injured – and so they didn't see anything [any other options] apart from to come back home.*

As we can see in this conversation, Stephan's perceptions on the notion of 'voluntariness' have shifted. It is only now that he is home and has created something important from his journey experiences that he supports the implementation of AVRR. I would argue that this reflects upon Stephan's positive experiences of reintegration, in that he has found a purpose and motivation in his life in The Gambia to *tekki fii* ("make it here") and therefore can now support the idea of others being able to do the same. This experience represents the model outcome of IOM discourses, but as we have seen through the previous chapters, does not apply to all return migrants and their experiences of "assisted voluntary return and reintegration". Most of the return migrants I spoke to would not count as 'sustainably reintegrated' according to IOM definitions, as they were still struggling with economic self-sufficiency, social stability, and psychosocial wellbeing.

The Double-Edge of Reintegration Support – 'Victimhood'

In Chapter One and Chapter Two I discussed the stigma return migrants can receive for being identified as a 'returnee' which is tied up in their apparent 'failure' to migrate and provide financially for their families and is also linked to the financial support that is anticipated to arrive as a part of their reintegration package. Stigma can lead to isolation and demotivation which may impact the psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants. I will now argue that the existing reintegration scheme has the potential to be a double-edged sword for return migrants as the discourse surrounding their return victimises them before being given support. This is creating a divide is being created between return migrants and the collective rhetoric of 'nation building' as they are separated from being a part of the solution and this could be harmful to psychosocial wellbeing.

I argue that as a return migrant, the labels 'returnee' or 'Backway boy' could carry stigmatized connotations that may be making reintegration more difficult, such as failure and unworthiness as exemplified in Chapter Two. Simultaneously, in order to receive support from reintegration schemes like the one the IOM is running, people must identify themselves as returnees. This does not necessitate a negative consequence, and the support that is being provided should be undervalued for those it is helping. However, the narrative that is being created for the collective group is one that deserves critical attention.

By being involved with the IOM reintegration programme, you as an individual are automatically a 'victim of the Backway' who requires assistance and external help in your life. I wish to make clear that I am not condemning the supportive and helpful work that the IOM Gambia are doing, and especially in the face of extensive challenges such as the enormity of recent return migration figures. However, I wish to highlight that *some* of the language used and the rhetoric that is created by IOM adverts could be seen as victimising and therefore unhelpful for the psychosocial wellbeing of said individuals. One such example is from a Facebook post that the IOM Gambia wrote in March 2019, which highlights the reintegration successes of a return migrant woman who was "impacted by backway syndrome" (IOM Gambia Facebook, March 2019). Associating the Backway with a "syndrome", I would argue removes an element of agency from the choice to emigrate, and also infers that successful reintegration of requires a 'cure' of sorts. Although the post is aiming to highlight her strength and resilience, this language could also be disempowering for other return migrants who do not associate their desire to migrate with disease, and do not wish to be victimised on their return.

A danger associated with this type of language and categorisation of people as 'victims' is that it can become entrenched as part of the individual's narrative and identity. Giordano (2014), talks about refugee migrants integrating into Italian culture having difficulty navigating these labels. Being ascribed a category of 'victim', some people find themselves inhabiting this category, incorporating it into their migration trajectory – a trajectory which continues once they have reached their destination or returned back to their home country as they continue to carry the label of 'returnee' or 'migrant'. When speaking to one return migrant, Baba, I felt that he sometimes exemplified this characteristic of inhabiting 'victimhood', not only for himself but on the behalf of others as he always spoke in the collective first person, and spoke in a detached manner as though he had told this story many times. Baba also frequently avoided answering my interview questions and continued to speak on behalf of return migrants and youths in general:

> *We were seven in number, one compound. Two have gone and the rest they arrested, brought back. The thing is, there are many reasons that we went on the Backway. People dying. Lack of employment. Our families are very poor, very poor families. We don't have anybody to help. We have nothing. When you go to Europe you see that it is an opportunity, and maybe you get work, gather small [amounts of] money, then you can send it to your people. So that's the main reason why we left this country to through the Backway. The government are not helping the youths. They're doing nothing for the youth in this country. There's no jobs. The youths are frustrated because the government are not helping. This is why we decided to take this risky journey. Most of our friends have died.*

Giordano (2014) explains that for migrants in Italy, losing their identity of 'victim' could be just as difficult as being labelled to begin with. "Being labelled in this way contains the foreigner in a moment of loss, outside of which the risk of experiencing a crisis of presence re-presents itself with full force" (Giordano, 2014: 55). Extending this analysis to Gambian returnees, being labelled a 'victim' of the Backway can have a double effect. Firstly, being treated as a victim can lead to inhabiting the role of victim which can produce feelings of demotivation and disempowerment. Secondly, losing the label of 'victim' through being 'successfully reintegrated' by definition of the IOM, could leave people feeling lost and vulnerable without the specialised support, or without the support of their collective identity. As discussed in Chapter Two, identity can play an important role in creating psychosocial wellbeing, such as feeling strong, and in dealing with the traumatic experiences that can be associated with being a return migrant.

The following sections will discuss the role that other organisations and associations play in the reintegration process of return migrants and for youth development; specifically, The Youth Empowerment Project and the Youth Against Irregular Migration.

THE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (YEP) – ROLE IN REINTEGRATION

The Youth Empowerment Project, YEP, is a four-year project funded by the EU-Africa Trust Fund. The project is a two-part operation focusing on addressing the economic causes of irregular migration. One part involves finding business partners and stakeholders willing to take on and train groups of young Gambians who will then be trained for up to (usually) six months in vocational or entrepreneurial skills. The second part of YEP is their small-business finance schemes, which allow young Gambians to apply for either a grant or a loan for a specific cause or project proposal, which they then may receive in cash or in kind. Below I will discuss the premise and implementation of YEP and their relationship with return migrants. Later in the chapter I come back to YEP, discussing the frustrations that have been raised in relation to bureaucratic processes of receiving funding and how this could be translating to a distrust of government promises.

