

Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia

Rossella Marino

Supervisor(s): Prof. dr. Ine Lietaert
dr. Joris Schapendonk

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Work and Social Welfare Studies

Academic year 2022–2023

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Her-opbouwen in Gambia: Terugkeerders en niet- gouvernementele actoren in de (Europese) externalisatie van terugkeer migratie management naar Gambia

Doctoral Advisory Committee

Prof. dr. Ine Lietaert (supervisor)
Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy; United Nations University-CRIS

dr. Joris Schapendonk (supervisor)
Radboud University, Department of Geography

Prof. dr. Ilse Derluyn
Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Prof. dr. Florian Trauner
Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Brussels School of Governance

Examination Committee

Prof. dr. Geert Van Hove (Chair)
Ghent University, Department of Special Needs Education

Prof. dr. Ilhan Kaya
Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

dr. Giacomo Orsini
Ghent University, Department of Social Work and Social Pedagogy

Prof. dr. Jan Orbie
Ghent University, Department of Political Science

Prof. dr. Polly Pallister-Wilkins
University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

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Giulio Regeni
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CHAPTER 1

General introduction

1.1 Introduction

In recent decades, undocumented migration from the South of the world – intensified by how hard it is to access visas to move to the Global North (van Houtum and van Uden 2023) – has gained wide relevance in the Western political arena. This has led policy-makers to embrace the approach of migration management that develops and implements technical solutions to problematised social issues (Oelgemöller 2017). So-called assisted voluntary return¹ is at the forefront of migration management. This measure rests on undocumented migrants' consent to return and the offer of assistance for their trip back as well as, in some occasion, their ensuing reintegration (Lietaert 2022). The interest of migration management in return migration – and the idea of 'voluntary' return within it – has been confirmed by its inclusion in the 2018 Global Compact for Migration (GCM). The GCM is a United Nations (UN) instrument of global migration governance, the international architecture addressing migration, which migration management is the operational branch of (Van Riemsdijk et al. 2021).

Assisted 'voluntary' return starts in host countries, where (potential) beneficiaries of the measure enter into contact with both state and non-state actors² assigning return and, possibly, reintegration support. From policy-makers' viewpoint, this support is supposed to work towards the sustainable reintegration of returnees back home, which, in its most popular connotation, signifies their lack of re-emigration (Kuschminder 2017). Reintegration assistance is normally provided by non-state and international actors in migrant-sending countries. In turn, assisted returnees as peer intermediaries (Maâ et al. 2022) take part in migration-management activities funded by Northern countries, such as awareness-raising against the dangers of illegalised migration. This may be performed in returnees' individual capacity or as members of self-organised associations (Vammen 2021). This prevention is part of the externalisation of

¹ The voluntary nature of assisted return is heavily debated, as mentioned later on and elaborated extensively in Chapter three. For this reason, I will use 'assisted return' over the official 'assisted voluntary return' throughout the dissertation, unless the distinction is analytically relevant.

² I use non-state actor to refer to civil-society organisations (CSOs), which include different types of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and grassroots associations, such as returnee groups. Non-state actors can be defined as broadly as including private actors, networks of individuals and experts too (e.g. Green 2018). However, they are less relevant for this dissertation. Furthermore, I follow the studies seeing CSOs as a broader umbrella or even (terminologically) taking over NGOs (Diamond 1994; Mohanty 2002). I do not consider international organisations (including intergovernmental and supranational ones) as well as development agencies which more directly emanate or encompass state structures, to fall under this category.

Northern countries' border, which means projecting it outwards to include third parties in controlling (potential) migration on their behalf (Boswell 2003).

The involvement of a wide plethora of actors in externalisation gives rise to a migration regime which is characterised by messiness and disorder, in spite of the unitary image that its funders insist on giving (Deridder et al. 2020). However, the literature has so far mostly concentrated on the European perspective and state actors within it (Cuttitta 2020). This dissertation partakes in the more recent body of work expanding the geographical, actorial and methodological scope of externalisation research (Cuttitta 2020; Oliveira Martins and Strange 2019; Stock et al. 2019; Triandafyllidou 2020). It does so by zooming in on the involvement of non-state actors in the externalisation of return migration management to the West African country of The Gambia, turned into a prominent target of migration control after exiting a twenty-year-long autocracy in 2016. More specifically, I focus on the question:

How do Gambian returnees and non-state actors affect externalised return migration management's practice and discourse?

In the remainder of the chapter, I introduce the relevant literature, research context, specific research questions and contribution of this dissertation. I first locate it within two main fields of literature: on the one hand, the intersection between return migration and migration management, and, on the other, border externalisation. In this dissertation, I tie these fields of literature together. In the subsequent section, I present the West African country of The Gambia as my research context. Based on specific research gaps, the above-mentioned research focus is then translated into five sub-questions, linked to each of the five empirical chapters of the dissertation. This overview gives way to a section on the contribution and relevance of my work, especially revolving around the critical approaching of return migration management rather than its impact evaluation and the contribution to a decentred understanding of externalisation. Beyond introducing the composing elements of the dissertation, this chapter works as a general guide for the reader too. Important to mention is that, first, this dissertation is article-based, which means that four out of five of its empirical chapters are in-print papers (one academic book chapter and three journal articles), hence standing on their own. Since these empirical chapters are therefore meant to be read together as well as individually, some repetition may

occur across them. Second, the research process of an article-based dissertation, whereby the writing starts quite soon in the trajectory and continues throughout, leads to a certain level of evolution in the output. I outline this evolution down below, explaining how one research question or a particular theoretical framework complements the next.

1.2 The externalisation of return migration management

The upcoming literature overview rests on the explicit combination of the concept of externalisation as border outsourcing to third countries and that of (return) migration management as a mobility-filtering technology. Externalisation through the funding of return-related activities in Southern countries infused with the responsabilisation and economic primacy typical of neoliberalism – such as reintegration assistance, awareness-raising and capacity-building involving returnees, etc. – is certainly complementary to harder forms of migration control, but is foregrounded in this dissertation for having developed its own centrality in Northern countries' migration-prevention designs. The following sections touch upon each of the relevant facets to this phenomenon, ranging from the mechanisms of return politicisation identified in existing research to the limited works that have addressed the perspectives of Southern non-state actors related to externalisation.

1.2.1 The politicisation of return

This paragraph addresses how return migration has been politicised as a tool of control of the unwanted migration that, defiantly, aims northwards (Kuschminder and King 2022; Schapendonk 2020). De Genova (2002) highlighted how the 'deportability' of undocumented migrants, or the constant fear of being removed, contributes to their illegalisation. This illegalisation is racialised, as return practices, alongside border enforcement and detention, feed into the existence of a 'Departheid', signifying the international segregation of Southern populations based on a Western coloniality of power (Kalir 2022). Gibney (2008) identified this rise of return as a way to deal with illegalised migrants as the 'deportation turn'. Peutz and De Genova (2010) explained that among the array of immigration policies available to host countries, deportation has indeed been naturalised as the way to restore some normal order of things, resulting in the politicisation of return migration as well as the entrenchment of what the authors dubbed the 'deportation regime'. Return practices include what Koch (2014)

termed 'state-induced returns', namely deportation and so-called assisted voluntary return. The former entails the forcible removal of illegalised migrants. The latter is instead characterised by the offer of positive incentives such as return and reintegration facilitation and counselling to them. Forced and voluntary return are not a dichotomy, but inextricably linked because those who do not pick up the latter may be threatened with the former. As such, these two return practices are part of a continuum of humanitarian border enforcement (Bendixsen 2020). Assisted return can indeed be considered a segment of the humanitarian borders reinforcing the status quo through the sanctioning of violence and inequality in mobility (Pallister-Wilkins 2022). Within the continuum with forced return, assisted return consequently is "an indispensable link in the chain of migration management" (Lietaert 2022, 108). Migration management is a particular political rationality effecting mobility filtering, whose contours will be outlined next.