The project aims to be open and accessible to all youths across the country, however the organisers recognise that this is one of their biggest challenges. Creating access for youths in rural areas is difficult not only because of poor internet connection, but due to structural differences such as educational background and socioeconomic status which might affect people's ability and interest levels. In efforts to raise awareness and accessibility in rural areas, YEP are working the National Youth Council representatives in different regions to travel around on motorbikes with communication materials and information about opportunities. Additionally, as highlighted in their monthly news-letter, YEP have been rolling out new campaigns in 2019 which travel around the entire country to reach-out to youths and encourage involvement through dance, tech shows, bike building and business talks (YEP News Flash, 2019).

YEP is a migration focused project, aiming to provide good opportunities in The Gambia to deter young people from migrating to Europe in search of alternatives. They are not specifically targeting return migrants as beneficiaries, but a YEP representative, who I will refer to as Dembo (32), commented that the organisation does work closely with the

IOM to encourage return migrants to apply for skills and training programmes. Dembo and I spoke about whether or not return migrants received any priority over other applicants, and it was revealed that applicants who are "more likely" to migrate or re-migrate would be given priority over somebody that "doesn't bother much about travelling". YEP does not automatically prioritise return migrants as a segregated group, but rather tackles migration in general, which is positive as it prevents jealousy and negative stigma from the rest of the community towards returnees. This is positive for reintegration, as it provides returnees with purposeful and meaningful opportunities to fill their days which is important for reintegration and psychosocial wellbeing. Conversely, it could also be argued that migration-deterrence focused prioritisation is illustrative of externalised EU migration policy having influence in departure countries, as The Gambia's allocated EU funding is channelled towards results of migration figures decreasing.

Out of the return migrants that I spoke to in my research, only one – Stephan – had been in touch with YEP or applied for training programmes or money. Stephan's youth group, YAIM, is closely aligned with YEP's goals and he often advertises YEP's job opportunities during their activism caravans and campaigns. The return migrants that I interviewed do not make up a representative population sample, but nonetheless, it was surprising to hear that none of the others felt included or inspired by YEP's campaign to empower the youth.

One of the reasons for this could be a reflection of the findings in Chapters One and Chapter Two, that their own Backway experiences and emotional difficulties are not being addressed first. Majidi (2013) spoke to deported youth in Afghanistan who had been experiencing a similar form of return assistance. He concluded from his interviews that there was a lack in understanding of the backgrounds and contexts of the young people's lives and traumatic return experiences. Specifically, he argued that a focus on material forms of support such as money and short-term skills training were not addressing the social or psychosocial impacts of returning to their community.

YEP argue that the six-month training courses are beneficial for young people because it gives them the quicker results that people want and need to feel motivated. This is an important factor in recruiting young people who are frustrated with a lack of accessible opportunities. They argue that they have seen good results from the short-courses and many people have found subsequent employment. However, when speaking to the return migrants and youth development advocate, Kebba, their impression of the courses was that they were not long enough to gain proper qualifications and that they were just a 'quick fix' for

producing positive figures for YEP's reports to their EU partners. Majidi's (2013: 64) conclusions were also that the short-duration vocational courses were not long enough to allow for real skills enhancement. From his respondents, 40% of the start-up businesses which came out of the short-courses failed within six months.

On the other hand, the practical skills and business entrepreneurship knowledge that can be gained through YEP's partnerships with local businesses are a great way for young people to experience different types of work and learn what they want to do and, importantly, what they do not want to do. This is something that Mobee director, Salifu, mentioned during a conversation about employing return migrants at the Wellness Centre; knowing what you *don't* want to work with is an undervalued aspect of being motivated towards what you do want to do.

As a newly started project, there is little data on the long-term impacts of YEP and whether or not young people are benefitting beyond the short-term financial support they can receive. Follow-ups and personal engagement with people who take YEP placements is very important and necessary for measuring YEP's benefits, and I was informed that follow-ups are beginning to happen through the organisation. However, it is also recognised that youth unemployment and irregular migration across the country are inter-sectoral national issues and cannot be fixed through one four-year project. The work that YEP is doing in trying to create job and learning opportunities for youths is a positive step in the direction of youth empowerment, despite the challenges and criticisms that they face regarding accessibility and EU funding interests. Return migrants are included in this project together with everybody else, which as mentioned, is beneficial for reintegration rather than having segregated allocation which could incite unwelcoming feelings. As Majidi (2013) argues, additional psychosocial support targeting returnees would provide return migrants with a space to feel supported in their own specific emotional challenges or social reintegration experiences. This may encourage more return migrants to feel inspired to apply to YEP's projects and job opportunities. Whether or not psychosocial support is the responsibility of YEP or another, more specific, return migrant programme depends upon intersectional communication and delegation within the country.

YOUTH AGAINST IRREGULAR MIGRATION (YAIM) – FILLING THE GAPS

Youth Against Irregular Migration is a grassroots project that began in the midst of irregular migration; founded in a Libyan detention camp, YAIM has been inspired by first-hand experiences of the Backway. I argue that grassroots organisations such as YAIM are acting to fill the gap that exists in other areas of return migrant reintegration by creating a returnee network of support and solidarity. One of the recommendations that Majidi (2013: 65) presents from his research is that networking opportunities for deportees are crucial to reintegration and psychosocial wellbeing, as it provides a space to share experiences of migration or the journey and feel solidarity with others in a similar situation.

YAIM's organisational goal is to prevent youths from deciding to take the Backway by showing them opportunities and encouraging development in their own country. The YAIM team travel around The Gambia sharing stories of irregular migration and ways in which they have since been developing themselves in their own country. In the process, the organisation invites other returnees to share their experiences of the Backway and of their motivations to *tekki fii* – "make it here" - in The Gambia. As an outcome of this process, YAIM (and other return migrant youth groups) are acting as an important social network for returnees, providing solidarity and shared local understanding of what it is like to return. YAIM is a brilliant and inspiring organisation for young Gambians, and is, I argue, providing the social support and therapeutic activities (such as story sharing) that the IOM and other official reintegration services are missing. Stephan recalled that for him and other YAIM members who share Backway stories, most have reported it to be a therapeutic experience and that it helps them to rebuild their lives. He said they feel good because they are not only helping others to recognise opportunity in The Gambia, but they are helping each other through talking about a shared experience.

Without being critical to YAIM's intentions, the higher structural formation of grassroot organisations which are externally funded by the EU highlight some fundamental moral questions in line with Rodriguez's (2017) research in Senegal. She argues that "EU governance of migration aims to control mobility, but also to shape the subjectivities of potential migrants so that they 'discipline themselves' to fit European immigration priorities" (Rodriguez, 2017: 1). As an organisation funded by European governments such as Germany, it could be argued that YAIM are victim to EU external migration policy shaping subjective perceptions of national development and migration. As a grassroots project, it is necessary to accept money from external sources, and similarly to what Rodriguez (2017) found, the

people working in these organisations find no moral dilemma applying for funds from EU countries whose political agendas are inadvertently making the Backway as dangerous as it is.

Rodriguez (2017: 2) is critical of the relationship between the subjectivity of human mobility and the EU governmentality of migration, arguing that new obstacles on the borders of transit countries are making it harder for people to circulate in their own region. "It is the perspective of international and development organisations that youths should simply abandon their plans and ideas to migrate and stay put in their countries, investing their efforts locally instead" (Rodriguez, 2017: 8). She found that young people in Senegal felt frustrated by the unfairness of unrequited free movement of Europeans and Senegalese. As such, it could be argued of YAIM to be unintentionally reproducing the introspection of being unworthy of 'global citizen' status, as they should turn their efforts to their own country instead (Rodriguez, 2017; Gaibazzi, 2015; Ferguson, 1999).

However, from speaking to Stephan and seeing the energy and drive that he had towards building a nation of strong, independent young Gambians who are in the future no longer reliant on external funding, I have to disagree that EU funding is negatively impacting YAIM as Rodriguez implies it might. For Stephan, his intentions of applying for external funding were a clearly defined stepping-stone to becoming more independent and self-sufficient. YAIM used the external funding to run their nationwide caravan which promotes youth development and shares experiences of the Backway. To imply that people that accept external funding are blind to the global structures which create inequality to begin with, is ethnocentric and just as detrimental to perceptions of individual agency and understanding. YAIM is an example of a strong and powerful network of young Gambians who have in the past not feel supported by their government and have therefore created a space to support one another. Stephan firmly stated that YAIM does not discourage migration in general, but just encourages regular and documented travel. "With documents you can be recognised, respected, you can go wherever you want". He argued that they support themselves by creating partnerships with NGOs and sponsors, so that YAIM members can go and learn skills: "We encourage the youths of the country to have skills so that when they travel, they can have something to *sell.* Because with skills you can go anywhere and have something you can start". Requesting external funding from EU countries to aid their trajectory I would argue is a way of turning the financial inevitability of global inequality into positive action.

The rhetoric that YAIM and YEP both reproduce is of national development with a concentration on the youth as a catalyst in this process. Their visions are in line with the way

that the government are also trying to utilise youth empowerment for national development. However, as I will discuss in the following section of this chapter, the alignment of these supposedly parallel ambitions still has obstacles to overcome.

BUILDING THE "NEW GAMBIA"

As President Barrow's new government lead The Gambia into its third republic, a discourse of the 'New Gambia' has been used in attempt to reshape the nation and the relationship between the nation and the state. In efforts to restore public confidence and consolidate institutional sectors in the 'New Gambia', Barrow's government has drawn up a medium-term National Development Plan 2018-2021 (NDP). The vision of the NDP is for the development of the 'New Gambia' which "upholds the highest standard of government, accountability, and transparency; where social cohesion and harmony prevails among communities" (NDP, 2017: 8). This vision is contrasted in the NDP to the "gross human rights violations, terror and serious abuses of office" which are stated to have characterised the values of the previous government, (NDP, 2017: 5).

In an opening statement to the document, Barrow has stated his hopes that the NDP will provide clarity and focus for the new government's actions and vision and encourage citizen engagement, especially among the youth. Importantly, the NDP has also been prepared in a 'popular version' which is more accessible to the general public, ensuring that information about the government's plans and priorities is available and transparent. It is stated in the NDP that this action is in hope to mobilise public action and encourage people to assume responsibility for the plan's implementation.

The NDP also places emphasis on stating that the country must focus on 'the youth' (defined as age 15-35) in order to develop the nation. Empowering the youth through employment and skills development is a key tool that the new government are utilising: "Government is determined to realize its commitment to 'leave no youth behind' as it recognizes that youth are the engines of growth and are an essential pillar for any development" (NDP, 2017: 14-15). As a symbol of this promise the first project that was signed by the new government was the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP).

However, restoring public confidence and trust towards the new government is a challenging task. To this end, the government are writing a new constitution, amending and

enhancing human rights standards and strengthening the independence of the judiciary. The Truth and Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, and the National Human Rights Commission are all new bodies which are aiming to strengthen and rebuild a transparent and trustworthy governance for people to believe in. Yet, as found throughout my research, it seems that the levels of trust among the youth regarding authoritative institutions is reputationally low and the relationship continues to be dysfunctional.

For example, one common topic that occurred in conversation was a distrust that the government would be able to combat corruption, or that they were even trying to do so. Many of the return migrants and young people I spoke to mentioned funds that they were aware of not ending up where they were supposed to, and rumours of the new government continuing to spend public funds at their own expense. Kebba, continuously an advocate for youth development, noted:

> *We say we need support [money] but we don't have it – so we need help and support from the government so we can do this [form an association]. But when they ["international funding"] come with the help and support - they [the government] buy new cars, you understand? And at the same time that they are criminalising the youths – they are using their names to get those cars.*

What Kebba is referring to here is the convoys of government officials that charge through the traffic in shiny black Hummers and Land Rovers. They make their presence known by driving in the middle of the highway with motorbikes in front and behind, forcing citizen traffic to the sides to stop or slow down whilst they pass. The roads in The Gambia are difficult to traverse and create endless frustrations for people living there on a normal day, as the infrastructure is poor, and the tarmacked roads are always congested. The superior display of wealth and power that the government present with the convoys was implied not only by Kebba, above, but by many others in day-to-day conversations during my research to be negatively impacting their perceptions of the new government. As denounced by Kebba, his impression is that the government are using youth development to receive EU funding but are subsequently using that funding to buy new cars as he does not see any evidence of youth development in progress. Return migrant, Ishmael, felt equally as frustrated at the idea of return migrant's names being 'used' to receive EU funding which he subsequently was not seeing:

> *The government uses our names for the Europe Funding. The EU, they wanna help the youths – [but] there is no help, no projects. They [the government] are doing nothing for the youths. Just promises. And there is a lot of money that Europe [the EU] deliver to The Gambia, but the youths are not benefiting.*

This shows not only a distrust of funding allocation, but that there is a disbelief in the promises the government are pushing regarding youth development. This discourse of distrust, corruption, and dishonesty is not exemplifying the political optimism that I spoke of previously. However, as will be shown below, these discourses feed into one another in forming a horizontal comradeship amongst youths, who are "becoming aware that their concerns are being replicated by thousands (or millions) of others whose existence they are confident of, yet whose identity they have not the slightest notion" (Anderson, [1986] 2006: 6).