1.2.2 Migration management, global migration governance and the GCM

Originally devised in the Global North (Oelgemöller 2017), migration management is a technocratic endeavour advancing the idea that, if managed properly, migration can be of benefit to all (Geiger and Pécoud 2010). As such, it aims to reconcile migration's economic gains with a logic of control (Pécoud 2015). States' tendency to devise and implement technical solutions to complex social issues such as migration thus depoliticises control as a doorway to beneficial outcomes. This falls under the scope of neoliberalism, which is a particular political rationality originated in the 1970s and resting on the dichotomy that "either [one is] economically productive or a security threat" (Oelgemöller 2017, 4). This allegedly inescapable and ordering truth hinges on law and a discourse of individual responsibility as depoliticising devices (Oelgemöller 2017). Economic expediency in migration management is not achieved by completely excluding migrants from the South, but by filtering their mobilities in order to create an economically convenient stratification of the labour force based on race and nationality (Neilson and Mezzadra 2013). Indeed, when it comes to migration, the economy/security nexus typical of neoliberalism intersects with fantasies of racial purity sustained by the Eurocentric system of global domination known as coloniality of power (Quijano 2000). Concretely, migration management encompasses practices as wide-ranging as data production, awareness-raising campaigns, the creation and rolling out of migration policies, border management and development schemes (Geiger and Pécoud 2010).

Global migration governance corresponds to the adequate level of international cooperation for the benefits of migration to be reaped. It extends beyond state actors to civil-society, private and inter-/supra-national actors operating at different geo-political scales (Pécoud 2015; 2021). This architecture of international cooperation, of which migration management is “the dominant regulatory paradigm” (Van Riemsdijk et al. 2021, 5), could not develop organically over the years. One of the reasons for this is the interest divide between migrant-sending and -receiving countries. In other words, the intention of countries in the Global South to preserve the positive externalities of out-migration (e.g. remittances) and the resolution of countries in the Global North to keep immigration at bay (Betts and Kainz 2017). This divide should have been addressed through the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), a non-binding international instrument made up of 23 objectives and adopted at United Nations (UN) level in 2018. However, critical scholars have pointed out that its neutral and legalistic formulation “[did] not seem to avoid the [pitfalls] of paternalistic (neo)colonial relations that are reproduced based on historical power hierarchies” (Oelgemöller 2021, 19). Additionally, it proved inconsistent and overall reproductive of a liberal-statist status-quo. Murphy (2022) saw this reproduction as indicative of “a form of progressive neoliberalism, resting on goodwill and virtuous actors and actions rather than formal justice-based institutional [mechanisms] for its authority and enforcement” (3). Indeed, Pécoud (2021) listed the GCM under what he termed a ‘managerial/developmental’ global migration governance, together with programmes such as assisted return and the information campaigns on irregular migration, which will be mentioned later on in this chapter. Objective 21 of the GCM precisely declares both international preference for so-called voluntary return and the necessity to work towards the sustainable reintegration of returnees. In the following, these points are addressed in turn.

1.2.3 Assisted return and sustainable reintegration

Assisted return originated in the 1970s as a social-assistance tool to support foreigners who were financially unable to go back home independently, turning into an instrument of migration management, and therefore control, at the turn of the millennium (Lietaert et al. 2017). It typifies the legally-based relationship between management and control because it relies on illegalised migrants’ responsibility to realise the inappropriateness of their presence in host territories, and therefore consciously choose to remove themselves from them. Policy-makers present assisted return as more humane because of this choice to return by illegalised migrants; however, seen the scarcity of viable opportunities for

legal residence in host countries, this return choice can hardly be considered genuinely voluntary (Cleton and Chauvin 2020). This has led critical researchers to label assisted return as state-induced return, as said above, or 'self-deportation' (Koch 2014; Spathopoulou et al. 2022). In the face of this, international lawmakers continue upholding the primacy of assisted return over deportation because of its alleged more dignified nature, as confirmed by the formulation of the GCM's Objective 21.

In addition to the preference of assisted return over forcible removal, the GCM's objective echoes the mainstream discourse connecting assisted return with the reintegration stage that returnees undergo once back in their home country. This discourse maintains that, based on the reintegration assistance usually included in the assisted-return package and mainly used for setting up small enterprises, returnees should be able to achieve what policy language refers to as sustainable reintegration (Kuschminder 2017; Lietaert 2019). The policy objective of sustainable reintegration evoked by the GCM builds on returnees' "entrepreneurship, skills and human capital as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country of origin upon return" (GCM 2018, 30). This globalised policy objective is still very much in line with the standardising and entrepreneurialising repertoire of migration management (Oelgemöller 2017). Evidence conveys that assisted return can hardly translate in linearly-successful reintegration outcomes. Scalettaris and Gubert (2019) linked this lack of linearity to several reasons, including how reintegration assistance generally relates to illegalised migrants' return unpreparedness as well as lack of integration and asylum; distrust towards assistance givers; absence of legal re-emigration avenues; and deficient support vis-à-vis difficulties in origin countries.

The pre-return phase of assisted-return implementation is increasingly dependent on the involvement of non-state actors. Critical research on this trend has generally shown how these actors are involved by states because of their different approaches and value systems. However, they are responsabilised and professionalised in order to align with the exclusionary design of national sovereignty (Kalir and Wissink 2016; Kox and Staring 2020; Vandevordt 2017). The same is true for the post-return phase of the implementation of assisted

return; however, occurring in third countries, this one falls under the scope of the outsourcing of the EUropean border³, or its externalisation, introduced next.

1.2.4 Externalisation

Externalisation has the objective of deterring illegalised migration through the (in)direct involvement of Western countries in the state decisions, social interactions, individual subjectivities and bodily movements of Southern populations (Cuttitta 2020). North America and Australia figure as relevant externalisation centres (Williams and Mountz 2018). However, seminal research on externalisation has been carried out on the EUropean realm, mostly from a political and legal lens. Externalisation is integral to the process of Europeanisation, as it developed alongside the European Union (EU)'s internal consolidation and contributes to its gradual evolution into a political union (Lavenex 2019). This, however, did not prevent EU Member States from retaining important migration governance competences (Gabielli 2016). Guiraudon (2000) explained that national bureaucracies found political advantages in privileging the supranational level to legislate around immigration. However, Lavenex (2006) clarified that externalisation then became a strategy to dodge emerging political constraints on the communitarisation of the control of immigration. In this context, the 'off-shoring' of the EUropean border off the Mediterranean coasts couples with its 'out-sourcing' to the origin countries of migrants themselves, encompassing both traditional types of migration control and migration-prevention measures (Bialasiewicz 2012; Boswell 2003). Research on EUropean externalisation has also regarded return policy specifically, revealing the ways in which the EU is strategically (non-)used by some of its Member States; the patterns of informalisation of EU law in this domain; and how individual EU Member States continue rivalling the EU in the conclusion of readmission agreements (Panizzon 2012; Slominski and Trauner 2018; 2021).

When turning its gaze to the South, externalisation research has quite extensively dealt with the, again, mostly political and legal implications of the EU's (non-)impact on the migration governance of African states. Externalisation is conditional on interstate cooperation, meaning that African governments obtain some leeway in exchange for collaboration on migration control.

³ I use this adjective, more than in reference to the spatialisation ploys of the European Union (EU) (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013) or the totality of the territory occupied by EU Member States (Collyer 2016), to refer to the externalisation operations of both the EU and its Member States, which are independent but tend to overlap.

Cassarino (2018) argued that this has strengthened supportive autocracies. Furthermore, looking at Northern and West African migration governance, each establishment engaged with EU externalisation differently (Boyer et al. 2020; Bürgin 2016; El Qadim 2014; Geddes and Lixi 2018; Lambert 2021; Soukouna 2020; Tolay 2012; Üstübici 2019; Wolff 2014; Zardo and Cavatorta 2016). This is because, as illustrated by Adam et al. (2020) with relation to the interaction between EU objectives and policy-making by the governments of Ghana and Senegal, African states approach migration according to a continuum of intra- and international interests. Yet, making sense of Algeria's broad insulation from EU's externalisation schemes, Zardo and Loschi (2022) noted that "[t]he burgeoning literature on the EU migration policy, EU foreign policy and Euro-Mediterranean relations overall agree that, despite increasing third countries' resistance to the EU's externalization of migration control [...], power asymmetry ends up driving cooperation dynamics, and the EU succeeded so far in leveraging sceptic governments through different types of tools and institutional arrangements" (2).

European and African states are not the only determiners of externalisation. Lavenex (2016) reflected on how international organisations (IOs) such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) play the counterweights, subcontractors and transmitters of policies and values in the 'multilevelling' of EU externalisation. As a prominent implementer of migration management, IOM has been particularly well researched in its organisational identity, practices and discourse. IOM went from being an agency charged with Europe's overpopulation problem after World War II to a UN-related entity with a wide mandate in more recent times (Pécoud 2018). IOM has been variously described as complicit in the racialised stratification of labour integral to global capitalism, a protector of the global nation-state architecture, a neoliberal means to global rebordering in contemporary times, an international sounding board for migration management narratives, and both a humanitarian and deportation entrepreneur (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010; Ashutosh and Mountz 2011; Bradley 2020; Georgi 2010; Lecadet 2020; Pécoud 2015). While posing as neutral because of its allegedly technical approach, IOM's work is project-based, causing it to implement donor states' desiderata uncritically (Pécoud 2018). As such, IOM has historically had anti-Communist, exclusionary and colonialist leanings (Bradley 2023).

Oliveira Martins and Strange (2019) registered that "the growing externalization of EU migration policies has opened up the door to new actors that became [increasingly] central in the political economy of migration. Here we find NGOs

and rescue entrepreneurs, local politicians, private security companies, technology developers, security and defence industries, and civil society [organizations]. Their participation in this phenomenon is multifaceted and multi-layered” (197). These actors have received comparatively less research attention, in a literature field mostly producing “univocal, Euro-centric and state-centric visions” (Cuttitta 2020, 9). Reacting to the specific finding that “studies on the relationship between NGOs/CSOs and externalisation are still extremely rare and limited in scope” (Cuttitta 2020, 2), a few recent works have focused on that. Cuttitta (2020) wrote about the unintended effects of these organisations’ involvement in the disorderly migration regimes of Tunisia and Egypt, showing how organisations which receive money from host countries may be critical of border control, while others which act on migration voluntarily may adopt more restrictive stances. Still on Tunisia, Dini and Giusa (2020) elucidated the transformation of civil-society organisations (CSOs) into intermediaries between externalisation and its target groups, juxtaposing this with the seclusion of critical actors from what the authors provocatively dubbed ‘uncivil society’. Pastore and Roman (2020) studied how certain non-state actors participate in externalisation while having quite critical perceptions of the risk and security framing underpinning it. Aguillon (2020) confirmed how externalisation may include reluctant non-state actors, while others may retract altogether from processes that they perceive as not credible.

Flanking the CSOs, migrants themselves are intermediating the outsourcing of migration management, often from migration industries characterised by racial hierarchies (Maâ 2021; Magallanes-Gonzalez 2021). Migrant intermediaries do and undo what is known as ‘borderwork’, or the re-inscription of the border, turned increasingly ubiquitous (Balibar 2009), in mundane activities performed by grassroots actors (Rumford 2013). Within the migrant category, (assisted) returnees, individually or in associations, perform migration-information campaigns and schemes targeting the so-called root causes of irregular migration. Evoking their traumatic experiences of migration, awareness-raising involves returnees in affective borderwork as a form of migration control whereby emotions bear upon individual subjectivities (Vammen 2021). Additionally, returnees play with externalisation scripts, including the ‘returnee’ label, to access advantageous opportunities (Shaidrova 2022; Vammen 2021). In this dissertation, I enrich this expanding body of work on non-state actors in externalisation, choosing the West African country of The Gambia as the geographical context to do so.

1.3 A breeding ground for externalisation: The Gambia

Tiniest country on mainland Africa and former British colony, The Gambia – a remarkably poor country – is home to a growing, young and mostly urban 2-million population. This population is divided into eight main ethnic groups and related languages, of which the largest are the Mandinka, the Fulani, and the Wolof (IOM 2017). The main religion followed across ethnic groups is Islam. Sufi Islam, also known as spiritual or mystical Islam, is preponderant in the country. This religion and longstanding cultural norms determine most of the country's social life, where polygyny is widespread and families are extended. From an administrative point of view, The Gambia is a Presidential Republic divided into seven regions, corresponding to so-called local government areas and districts (Juffermans and McGlynn 2009). The Gambian economy revolves around agriculture, tourism and remittances, and unemployment is very high. 90,000 Gambians were estimated to reside abroad in 2015, mainly spread between the US, the UK, Spain, other European countries and West Africa (IOM 2017). By 2019, emigrants have grown up to 118,483 (Migrants Refugees 2022). In 2016, 11,929 Gambians were recorded to have entered EU territory by sea (IOM 2017). Between 2014 and 2019, undocumented arrivals to Europe by mainly young Gambians amounted to 40,000 (ECRE 2020).

The land journey towards the EU through Libya takes the name of 'backway', around which multiple motivations, aspirations, capabilities and constraints assemble (Conrad Suso 2019; Schapendonk 2020). According to Gaibazzi (2019), this is the continuation of a historical and cultural predisposition of the Gambian population to emigrate. (Illegalised) migration is often seen as the consequence of the diaspora's silence on the hardship of being abroad as well as peer and family pressure. More than anything, it is a livelihood and emancipation strategy, undertaken especially by young men for the well-being and development of entire families and communities as well as an escape route from structural problems. As such, the mere idea of Europe as a fantastic prospect of wealth brings hope and reassurance even to those Gambians who cannot manage to actually move. Emigration and immobility mix with family and social dynamics, including polygyny, bearing the endogenous competition which causes a large part of backway departures, on the one hand, and may be at the origin of post-migration family dispersal, on the other. In this context, migration becomes existential, in that it makes and unmakes the spatio-temporal landscape of intersubjective relations interweaving The Gambia's social fabric.

The above overview should give a sense of the motivations causing The Gambia to become an important target of externalisation for the West. The conditions became ripe with the end of Yahya Jammeh's 22-year-long dictatorship in late 2016. Jammeh replaced the country's first president Jawara in a military coup in 1994. He then went on erecting a regime which perpetrated severe human-right breaches and estranged the international community. Jammeh additionally played with dividing his people ethnically and reprimanded those who left the country (Hultin et al. 2017). In the 2016 elections, Gambian citizens ousted the dictator thanks to the heavy involvement of the diaspora (Nzally 2018; Perfect 2022). ECOWAS threatened a military intervention to guarantee the installation of the successful Barrow, after Jammeh showed unwilling to step down. Consequently, Jammeh fled the country and Barrow started his presidency in January 2017 (Hartmann 2017). Adama Barrow's triumph was not without trouble. The 'three years jotna' movement born in 2019 was unsuccessful in preventing the president from prolonging his mandate to five years. Nevertheless, Barrow was re-confirmed at the head of the government in the largely non-violent elections of 2021 (Perfect 2022).