Widening the Gap: "The youth are the country!"

Wedeen (2003), discusses the process of nation building through an ethnographic examination of political events in the aftermath of Yemen's national unification in 1990. She concludes that contrary to many scholars' assumptions about State-formation, modern democratic governance is not inevitably linked to strong and visible "stateness" (2003: 273). In fact, she found that political activity and experiences of citizenship thrived because the state was fragile, and the citizens felt unified in times of tenuous national security. Although not directly applicable to the political situation in The Gambia, I feel that this theoretical examination provides a relevant idea in that there is a feeling amongst the citizens of a strong national identity and sense of community which may have been heightened by the political uncertainty. It is not possible for me to examine the *effects* of the election or a comparison of the current political landscape as I have no relevant data from before the events. However, the following extracts from the interviews highlight strong opinions and beliefs about what should or could happen to the country now, and whose responsibility it is to get it there.

Kebba talked passionately about his views on youth involvement in country's development and how his association would encourage and help them achieve their potential:

> *People are here! And we are organising them! Nothing is possible without being organised. We have to come together first, engage! The youth has to be engaged. We cannot do anything without the youths, the youth is the country. The youths are the country, the youths are the country! And they [government] in the times of their politics and stuff [are] saying, we need the youths cos they're making the changes and only you [the youths] can make the changes. The youths are the target, without the youths - I think everything is failed.*

This is exemplary of the divide that Kebba felt existed between the youth – "us" - and the government – "they", eluding to a sort of "imagined community" of comrades that Kebba believes are ready and waiting to be engaged and change the country (Anderson, 2006: 7). Kebba makes a stark distinction between the youths and 'the government' who he blamed for the disengagement and demotivation of the youths he saw around him:

> *I initiated the association with a good friend. […] I was saying – these youths here in The Gambia, our junior brothers and sisters, they are sitting down without doing anything, without engaging in anything! And the government can't look after them, because they are individuals. And instead they are criminalising them. They must go and steal or do bad things [instead].*

He identified a bond with those *sitting* on the street corners – as brothers and sisters – and polarises their situation as an inevitable path to criminal behaviours, an inevitability that he believed is accountable to the government. What is interesting, is the connection that is made between 'having nothing to do' (as discussed in Chapter One) and being pressured into stealing and "doing bad things" instead. Kebba insinuated that a lack of alternative opportunities leads youths into pursuing criminal activity because they have no other options, and therefore he directly blames the government for their behaviour. This is what Kebba repeatedly referred to as "being criminalised":

> *But still now, the President of The Gambia doesn't know you! It's you who knows him, isn't it! He doesn't know you! And you can't be employed here you know, we have too many drop-outs from school. They [government] are not creating anything for these people – for the people that don't finish high-school, and from there… and they know, being a drop-out doesn't mean that you're stupid, you can do something. Some of them [drop out] because their parents have nothing to pay for their school fees. And the government are not doing anything to help them, and that is very sad. Otherwise, they will [become] criminalised. They will do something else, from what they're supposed to be. And that's not the ideal. So that's where we come in! To take all those people, to guide them. The drop-outs, the deportees, the illegal migrants.*

This phrase that Kebba used – "being criminalised" – refers to the notion that the government are not only actively attempting to criminalise activities that youths are doing, such as idling and drinking on the streets, but that the government should be blamed for youths turning to crime, either out of boredom or as a means of income. He also frequently mentioned a so-called body of the police force which he calls "The Anti-Crime", and expressed his anger at what he believed to be a government scheme which targets young people who are wanting to

have fun, and it gave him reason to not trust the government. He called them "The Anti-Crime":

> *The Anti-Crime. It is a sect of police, for the youths. If you want to go to Kololi, for a party – tonight or whenever there – they can just pick you up you know!? Take you for three days to farm for them, for the police, you go work for them – that's not fair!!! You know? That's not fair! Instead of justifying, taking you to the court – no! You're taken for three days to work and then they just take you back. For nothing! They say you're just idling. You just idling around the streets – you get arrested for that! They take the powers from us! They're playing games with us. It's all about disempowering the youths – that's why the youth's go! That's what the former president was doing.*

After speaking to other people and asking about "The Anti-Crime", I started to piece together different versions of what this apparent government body, finding that the description Kebba had given – specifically with the consequence of unpaid labour – was amongst a variation of ideas. For example, some people argued that the 'sect of the police' he was talking about were employed to control the spike in crime that occurred around the time of the elections. However, the *idea* of "The Anti-Crime" is something people were aware of and spoke of, and according to Kebba, believe is a continuation of authoritarianism and corruption even in the new government.

These beliefs undoubtedly hold resonance to Jammeh's regime, which was infamously oppressive and financially corrupt. Recent national developments have been attempting to tackle the items Kebba was concerned with, such as reducing school fees and concentrating on keeping more girls in school, (although according to some families I spoke to, other mandatory costs such as uniforms and books are still making school too expensive for the poorest communities). But in spite of the promises in the NDP, it appears the new government has yet to gain the trust and respect of youths like Kebba who feel invisible and unsupported.