The onset of Barrow's government coincided with heavy investments by the EU. In February 2017, the EU Commission issued a press release entitled "EU opening a new chapter of relations with The Gambia" (EU Commission 2017). This chapter involved making immediately available a 75 million euros package and spearheading a 150 million euros one for the medium term. The money was to be employed in different sectors, including infrastructures, food security, trade, democratisation, and, of course, migration. The latter was to be financed through the European Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) instituted with the 2015 Valletta Summit as a reaction to the so-called migration crisis of that year (Zardo 2020). The EUTF, among other projects, underpinned The Gambia, EU, and IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration launched in November 2017 as well as the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC) (IOM 2017b). Since 2017, several reports filled with data have publicised the employment-making efforts of YEP and the assisted-return numbers of IOM. According to the latter, assisted returnees amounted to 3,500 in the 2017-2019 period. 2000 people out of that number were said to have accessed reintegration assistance (IOM 2019). The volume of EU's funds, however, has raised doubts among the population as to the actual impact of the projects operationalised. As an example, artists Bilal Bin Kebba and Gee have referred in a song entitled Tekki Fii – the name given the EUTF-sponsored umbrella intervention for tackling the so-called root causes of irregular migration which in English translates as 'make it here' – to the high number of

backway migrants who were still leaving The Gambia in 2019, despite the 11 million euros invested by the EU in YEP for youth employment.

EU-sponsored migration management in The Gambia has not stopped at return and reintegration, but equally involved the development of a National Migration Policy in 2020 and the establishment of a National Coordination Mechanism on Migration in 2019 led by the Office of the Vice President. IOM provided technical support for this as well as for the drafting of The Gambia's National Voluntary Review Report on GCM implementation and most of the initiatives mentioned therein. These initiatives regarded the areas of migration-related data collection, labour creation and mobility, spreading of information on migration, diaspora engagement for development and border management. In the report, the Gambian government was said to be weaker on the side of the fight against human smuggling and trafficking, because of relevant legislation either not introduced or reviewed (Government of The Gambia 2022). All these post-dictatorship developments spurred the erection of an externalised migration-management machine in The Gambia, on which only a few works virtually exist. The earliest reports touched upon the delicate balance that the consolidating Gambian government has to strike between donor funds (conditional upon emigration prevention and returns) and the political responsibility towards its population (largely reliant on remittances). They also presented some EU-sponsored projects which were under way, including the reintegration services of the European Return and Reintegration Network (ERRIN), the awareness-raising by the returnee group Youth Against Irregular Migration (YAIM) financed through German funds, and the Migration Information Centres managed by IOM and the Gambian National Youth Council (NYC) (Altrogge and Zanker 2019; Zanker and Altrogge 2017). Additionally, Cham and Adam (2021) looked into the discursive framing of cooperation around migration control of different stakeholders, comparing pre- and post-dictatorship phases. The authors specifically noted how government and civil-society actors have alternatively framed the decision (not) to work with the EU on deportations as resistance against neo-colonial requests, an attempt to preserve European aid, or the need to respond to domestic economic and security concerns. Further on this, Zanker and Altrogge (2022) approached the governmental decision to impose a moratorium on the deportation of Gambian citizens from Europe in 2019, understanding it as an attempt to preserve its fragile sovereignty vis-à-vis the neo-colonial requests of the Global North. Finally, Aucoin (2022) brought externalisation in conversation with borderwork as well as showed how the Gambian government appropriates the externalisation agenda for the sake of internal politics. The Gambia is a context of intensive out-migration and rapid

unfolding of the externalisation project. Its non-state landscape has virtually received no in-depth research attention, as most of existing post-2016 research has either zoomed in on governmental issues or approached the migration-management landscape and the change in migration narratives broadly. Consequently, I hereby investigate grassroots participation in externalised return migration management.

1.4 Research sub-questions, theoretical approaches and chapter overview

This dissertation aims to establish how the participation of Gambian returnees and non-state actors in externalised return migration management affects its practice and discourse. This aim requires shedding more light on return migration management's practice and discourse and then seeing how this is perceived and acted upon by Gambian non-state actors. I address these points in turn in the upcoming studies, by which I mean the specific articulation of methods, data and theory that I mobilised to respond to each of my research sub-questions. However, these studies should not be seen in isolation: their reciprocal relations are explained in the remainder of this chapter. Each of them is approached through a specific theoretical framework. Indeed, the research process, in how it unravelled between data collection and analysis, commanded a certain flexibility in experimenting with and combining different theoretical strands to grasp as many implications as possible of the topics at hand. As such, this dissertation should be seen as an assemblage of theoretical and conceptual lenses from different fields and disciplines, each allowing me to make sense of specific problems within a coherent whole. This assemblage of subordinate research questions and related lenses, introduced by the specific research gap motivating each, is disentangled below.

The first study, contained in Chapter three, revolves around assisted return as an instance of contested humanitarianism, in that it cares for illegalised migrants through the chance to escape precarious lives by returning in a facilitated manner; however, this precariousness is fabricated by host countries in the first place (Bendixsen 2020). This connects to the concurrence of securitisation and humanitarianism in migration and border operations, which is related to the symbiosis between migration management and control already underlined (Chimni 2000; Cuttitta 2018; Fassin 2011; Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Ticktin 2011; Walters 2010). Lietaert (2022) posited that a specific care/control balance exists

in the assisted-return frameworks of different countries. Comparative studies of assisted return have so far mainly been descriptive, whereas analytical works either concentrated on a single aspect of the measure or country (Beltman 2012; Caselli et al. 2022; Cleton and Chauvin 2020; Cleton and Schweitzer 2020; Crane and Lawson 2020; EMN 2016; Kalir and Wissink 2016; Koser and Kuschminder 2015; Kox and Staring 2020; Mahar 2020; Vandevoordt 2017). To fill this gap, I will instead evaluate how care and control relate to each other in actual national configurations rather than abstractly, comparing what I call the regulatory, organisational and practical assisted-return layers that I have adapted from Lietaert's framework (2022). The empirical material I will use for this analysis derives from desk research and remote interviews conducted with key stakeholders in 2020. In this first study, the body of work on contested humanitarianism appeared appropriate to explore the care/control balance of assisted return. The related policy objective of sustainable reintegration commanded a discursive analysis. For that, Nay's (2014) framework on the legitimisation process of policy constructs was embraced next, as detailed below.

The second study, featured in Chapter four, deals with the policy objective of sustainable reintegration, whose relevance I have already talked about in relation to its incorporation in the GCM. Despite this incorporation, some discursive reviews and a few attempts at operationalising it (Black et al. 2004; Danish Refugee Council 2011; Filipi et al. 2013; IOM 2015; 2017a; Koser and Kuschminder 2015; Strand and Aalen 2016; Whyte and Hirslund 2013), the policy objective of sustainable reintegration remains ambiguous in its meaning and origins (Kuschminder 2017; Özerdem and Payne 2019). I contribute to clarifying this ambiguity by reviewing a list of close to 100 texts by various stakeholders about sustainable reintegration and analysing them in the light of an adaptation of Nay's (2014) model on the legitimisation of policy constructs. This model encompasses their early normalisation, fragmentation, assimilation and renewed normalisation. Sustainable reintegration encounters the realm of reintegration assistance in the externalisation of return migration management. Making sense of how non-state actors from the context of high cultural predisposition to migration of The Gambia could be included in it, called again for a different theoretical framework. This is the Sociology of Translation (SoT) linked to Actor-Network Theory (ANT), put forward next.