Whilst it is possible that the 'us versus them' mentality that Kebba portrayed in his discourse is contributing to the barriers between the supposed spheres, this does not deter from his optimism about The Gambia's future possibilities which he saw in the hands of the youth, and intended to fulfil through his own youth association. This is exemplary of the way that youth group ideology is being wielded to fill a gap some young people feel exists in government support. A similar rhetoric shone through other interviews too, such as with Ishmael, a return migrant who was keen to start his own association for return migrants and was negotiating how to best find ways to reach allusive government support:

> *The time we came back, I said okay what can I do so that the government can help us. Because the government cannot help one individual. When you form an association, you write your proposal, things that you need. Then maybe the government can help you. Then I gather the boys, I call them. I contact the boys that came on the same flight, told them look – [let's] have a meeting. They come to my compound and I tell them look – let us not lose hope. We are returnees, we are deported back. Let's form an association. Let's go and find doors. So then the government can help us, will help us. We go, we flock together.*

Ishmael and Kebba both present themselves as leaders, as people who will stand up and find collective opportunities for return migrants and youths alike. They both spoke with determination and an attitude which could sometimes come across as aggressive, but their passion cut through their obvious frustration. I would argue that the current political climate in The Gambia has provided a catalyst for (some) already motivated young people to find purpose and create meaning through banding together their communities and activating their voices. As discussed in Chapter One, these are the key elements of self-purpose and psychosocial wellbeing (Wright, 2012; 2012a). This motivation to create success and opportunities for young people in the New Gambia may be the force needed to unify the public and political and build a new form of trust towards the government.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, projects such as YEP are exemplary of what can be achieved through the cooperation of government funding and youth representatives, to provide opportunities and skills learning for the country's youth. However, also previously mentioned (in Chapters Two and Three), the allocation of large amounts of funding and how to access it is a topic filled with miscommunication. Repeatedly the youth and return migrants spoke to me about applying for funding for associations and project proposals and not receiving any, even though they knew the money was there. The EU grants that are being supposedly ear-marked for youth development do not appear tangible or accessible for the youths trying to develop themselves. This is a problem for building a trusting relationship with the government. Kebba, referring to his own efforts to set up a youth employment association, explained what he believed to be the problem:

> *Yeah and let me tell you, they say there is a pledge coming from the EU and Europe, a grant is coming to the country, to the government. These associations they have to spend these grants, you know. We [Kebba's association] have to go to the ministry of agriculture, because we're working with a site – we are [working with] agriculture. But the thing is, they don't focus on associations. And we're telling them, without associations there is no development. What they're proposing is giving them salaries, employing them, working – but they're not offering [anything to] the people that are trying to create development for the country.*

Ishmael, return migrant, conveyed a similar narrative when asked about how he thought he could fund his association for return migrant reintegration:

> *Yeah it's here but it's not happening. We wrote to the government but still now there is no project. And the EU came here and they call me, they call me to go with one boy and represent the migrants. We went there for a meeting. The EU promised that they are gonna give the government money to help the youths – they give the money, a lot of money for the government. But there is nothing left. We wrote our proposals and we found all the necessary documents to show our association so they can help, we tended to that… we write to them. Sent our proposals. We need poultry and small maintenance. But still now there is no help, today… tomorrow… no help. Over one year plus. And the money is here [in the country].*

To address this matter, I also spoke to Dembo, the representative from YEP, and asked him to explain how the finance scheme works for proposals and funding, and whether or not people can apply directly to YEP with their project or association proposals, and how they are connected to the government. Dembo described the financial processes of YEP and how the programme works. From his description, the process appears to be very bureaucratic, involving numerous partnerships and outsourcing processes removing YEP themselves from the actualisation of individuals receiving funding or training. They have two financial schemes, one as a grant and one as a loan. The mini-grant scheme allows for 250 individuals to be eligible to up to 1000 USD each, through in-kind materials. Dembo explained the process of the scheme:

> *We don't disperse cash to them, what we do is they come up with their business ideas and plans and look at what they need in order to start or to strengthen their business and we try to get them these materials up to 1000 dollars. But we don't do this processing ourselves and we don't disperse ourselves. In order to keep it transparent and also independent in terms of monitoring and reporting, we outsource this.*

Through the chosen outsourcing company, the National Association of Corporative Credit Union (NACCU), individuals are able to apply for the grant and can get the form from either the region YEP offices or online at YEP's website. This form must then be sent to NACCU, which "is just a stone's throw away from our offices so easy to get to" (Dembo, YEP). NACCU then reviews all of the grant applications periodically through a grants committee, which YEP has a seat at in a purely observational role. YEP do not have a voting right. According to Dembo, the committee then takes a decision on the "projects that seem most physical or profitable enough of can deserve the loan or grant, and then it is dispersed to them".

Though seemingly complicated to the lay individual who may not be familiarised with bureaucratic business operations, Dembo made it clear that as an UN-run project, transparency and trustworthiness of the process was very important, and they try to keep the process very clean with a solid paper trail to show unbiased allocation of money. Yet this was not the perception of the process that was coming across to youths that I spoke to like Ishmael and Kebba, who instead have been alienated by the misunderstanding of "the government" having "lots of EU money" to give out to the youth for their own development. I raised this point with Dembo and asked him if he had any advice for youths who are trying to "develop themselves" and struggling to attain funding, as Kebba had been expressing. Dembo gave the following explanation in his role as a YEP representative:

> *At an institutional level – because it's a UN agency – we do have different ways of channelling funds and giving the disbursement packages. For more informal or semi-structural organisations for empowering youth – we do also support them in the area of sensitisation and advocacy […] Usually those are low budget. It's something that we also really don't want to, let's say – promote or encourage – because then anybody can come and form their little institutions and say 'hey I'm doing this' because they've seen this [YEP] is a project with 11 million and they feel they can do something. Strategically we know that you need to have the qualities and apparatus to do that. So, we are also being very careful in terms of that. But obviously that has never stopped our intention of working with them – and we've worked with a lot of them, supporting them. They say, 'ah we need transport, refreshments, water' – and these things are low cost things, and we can just give it to them. And then yeah, sure, we have a message in the visibility materials to say we helped.*

Explanations such as these might be some of the reason why some young people such as Kebba and Ishmael feel there is a barrier between *their* efforts to 'develop' the nation through their own youth associations and the available funding from the EU, which they feel is inaccessible. In the eyes of Kebba and Ishmael, it seemed that they must apply directly to the government and not to a particular body or institution such as NACCU. Ultimately, the gap that is being created appears to be a matter of miscommunication and inaccessible information, either on YEP's behalf or the government's, but could inadvertently be widening the distrust-filled gap between youth and 'the government', (the notion of which does not differentiate between different bodies or government-run projects). On the other hand, it could be argued that bureaucracy is an inevitable part of business and political matters, one that must be learnt in order to navigate oneself to success. In a more unofficial capacity, Dembo imparted some more advice, arguing that he himself had to learn the bureaucracy to progress to where he is now:

> *I'm still a youth – and I am still in the activism for youths – so this is personal. This is me personally speaking now, separate from my portfolio. And there were plenty of times we [as youths] thought hey – we have an idea – lets form an association lets form a group – in order to get funding. To me it doesn't work like that. When I grew up and came to understand that it doesn't work that way, especially in the corporate world, I learned that you really have to be more strategic and you also need to possess all the capacities in order to deliver. […] so long as you know the ideas are good you can join hands and see how you can affiliate yourself and strengthen as an entity. Rather than make a project just to attract donor funding.*

This is important because it shows that he understands where people like Kebba and Ishmael are coming from, their thoughts and beliefs about 'the government'. It is also important because it shows a blurring of the line between supposedly separate spheres, illustrating that he himself is a youth and feels strongly towards the same cause. Open expression of this message could be a powerful way of collaborating with and encouraging youths such as Kebba and Ishmael who wish to contribute to the 'nation building' that the government are advocating for – and specifically asking for participation in with the NDP – and who are instead feeling frustrated and pushed down by bureaucratic means.

For return migrants' psychosocial wellbeing, this is especially important as the feeling of abjection may already be resonating from having to return empty-handed to The Gambia, and who are now struggling to negotiate 'the system' in which they can help themselves. As discussed throughout Chapters One and Two, the ability to pursue goals and achieve a sense of purpose are fundamental pillars of wellbeing and, in turn, reintegration. The beginning of this chapter outlined the ways in which global mobility governance is being implemented through organisations such as the IOM and through the EU-Africa Trust Fund, and how this may be influencing discourses surrounding 'sustainable reintegration' in The Gambia by focusing on reducing remigration. YEP is a project which directly focuses on reducing remigration through providing youths with alternative opportunities to develop themselves and the nation from within inside the country. Inadvertently, it could be proposed, the financial connection between YEP and EU external migration policy is inevitably contributing to the implicit notion that young Gambians without the necessary social capital do not have the privilege to travel freely as a global citizen. If so, or anyway, it might also be suggested that creating easy, understandable, accessible pathways to the opportunities and finances that they do provide with the EU-funding could be a step towards rebuilding the trust from youths being asked to remain where they are.

This chapter has shown that there are obstacles to be overcome in order to align the government vision outlined in the NDP and the attitudes of youths who wish to develop themselves with or without political support. The freedom of release from a two-decade dictatorship appears to have created a bubble of development-orientated optimism, and in areas that people do not feel supported by higher organisation, such as in the creation of return migrant networks and psychosocial activities such as experience sharing, youth groups have organised themselves to fill these gaps. Similarly, the same could be said for Mobee and the Wellness Centre, which is carving out its own space for mental health awareness and psychosocial healing in a field which is lacking government level action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout this thesis I have discussed the experiences of return migration in relation to constructions of mental illness and *stress*; coping mechanisms and available mental health services; relationships and expectations; and the individual and collective narratives which shape return migrant identities. In each chapter, I have highlighted how these factors interconnect with one another and interact with the psychosocial wellbeing of return migrants to The Gambia.

To begin this thesis, I have analysed the ways in which *stress* and the narratives told by return migrants interact with the ascribed 'return migrant' identity. I explored how characteristics ascribed to this identity build on the idea of sufferance and struggle being a necessary endurance for young men in their trajectory to adulthood. Meanwhile, *stress* – a word used to talk about difficult emotions or psychosocial struggles as well as material problems, is often downplayed and dealt with through coping strategies which could potentially lead to more severe forms of mental health problems. I have argued that the fear and stigma attached to 'mental illness' has created barriers to accessible healthcare amongst return migrants, adding to a lack of services for psychosocial support and wellbeing. Spaces for psychosocial therapy and community-based activities, such as the Mobee Wellness Centre, could be a less alienating and more inclusive way of helping some return migrants to rebuild their motivation and sense of purpose, which have been found to be fundamental factors for psychosocial wellbeing, and were highlighted by the returnees to be important for their personal growth and reintegration.

The thesis also explores the social imaginary of migration and how this migrant imaginary interacts with the psychosocial wellbeing of returnees. I have highlighted that although there are social expectations which revolve around financial pressures and family obligation, for some return migrants the social capital they believe to have gained through 'being travelled' reveals a far more complex set of motivations for leaving on the Backway and for their return, which is often neglected in the push-pull economic logic of mainstream irregular migration discourse. The prospect of 'being travelled' appears to be heavily shaping the social imaginary of migration, as found in other studies such as in Peru and Mongolia, which also show that being a migrant elevates one's social status and transforms perspectives.

For the returnees I spoke to, many felt they had gained new perspectives from the countries they had travelled through, even if they did not reach their intended destination of

Europe. These perspectives, gathered from varied experiences of violence and dehumanisation as well as from seeing different forms of national development, have changed the way that returnees view their own situation in The Gambia. For some, such as Stephan, his experiences of being treated as "literally nobody" has fuelled him to work on encouraging development and pride of national identity within The Gambia. He does not want the Backway to be the only viable option for young Gambians who want to improve their lives, and therefore works with YAIM to discourage others from repeating his experience. For others, such as Ishmael and Azis, the knowledge that they have gained from being abroad has created frustration and resentment towards The Gambian government and the weak economic situation they have returned to. I suggest that these perspectives should be considered and acknowledged when addressing the turbulent relationship between return migrants, youths, and the new government in order to consolidate efforts for national development.

Both perspectives in these examples have been further explored in relation to how return migration is impacting psychosocial wellbeing. Stephan's association, YAIM, has been a way to create a network of return migrants which in turn has provided a space in which returnees can share their stories and feel acknowledged and validated in their experiences. In this way, the actions of grassroots associations such as YAIM are filling a gap that exists in psychosocial support for returned migrants in The Gambia. The perspective exemplified by Ishmael and Azis, that although they have seen other countries and appreciate 'being travelled', the realisation of the uneven global structures which exist to restrict and govern mobility for 'ineligible bodies' is a heavy weight to carry. Feelings of abjection, frustration and resentment are valid and understandable reactions to their experience of return. I reason that if these feelings are left invalidated and unsupported, they could severely impact psychosocial wellbeing and reintegration. Without an outlet to address their experiences, frustration and resentment could act as a barrier to wanting to find ways to motivate oneself or change behaviours to improve wellbeing.