The third study, contained in Chapter five, has to do with the participation of non-state actors in externalisation. In a mostly Euro- and state-centric research field (Cuttritta 2020), a limited number of works have dealt with the unpredictability and

defiance demonstrated by Southern actors involved in externalised migration management. Their mundane operations feed into what has come to be framed as a messy and non-linear migration regime, where manifestations of borderwork abound (Andersson 2014; Bartels 2017; Cold-Ravnkilde 2021; Cuttitta 2020; Frowd 2018; Horvath et al. 2017; Rumford 2012; Sciortino 2004; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Vammen 2021). Analysing ethnographic material, I enrich this literature body by turning to an under-researched geographical context and focusing exclusively on locally-embedded non-state actors. This allows me to grasp how non-hegemonic actors are networked into constructing their time-space and therefore bring the concepts of externalisation, migration regime and borderwork in conversation with that of subaltern geopolitics (Pallister-Wilkins 2021; Sharp 2011; Smith 2011). Furthermore, I will instrumentalise a theoretical framework utilised relatively little in the externalisation field. This is the Sociology of Translation (SoT), embedded in Actor-Network Theory (ANT). The two have been developed by sociologists such as Latour (2005) and Callon (1984). These approaches see phenomena as evolving networks rather than fixed entities, appearing appropriate to make sense of the fluidity of borderwork within the migration regime. Following SoT and ANT, the evolution of networks depends on the amount and durability of connections between an initiating actant and both human and non-human actors. The enrolment of these actors in resulting socio-material networks is not without consequence, but inevitably leads to an alteration of the original entity or design, identified in ANT language as translation. SoT and ANT manifested fruitful to look at how the incorporation of Gambian non-state actors expands the reach of externalisation but inevitably alters it in unforeseeable ways. Yet, these approaches have been judged deficient when it comes to dealing with economic asymmetries as well as historical legacies (Barry 2013). The following research sub-questions address precisely the relationship between these two dimensions and externalised return migration management in The Gambia. I therefore singled out two more theoretical approaches as a complement to this ANT-inspired analysis: moral economy and coloniality. They will be introduced in turn.

Turning to another facet of non-state-actor participation in externalised return migration management in The Gambia, the fourth study, appearing in Chapter six, approaches migration-information campaigns. Existing works have explored their discursive and political implications as well as more or less directly addressed the dynamics of returnees' involvement in them as instances of participation in a racialised migration industry (Cappi and Musarò 2022; Cranston et al. 2018; Fine and Walters 2021; Maâ 2021; Maâ et al. 2022; Magallanes-Gonzalez 2021; Musarò 2019; Shaidrova 2022; Vammen 2021;

Williams 2020). However, these works have not looked in depth into how returnees morally judge the capitalist dynamics inherent in the migration industry they belong to. I will approach this gap through an innovative theoretical lens applied to ethnographic material collected inside and outside of the Migrants as Messengers (MaM) sensitisation project led by IOM in The Gambia between 2019 and 2022. I will start from Fine and Walters' (2021) identification of a 'politics of voice' in how returnee stories are bent for the purpose of awareness-raising. Then, I will mobilise the concept of moral economy. Originating from the historically-informed inquiries of Thompson (1971) and Scott (1976), the notion of moral economy has also been connoted as a framework of circulating norms and emotions (Fassin 2005). Later works have re-connected moral economy to more radical explorations of the interaction between social norms and economic exchange, especially with relation to the repercussions of capitalist logics being perceived as (il)legitimate, and the translation of political economy's abstract mechanisms on the ground (Palomera and Vetta 2016; Siméant 2015). Fusing the moral economy's more recent conceptualisations with the notion of politics of voice, I will define the concept of 'moral economy of voice'. This refers to the casting in moral terms of the clashes between Gambian returnees and IOM around some of awareness-raising's capitalist logics. Through the utilisation of the notion of moral economy in relation to returnees' participation in externalisation, one can reflect on the (lack of) endurance of externalised migration management when grassroots actors are faced with mechanisms of inequality and exploitation. Yet, this notion has the limitation of generally failing to locate these mechanisms within a global matrix of (neo)colonial power. The coloniality lens illustrated below was picked in consequence of this shortcoming.

The fifth and last study, present in Chapter 7, adds another piece to the puzzle of elucidating the implications of Gambian non-state actors' being networked into externalised return migration management. As already said, returnee groups participate in externalised migration-management by partnering up with IOs and other international and local partners. However, the associative dimension of assisted returnees in countries of origin has been regrettably under-researched compared to deportee and refugee groups (Bouilly 2008; Lecadet 2017; Pian 2010; Pincock et al. 2021). I address this shortcoming by retracing the birth and evolution of a Gambian returnee association and zooming in on a project that the group has implemented together with a European NGO active in the field of sports. To get to the bottom of the coexistence of different epistemologies in how the design and implementation of the project is approached by these two actors, I will employ the coloniality lens sharpened by scholars such as Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2000). In this theoretical framework, coloniality is accompanied by

subaltern knowledge and what is called 'border thinking', or non-hegemonic actors' unique thinking and acting from the edges of the 'colonial difference' (Mignolo 2000). Using ethnographic material collected during the unfolding of the project, I will show the challenges and limits of the attempt to disentangle coloniality, subaltern knowledge and border thinking in an intricate field. In the light of this, I will reflect on the limits of the coloniality designs of externalised migration management and civil-society. Taken together, realising these five research aims entails some valuable contribution to the domain of migration studies at large and the understanding of externalised return migration management in particular. The next section goes through them. Before moving to it, a summative list of this dissertation's sub-questions is offered below:

1. *How do care and control interact in the configuration of assisted return across six European countries?*
2. *How has the meaning of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration evolved since its emergence?*
3. *What are the implications of Gambian non-state actors' enrolment in externalised return migration management?*
4. *How do IOM and the returnees morally cast their clashing over certain capitalist logics of the industry of awareness-raising?*
5. *How do coloniality and border thinking manifest themselves in a partnership between a returnee group and a European non-governmental organisation (NGO)?*

1.5 Contribution and relevance

As explained, this dissertation's main research aim encompasses two, interconnecting foci: first, the externalisation of return migration management; second, the interplay between this externalisation and Gambian non-state actors. Its contributions are correspondingly essentially double. First, this research fits into the large body of literature re-politicising (return) migration management and unveiling its neoliberal underpinnings (De Jong 2016; Geiger and Pécoud 2010; Ihlamur-Öner 2021; Kalm 2010; Oelgemöller 2017; Walters 2015). It does so with two takes on assisted return and sustainable reintegration which build upon but do not resemble any existing work on the matter. While

critical research on assisted return has definitely been conducted in the last decades, particularly with an accent on the discursive construction of voluntariness and not from the systematic and comparative position I take, publications on sustainable reintegration have mostly remained at the level of the operationalisation of indicators and definitions, to measure the phenomenon rather than take issue with it analytically (e.g. Black et al. 2004; Koser and Kuschminder 2015; Kuschminder 2017). This signals the tightening of the cosy relationship between academic knowledge and policy-making, whereby policy categories, frames, definitions and objectives are taken for granted by scholars and researchers (Stierl 2022). For instance, academics have often lent their expertise to IOM, buttressing the latter status' as veritable hub for knowledge-production (Pécoud 2018). Arguably, this contributes to blurring the boundaries between research and consultancy, which would not be a bad thing in itself if it did not avoid "do[ing] harm" (Stierl 2022, 1098, emphasis in the original) to the deadly and exclusionary European border regime. Differently, I adopt a critical stance towards assisted-return programmes and sustainable reintegration, leading me to the peripheral path – less in the former case, more in the latter – of critically questioning these programmes and constructs rather than evaluating their impact.

In addition to the above, the second main research aim speaks to the decentring turn in migration studies. Calling for pluralising viewpoints, disciplines and knowledge-production, Triandafyllidou (2020), echoed by Zardo and Wolff (2022), set out her decentring agenda as based on problematising clear-cut divisions between origin, destination and transit countries; taking seriously the role of local non-state and private actors; and refraining from side-lining rural areas over urban ones. Referring to EU studies more broadly, Orbie et al. (2023) have nevertheless cautioned against the depoliticising potential of the concept vis-à-vis more disruptive projects such as the decolonial. Indeed, decentring may become equal to re-calibrating EU action rather than do away with epistemological and material imbalances of power. Reflecting on how this study fares in the light of the above directions, I approached it from a place of multiplicity of theoretical sources, focusing on returnees and non-state actors over bureaucratic or Northern ones. Furthermore, rather than following the lead of existing works which have emphasised the agency of Southern actors within externalisation, I attempted to unpack the relationship between these actors' own agendas with the latter's, against the background of differing values and understanding between them. However, I am aware that juxtaposing agendas entails maintaining certain Eurocentric language and epistemological stances, including the externalisation, returnee or non-state-actor terminology. This may

be considered one of the decentring agenda epistemological quagmires, as, to question global power imbalances, one is pushed to reify the metropole/periphery dichotomy and its implicit subordination of the latter. The challenge to take the colonial difference seriously while being mindful of dichotomous thinking is a red thread running through the whole dissertation. If accomplishing decentring has proved arduous, materially overturning the coloniality of power through this agglomerate of written pages is not even a question. Yet, as a Southern-European woman researching the Global South while carrying her White privilege, I can read the whole research process as, although far from definitive or complete, a personal decolonisation journey, some elements of which are discussed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 2

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has situated this dissertation within the body of literature on (non-state-actor participation in) the externalisation of return migration management, identifying the research gaps which inform my research sub-questions. These questions called for a qualitative methodology, which, in turn, entails reflexivity over the researcher's positionality vis-à-vis the research process. In the following, I will first introduce the constructivist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and qualitative methodology of this dissertation. Then, I will detail the methods of data collection and analysis of the different studies composing this dissertation, providing an in-depth focus on the challenges of doing ethnography during pandemic times. I finally deal with issues of positionality, concentrating on two main topics: White research in Africa, together with the dynamics of relationship-building on the ethnographic 'field', and the extent to which ethical questions may be elucidated from the standpoint of affirmative politics.

2.2 My ontological, epistemological and methodological stance

Social science research rests on particular ontological and epistemological commitments on the part of the researcher. They have to do with the researcher's stance on the nature of the reality she is looking at and the how of what can be known about that reality, respectively. Marsch et al. (2018) explained that two broad ontological perspectives exist, namely foundationalism and anti-foundationalism, also known as realism and constructivism. To them, two broad epistemological views are connected, namely positivism and interpretivism. Quantitative methods of data collection are broadly associated with the former, whereas qualitative ones are commonly employed within the latter⁴. Simply put, foundationalists hold that a social reality exists out there, independently of the observer's knowledge. With the rigorous application of quantitative methods and striving to be neutral and value-free, researchers can produce objective knowledge about cause-effect relationships within this social reality, as if the latter had discoverable laws similar to the ones found in the natural world. For the anti-foundationalists, no social world exists independently

⁴ Middle-ground positions are not uncommon. Critical realism, for instance, embraces a realist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, preferring a mixed-method methodology.

of its social construction by social actors, including the researcher. This is what is called double hermeneutics, according to which “the world is interpreted by the actors (one hermeneutic level), and their interpretation is interpreted by the observer (a second hermeneutic level). For [constructivist] researchers, the aim becomes to explore their own interpretation of the interpretations made by actors about their behaviour” (Lowndes et al. 2018, 9). The authors explained that constructivists do not rule out the possibility of explanation, but that the explanation of social facts and behaviours comes from the *understanding of why* people act in a certain way based on the meanings they hold about the world they live in. A qualitative methodology, seeking in-depth insight into actors’ frames of meaning and interpretation through interviewing and observation, appears more appropriate for hermeneutical research. Seen that, however, the researcher constructs reality just as much as her research participants, she is encouraged to reflect on her social, cultural and political position in relation to her research findings. This is not for cancelling out the biases which may affect a purportedly objective reading of social mechanisms, but to foreground the determinants of the second hermeneutic level, without which the first would not even be possible. Many researchers in this tradition do not stop at reflecting on their situatedness, but spell out their normative commitments to the particular topic they study.

Far from thinking that a social reality exists independently of the subject’s knowledge, or that, even if this reality existed, the researcher could write off her hermeneutical level by explaining away her biases, I embrace a constructivist ontology, interpretivist epistemology and qualitative methodology. This means that I subscribe to the idea that social entities only have causal power in relation to social actors’ understanding of them and that, to the extent that these social entities are exclusionary and violent, I contribute to their exposing and potential dismantling through my research. For this kind of research, it is therefore paramount to unpack relevant actors’ interpretations and meanings, including mine. I will achieve this by combining a number of qualitative methods and reflecting on my own positionality and situated impact on the research process.

Researchers employing qualitative methods prefer trying and gaining a deeper understanding of single and situated circumstances, events and experiences. First of all, they would normally not design hypotheses or variables, but keep an open-ended perspective on the subject matter. This also means engendering an iterative and sensitive relationship between theory and empirical findings, as both inform each other in a non-linear way. This is what Cerwonka and Malkki (2008) explained as improvising theory, or tacking between ethnographic

insights and the concepts of theory. As introduced in Table 1, directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005), whereby “a theory or relevant research findings [are guidance] for initial codes” (1277), which are then sharpened based on the insight produced by this first round of coding, is the method of data analysis I have used the most throughout. Additionally, researchers in the qualitative tradition would commonly eschew generalisations, because facts and understandings are contextual and the observer is not simply biased, but an active constructor of the reality she describes (Vromen 2018). In this research too, generalisation was never a fundamental aim. Indeed, I believe in the uniqueness of the context and the subjectivity of the experiences I have studied as well as the partiality and situatedness of my understanding of things. However, certain findings from my ethnographic work may resonate with insight on the messiness of the migration regime generated from different standpoints. Some of the similarities, for instance, found between the Gambian case and research produced on the incorporation of migrants and returnees in awareness-raising against irregular migration in other North and West African contexts, are pointed out in Chapter six. Furthermore, I maintain that the validity of a study should not be measured through the extent to which the research process followed the tenets of the scientific method, but the depth of the ethical dedication of the researcher towards her research participants. I will elaborate on this extensively later on in the chapter.

Before moving on, however, a clarification on this dissertation’s constructivist ontology is in order. The broad ontological positions I have introduced above are actually very varied and composite within. Constructivism, indeed, may be more inclined towards so-called post-structuralism and therefore stress the centrality of language in the construction of reality around us. At the other end of the spectrum, constructivism may maintain its interest in discourse and representation while also recognising the role played by material reality in buttressing them. Broadly speaking, these varieties correspond to what Marsch (2018) called thin and thick constructivism. I do not intend to pick either of these two sides; yet, I want to nuance my constructivist situation by specifying that it encompasses both an attention for language and materiality, as, I contend, they concur in shaping the social construction of the reality surrounding us. It is for this reason that, pointing to two representative instances, I dissect return migration management’s discourse on sustainable reintegration in Chapter four, while zooming in on the materiality of local civil-society actors’ enrolment in externalisation in Chapter three.