In the final chapter of the thesis I have contextualised the findings above within the on-going political transformation in The Gambia. In addressing the relationship between youths and their belief in the new government, Kebba was one of the most vocalised people I spoke to regarding his scepticism of 'the government', but far from the only voice that shared these views. His words throughout the thesis epitomise the dichotomy that exists in the minds of some youth groups regarding the words versus actions of the state, highlighting the inherited distrust that is going to take time to rebuild after two decades of harsh dictatorship.

Furthermore, the resentment and frustration that some of the return migrants felt on returning is being compounded by miscommunication from the government regarding funding, which is further instilling distrust and demotivation.

Critical questions have been raised about the intentions and involvement of international organisations, such as the IOM and the EU-Africa Trust Fund in reintegration projects, such as YEP. On the one hand, a focus on youth empowerment is a positive and necessary step for a newly democratic state, which will hopefully encourage public confidence in the new government if promises are fulfilled. Furthermore, by not segregating the accessibility of YEP's projects to return migrants over other youth members, negativity and resentment that could be potentially damaging to return migrants' psychosocial wellbeing might be lessened. On the other hand, by undertaking the immediate task of reducing irregular migration on behalf of the European Union, the long-term impacts a four-year project (YEP) may not have been fully considered, especially for the reintegration and wellbeing of return migrants.

Furthermore, whilst YEP and the IOM are working on a national scale to support return migrants and provide opportunities for personal growth, the findings from this research have shown that some people are not feeling any sense of inclusion in these projects or in the government's proposed actions, and are struggling to find ways to support themselves financially and emotionally. As mentioned, networks of return migrants can act as fundamental psychosocial support through creating feelings of solidarity and validation, and it is the grassroots youth groups which are doing this, with or without support from the government. I suggest that a more communicative and collaborative relationship between different sectors and associations of youth development and empowerment would create a more inclusive web of opportunities for everyone to get involved in. This may also lead to a wider reach across already existing youth networks, which is something that YEP have highlighted as a problem for their project. It has also been raised that whilst the IOM are concentrating heavily on returning migrants, they are struggling to simultaneously reintegrate such large volumes of returnees. Again, this may be having an impact on feelings of frustration and resentment about returning. These sorts of dilemmas raise questions about the indirect consequences that external EU-migration policies might have on the individual wellbeing of returnees.

In summary, through the framework of the 'social imaginary' of migration, I have explored what migration means for young people and the prospects the Backway can provide. Subsequently, I have examined what the experiences and perspectives gained on the

Backway mean for return migrants and how their psychosocial wellbeing is shaped. In concluding on these meanings and the migrant imaginary, it is important to remember that migration is not a new notion to The Gambia. Migration is imbedded in the country's history as a fundamental part of the river landscape and seasonal farming culture. It is not unusual for young people to travel, to be on the move, and to want to experience the world outside of their home town. I would argue that this is a feeling shared by millions of individuals around the world, inherent to our human desire to explore curiosity. The Backway provides an imagined future for a life outside The Gambia and is seen through optimistic eyes despite knowing how perilous the journey can be and how unlikely it may be to reach Europe. Ultimately, within the complex web of interdependent relationships between the EU and governments like The Gambia's, thousands of those who have tried to travel along the Backway are returning to their country with renewed perspectives and expectations of new opportunities. Providing spaces to share experiences and feel worthy of being heard is the first attainable step to supporting their motivation and psychosocial wellbeing.

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APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Version 1.0 Date 10/10/2018

Study Title: Psychosocial Wellbeing and Mental Health Among Returning Migrants in The Gambia

Sponsor & Funder: The University of Oslo

What is informed consent?

You are invited to take part in a research project. Participating in a research study is not the same as getting regular medical care. The purpose of normal medical care is to improve one's health. The purpose of a research study is to gather information that may be useful in the future for the whole population. It is your decision to take part and you can stop at any time without giving any reason.

Before you decide you need to understand why the study is being done and what will happen in it. Please take time to read the following information or get the information explained to you in your language. Listen carefully. You can ask questions if there is anything that you do not understand. Ask for it to be explained until you are satisfied. You may also wish to speak your spouse, family members or others before deciding to take part in the study.

If you decide to join the study, you will need to sign or thumbprint a consent form saying you agree to be in the study. You will receive a copy of the consent form.

Why is this study being done?

The aim is to learn about experiences of returning migrants and to understand how these experiences are related to wellbeing of the mind, body, and community. You have been selected for possible participation because of your connection to return migration, either as a return migrant or through involvement with reintegration in some manner. This research is for a master's thesis in International Health from the University of Oslo, Norway.

What does this study involve?

The study is about gaining an understanding of the reintegration experiences of people returning to The Gambia after trying to migrate to Europe. The research will include interviews, group discussions, and day-to-day observations and conversations. No clinical or medical tests will be conducted. Approximate timeframe will be several hours of contact over the course of 3-4 months, repeated interviews if you are willing.

What harm or discomfort can you expect in the study?

There are no anticipated risks in this study. A consideration is that it might be emotional to speak about your experiences, but the interviews will be very flexible and adapt to how you feel and will take place in an environment of your choice.

What benefits can you expect in the study?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The possible advantage of taking part in this study will be that your contribution of knowledge and experiences of reintegration may help to inform organisations that are providing support of what is most important to you.

Will you be compensated for participating in the study?

You will not get paid for being in this study, but if you or we travel I will cover expenses for transport.

What happens if you refuse to participate in the study or change your mind later?

You are free to join the study or not and you are free to stop being in the study any time without giving a reason.

If you do not want to continue in the study I will use only use the information already collected from you.

How will personal records remain confidential and who will have access to it?

All information that is collected about you in the study will be kept strictly confidential and is anonymised. Your personal information will only be seen by the researcher, the sponsor and if necessary the Ethics Committee and Government authorities.

Who should you contact if you have questions?