2.3 Doing qualitative research in pandemic times: in-person and remote methods of data collection

In the following, I will introduce the different qualitative methods I have utilised to approach my specific research questions. As I display in Table 1, the reader should consider the studies of Chapter three and four as separate from the broader ethnography informing the studies of Chapter five, six and seven. This is because of, as explained in Chapter one, the discerning of the two foci of analysis underpinning this research: the practice and discourse of externalised return migration management *and* the dynamics of incorporation of Gambian non-state actors in it. However, some methods are relevant to different studies *across* the two foci (e.g. desk-based research leading to the analysis of policy, legal and organisation documents as well as remote interviewing). Following the table, to contrast and compare the implications of using different qualitative methods to approach diverse research questions during a global pandemic, I will embark on dedicated discussions of the methods of textual and visual analysis, remote interviewing and in-situ ethnography (Vromen 2018). However, it should be noted that the ethnography informing the latter three studies of this dissertation encompasses desk-based research on relevant documents and audio-visual material; semi-structured, remote and in-person, formal and informal interviews; and participant observation.

Table 1. Overview of data collection and analysis across the studies

| Study and chapter | Research question | Type of data | Method of data collection | Access to respondents (if applicable) | Time-frame of data collection | Method of data analysis |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Study one (Chapter three). | How do care and control interact in the configuration of assisted return across six European countries? | Law and policy documents; interview transcripts. | Desk-based research; in-depth, semi-structured, remote interviews (n=18) and written correspondence (n=10) carried out by two UNU-CRIS research interns and a UGent Master's student in Social Work. | Direct approaching of potential respondents (mainly through email and phone call) based on the relevant profiles identified during the desk-based phase. | July-December 2020. | Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |
| Study two (Chapter four). | How has the meaning of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration evolved since its emergence? | Texts (n=99) coming from policy, law and different types of organisations. | Desk-based research. | / | October-March 2019. | Summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |
| Study three, four and five (Chapter five, six and seven). | What are the implications of Gambian non-state actors' enrolment in externalised return migration management? How do IOM and the returnees morally cast their clashing over certain capitalist logics of the industry of awareness-raising? How do coloniality and border thinking manifest themselves in a partnership between a returnee group and a European non-governmental organisation (NGO)? | Policy, research and report documents. Digital audio-visual material. Interview transcripts and field notes. | Ethnography, including desk-based research; semi-structured, formal and informal, remote and in-person interviews (out of which, both off- and on-record, n=42 formal interviews); and participant observation. | I started from approaching the relevant stakeholders emerging from the desk-based research. I was aided in this by two UGent Master's students in Social Work who were carrying out an internship at Caritas The Gambia before my first fieldwork stay. I then enlarged my circle based on these first contacts. | In-person: March 2020, Remotely, from March 2020 to September 2021. In-person: between September 2021 and October 2021. Remotely, between October 2021 and March 2022. In-person, between March 2022 and July 2022. | Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |

2.3.1 Words and images of return migration management: document and visual analysis

In the interpretivist tradition, discourse analysis is predicated upon the conviction that power and knowledge are two sides of the same coin, and that language is representative of broader socio-political dynamics. This is particularly true of governmental policies or the communication material of (non-)governmental organisations (Vromen 2018). In the study of Chapter four, I performed a summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005) of 99 texts referencing the policy objective of sustainable reintegration to I unpack its evolution and legitimisation. These texts were gathered from the repositories of actors active in the migration-management field, namely IOM, the EU, migration-related NGOs and scholars. As I approached them, I did not look for the frequency, but the meaning of the usage of the term 'sustainable reintegration' in context. The analysis of document material was instrumental for the studies of Chapter four and five too. Vromen (2018) highlighted that discourse analysis is recently expanding to social-media and visual-material analysis, being digital posts and images as meaning-dense as traditional written text. Indeed, as part of the efforts made to feed my ethnography while being physically away from The Gambia because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I scanned the textual and visual material published by IOM The Gambia as well as two returnee groups on their Twitter and Facebook profiles between 2018 and 2021, as a background preparation to the ethnographic research on returnees' participation in EU-funded awareness-raising campaigns on illegalised migration contained in Chapter four. I approached this material through a critical visual methodology, combining the semiotic analysis of the images with critical discourse analysis (Rose 2001). While scrutinising texts and images gives a sense of the inscription of political power into a certain communicative matrix, exploring the how and why different actors participate in its erection requires a direct engagement with their mind frames and perspectives, accessed through the data-collection technique introduced next.

2.3.2 Semi-structured interviewing: the case of remote exchanges

If interpretive research is about grasping the understandings and interpretations of social actors, interviewing is the qualitative tool preferred by researchers to access them. Interviews are in-depth, qualitative forms of human interaction. Semi-structured interviews leave the space for open-ended questions while still maintaining some pre-determined direction in the topics that the exchange is

supposed to cover (Alsaawi 2014). In this dissertation, semi-structured interviews have been one of the methods of data collection for all the studies except for the second. Semi-structured, formal and informal, remote and in-situ interviews are part of the broader ethnography carried out on non-state-actor incorporation in externalised return migration management in The Gambia. However, in this section, I seek to discuss remote interviewing by itself, in connection with the remote exchanges informing the study of Chapter three on the practice of return migration management. This is because I developed some reflections as to the ethical differences characterising the holding of remote exchanges in the different contexts of Europe and The Gambia.

Both the interviews at the basis of study two and part of those performed within the ethnography on Gambian participation in externalisation were conducted remotely, as a consequence of the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic a few months after the start of this research journey. The social, political and economic implications of Covid-19 worldwide are hard to overstate. The consequences of the pandemic certainly hit hard on early-career researchers like me, about to implement their carefully devised research projects only to see them unexpectedly disrupted. Because of the frantic rhythm of academia, Covid-19 setting in could not mean, however, pausing the doctoral research indefinitely, but had to spur the re-adaptation of it. Remote interviewing is one of the ways in which this re-adaptation occurred. Cornejo et al. (2023) explained that remote means of research are not new in academia. The literature has highlighted both negative and positive aspects of this type of interviewing. On the one hand, they make it harder to develop trust bonds with the respondents and they depend upon respondents' access to digital means, which is hard to get especially in situations of vulnerability. On the other, they bring the experiences of the interviewer and the interviewee closer, both interacting from a home or private space and, in the case of Covid-19, dealing with the same kind of global calamity. Gruber et al. (2021) differentiated synchronous and asynchronous forms of remote interaction, which can involve video, voice or text. They claimed that asynchronous text-based communication makes it harder to grasp what they call social cues, namely pieces of communication that go beyond the spoken word. Yet, they accommodate more symmetrical power relations because the respondent can react at their own pace and the gender, class and racial characteristics of the interviewer are less intrusive. Video-based interactions, on the other hand, are as intrusive and asymmetrical as face-to-face ones, and they are also subjected to the intervention of technical problems.

The study contained in Chapter four deals with the care/control nexus in the configuration of assisted return in different European countries. To give insight into the implementation strategies of counselling – or the sessions social workers have with illegalised migrants in connection with their return plans, remote stakeholder interviews were conducted by a team of two research interns and a Master's student I closely supervised. Power-asymmetry issues were less relevant in these exchanges with stakeholders located, just like the interviewers, in the Global North. What emerged more significantly was the trade-off between ethnographic observation, allowing the researcher to substantiate the interview claims with her own views on the topic, and respondents' original elaborations on their own practices, whose depth and lucidity were arguably deepened by the temporary distance from in-presence work. The remote exchanges had with Gambian respondents – both local NGO, IO and CSO workers and returnees – manifested more clearly the power and technological asymmetries between the interviewees and I. These exchanges covered almost all the types listed by Gruber et al. (2021), as, because of The Gambia's widely unstable internet connection, video calls would soon turn into voice calls and voice calls alternate with messaging. The protracted and compelled being away from the *physical* field (more on this concept will come in the next section) sparked doubts as to whether it was ethical to reach out to respondents during a global pandemic to ask about migration-related issues. It also made me reflect more fundamentally about the epistemology of qualitative research, rejecting positivist ideas about the validity of research findings but still broadly doubting the fruitfulness of interviewing as a method of data collection when decoupled from some sort of ethnographic observation. Yet, because of the turn the pandemic took, these remote exchanges ended up being just one phase of the whole research journey. Almost all Gambian respondents with whom I have communicated online, I have met in person too. I may argue that keeping in touch during the pandemic – beyond allowing me to see what these actors were doing in exceptional times – created some feeling of, however different in degree, my respondents and I sharing the same struggle. This link would come in handy when I returned to The Gambia in September 2021 for resuming my ethnography, the contours of which I will draw in the next section.