If you have any questions or are worried you can contact:

Project Manager/Researcher: **Emma-Jane Dennis**
Telephone: **7236002** or email: **emmajane.dennis@hotmail.co.uk**

Supervisor: Benedikte V Lindskog (benedik@oslomet.no)
Co- Supervisor: Ruth Prince (r.j.prince@medisin.uio.no)

Please feel free to ask any question you might have about the study.

Who has reviewed this study?

This study has been checked by the Gambia Government/MRC Joint Ethics Committee, and the Medical and Health Studies Ethical Research Council of Norway (REK). These Ethics Committees protect your rights and wellbeing, and have given permission for it to take place.

CONSENT FORM

Participant Identification Number: |__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|__|

_____
(Printed initials of participant)

☐ I have read the written information **OR**

☐ I have had the information explained to me by study personnel in a language that I understand,

and I
confirm that my choice to participate is entirely voluntarily,

confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study and I am happy with the answers that have been provided,

understand that I allow access to the information about me by the persons described in the information sheet,

had enough time to think about whether I want to take part in this study,

agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature/ thumbprint* ☐

_____
Date (dd/mmm/yyyy) Time (24hr)

Printed name of witness* _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

I attest that I have explained the study information accurately in _____ to, and was understood to the best of my knowledge by, the participant. He/she has freely given consent to participate *in the presence of the above named witness (where applicable).

Signature of person obtaining consent

_____
Date (dd/mmm/yyyy) Time (24hr)

** Only required if the participant is unable to read or write.*

APPENDIX 2: LETTER FROM THE NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICE (NSD)

NSD

Benedicte Victoria Lindskog
Postboks 1089
0317 OSLO

Vår dato: 02.07.2018 Vår ref: 60737 / 3 / OASR Deres dato: Deres ref:

Tilrådning fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning § 7-27

Personvernombudet for forskning viser til meldeskjema mottatt 11.05.2018 for prosjektet:

60737	*Psychosocial Wellbeing and Mental Health among Migrants in The Gambia*
Behandlingsansvarlig	*Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig	*Benedicte Victoria Lindskog*
Student	*Emma-Jane Dennis*

Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon finner vi at prosjektet er unntatt konsesjonsplikt og at personopplysningene som blir samlet inn i dette prosjektet er regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. På den neste siden er vår vurdering av prosjektopplegget slik det er meldt til oss. Du kan nå gå i gang med å behandle personopplysninger.

Vilkår for vår anbefaling

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:

- opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon
- vår prosjektvurdering, se side 2
- eventuell korrespondanse med oss

Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke endringer du må melde, samt endringsskjema.

Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i Meldingsarkivet.

Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

Ved prosjektslutt 01.06.2019 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning

NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS Harald Hårfagres gate 29 Tel: +47-55 58 21 17 nsd@nsd.no Org.nr. 985 321 884
NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data NO-5007 Bergen, NORWAY Faks: +47-55 58 96 50 www.nsd.no

APPENDIX 3: LETTER FROM THE GAMBIAN GOVERNMENT/MRC JOINT ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Gambia Government/MRCG Joint
ETHICS COMMITTEE

C/o MRC Unit: The Gambia @ LSHTM, Fajara
P.O. Box 273, Banjul
The Gambia, West Africa
Fax: +220 – 4495919 or 4496513
Tel: +220 – 4495442-6 Ext. 2308
Email: ethics@mrc.gm

22 November 2018

Ms. Emma Jane Dennis,
Institute of Health and Society,
University of Oslo, Norway.

Dear Ms. Dennis,

R018025v2, Psychosocial Wellbeing And Mental Health Among Returning Migrants In The Gambia

Thank you for submitting your revised proposal addressing the issues raised by The Gambia Government/MRCG Joint Ethics Committee at its meeting held on 25 October 2018.

Your response is satisfactory. I am now happy to approve your proposed study.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

MK Cham

Dr. Mohammadou Kabir Cham
Chair, Gambia Government/MRCG Joint Ethics Committee

Documents submitted for review:

- Response letter – 8 November 2018
- Research proposal – Updated version
- Response letter to EC – 10 October 2018
- Response letter to UTG – 7 September 2018
- Notification form (NSD)
- ICD, version 1.0 – 10 October 2018
- Interview guide
- CV – Emma Jane Dennis

The Gambia Government/MRCG Joint Ethics Committee:

Dr Mohammadou Kabir Cham, Chair
Prof Ousman Nyan, Scientific Advisor
Dr Kalifa Bojang
Dr Ahmadou Lamin Samateh
Dr Pamela Ewenighele
Dr Jane Achan
Rev Gabriel L. Allen
Prof Umberto D'Alessandro
Dr Mamady Cham
Mr Momodou YM Sallah
Prof Martin Antonio
Dr Assan Jaye
Ms Nellie Jobe, Secretary

APPENDIX 4: LETTER FROM THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR MEDICAL & HEALTH RESEARCH ETHICS (REK)

Vår ref.nr.: 2018/869 D

Review

The Secretariat for the Regional Committee for Medical & Health Research Ethics, Section D, South East Norway, reviewed the enquiry regarding remit assessment received on April 26, 2018 for the Research Project "Psykososial helse blant tilbakevendende migranter i Gambia."

The application was assessed accordance with the Norwegian Research Ethics Act (2006) and Act on Medical and Health Research (2008).

The Decision

The Secretariat for the Regional Committee for Medical & Health Research Ethics, Section D, South East Norway, found the Research Project to be outside the remit of the Act on Medical and Health Research (2008) and therefore can be implemented without its approval.

Ethics Committee System

The Ethics Committee System in Norway consists of seven Independent Regional Committees with authority to either approve or disapprove Medical Research Studies conducted within Norway, or by Norwegian Institutions, in accordance with the Act on Medical and Health Research (2008).

Please do not hesitate to contact the Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics Section South East D (REK Sør-Øst D) if further information is required, as we are happy to be of assistance.

Med vennlig hilsen
Hege Cathrine Finholt, PhD
Rådgiver

post@helseforskning.etikkom.no

T: 22857547

Regional komité for medisinsk og helsefaglig
forskningsetikk REK sør-øst-Norge (REK sør-øst)
http://helseforskning.etikkom.no

REK
REGIONALE KOMITEER FOR MEDISINSK OG HELSEFAGLIG FORSKNINGSETIKK