2.3.3 Doing ethnography during a pandemic: a critical look at a (neo)colonial practice

Ghoddousi and Page (2020) introduced ethnography as a composite “epistemological orientation towards the field than a specific method per se” (2). Made popular by the discipline of anthropology, it historically involved White male

researchers going to faraway places to immerse themselves in the othered cultures of colonised peoples between the 19th and 20th century. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2019) elaborated on the colonial underpinnings of ethnography. He sketched a convincing overview of the evolution of ethnography and its imbrication with different types of colonialisms. If anthropological ethnography was rooted in the long-standing colonial interest in 're-searching' the Other to assess her humanity, it nowadays dovetails with the surveillance turn spurred by so-called global terrorism and what is known as data capitalism. In practice, ethnography has been criticised, deconstructed and re-adapted in different disciplinary turns. Feminist researchers, in particular, have appropriated it as a means to uncover the everyday of politics, away from master explanations of social phenomena through grand theories and abstract categories (Ghoddousi and Page 2020). This has led to various reflections on what ethnography in the "field" entails, especially from the domain of feminist geography. Hyndman (2001) criticised the idea of fieldwork being a masculinist endeavour, because it allows to recount a situated story rather than an abstract narrative. However, the situatedness of fieldwork does not bind it to a specific time and place of exploration, but makes it a cross-cutting political project. The field is not an essentialised space out there, but a network of human and material nodes which extends into the home and the personal life of the researcher. Repeating what I have highlighted earlier on, Hyndman (2001) warned against making knowledge of the experience gathered on the field. This resonates with Kristensen's (2020) suggestion to see fieldwork as addition rather than revelation. The author encouraged to deal with what she termed the politics of location, pushing researchers to flock to over-researched places relevant to the European creation of crisis and emergencies. Because of this collusion between academia and politics, we are called to declare our complicity with exclusionary designs and strive to be critical in response. Indeed, The Gambia turning into a prominent target of externalisation corresponded to it being over-researched by students, scholars, consultants and journalists. This motivated me to try and clarify to my respondents how *my* research was allegedly different from the others'. If this enabled me to access otherwise reluctant participants – for example when a returnee accepted to be interviewed only because I was not interested in her traumatic migration story, that she was asked to recount one too many times; it disappointed them at the same time – for instance when I replied to the same returnee that my job was not to mediatise her criticism towards her exploitative involvement in awareness-raising, as she wanted me to do. At any rate, I soon realised that stressing what I considered to be the critical essence of my research did not remove the fact that I was, like any other interviewer in The Gambia, part

on an extractive migration industry which, for the most part, collects information without delivering concrete benefits to the informants (Andersson 2014). Some details on the geographical, temporal and content scope of my research are now in order, after which more will be said on the ethical challenges of it.

The ethnography started in March 2020 from the Greater Banjul area, where most of the organisations involved in migration management are located. I was having interviews with staffs from these organisations, while familiarising with the context through various visits and countless informal chats with residents. Around ten days after my arrival in Banjul, I was repatriated to Belgium because of the international borders of the EU closing indefinitely due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I kept in touch with my respondents through the remote means described in the previous section. I returned to The Gambia in September 2021, for a month-long stay that would allow me to physically reconnect with my field of research after a long hiatus. The observations of this second research stay were done around the Greater Banjul area and, to a lesser extent, the North Bank and West Coast Region of The Gambia. They mainly concerned the involvement of Gambian returnees in EU-funded awareness raising on so-called irregular migration. For that, I witnessed returnees attending trainings and doing sensitisation within the Migrants as Messengers (MaM) project led by IOM. I also observed the daily activities of one self-organised returnee group, including the realisation and promotion of its own communication material. I followed closely a returnee group in my third and last research stay too, between March and July 2022. In addition to the regions already visited, during this period, I also did observations in The Gambia's Central River Region and Lower River Region. By participating actively in the day-to-day operations of the returnee group, I was able to witness and contribute directly to the group's implementation of a project led by a European NGO. This is just the part of data collection that I did in direct response to the related research question, as it were; but the extent of my experience in the field spilled into my respondents' and my personal sphere as well.

2.4 From outsider to outsider: positionality, relationships and ethics in the “field”

Going deeper into the direction given by Ghoddousi and Page (2020) to grasp the different implications of ethnographic research, they offered the fruitful lens of ethnographic assemblage as a method to study the fluctuating multiplicity of

the social through a focus on mundane practices and the significance of affect for the creation of associations between human and non-human actants. This method has a broader outlook than the content of ethnographic research strictly speaking, tending to the creation of “ties in the real world between the researcher and participants through exchanging affects that create trust and blur the boundaries between researcher and researched” (Ghoddousi and Page 2020, 6). In assemblage ethnographies, the researcher and the participants are connected by solidarity ties based on affect which make what is known as Participatory Action Research (PAR) possible, developing forms of political agency including the research output and the concepts that the authors called generative. Assemblages are not fixed, but they can de- and re-territorialise at will, allowing for affect to span spatio-temporal compartments. Autoethnography was mentioned as one of the practices that, adding to the more traditional forms of ethnographic research, would underpin an assemblage ethnography approach. Autoethnography allows to trace the affective links spanning the assemblage while maintaining the subjectivity of the researcher, who does not go native, but deeply hangs out. Although I cannot claim to have started from or later embraced either the approach of PAR or that of auto-ethnography for this research, I intend to use the rest of this chapter to reflect, as in a raw and concise auto-ethnographical overview, on how my ethnographic undertaking in The Gambia approximates the type of assemblage ethnography just described. This is because of the central role of affect, leading me to eventually find it ever harder to maintain some sort of boundary between the research participants and myself, which translated in somehow imperfect forms of participatory and/or action research, including the generation of concepts to describe returnees’ challenges vis-à-vis EUrope’s exclusionary migration regime. The following outline of my assemblage ethnography should be seen as a way to tune in the cacophony of the academic backstage, as Aparna et al. (2020) would put it. This prompts me to elaborate first on my positionality, in relation to the lively debate in the academic realm over the insiderness and/or outsidersness of migration researchers.

I am a Southern-Italian White female researcher who has been living in the North of Italy and then the North of Europe for the past eight years. I come from a lower middle-class family, characterised by the patriarchal remit of a housewife mother. I was brought up a Christian Catholic, but I became uninterested with my religion around my teenage years, encountering no particular resistance from my family for that. My family subscribes to left-leaning political views, which I totally share. Before embarking on my ethnographic journey to The Gambia, two main experiences linked me to Africa as a geopolitical entity. First, the Master’s

thesis I wrote on the evolution of the South African democracy from the end of apartheid to the presidency of Jacob Zuma. Second, being a volunteer in a theatre project with African asylum seekers in the Italian province of Trento. This overview places me quite immediately on the outsider end of the outsider/insider spectrum of migration research. The literature on the topic has highlighted the advantages and disadvantages of both insider and outsider ethnographic research. Outsiders should be better at observing phenomena that insiders would take for granted, would feel less embarrassed to ask commonplace questions and, hence, enable the respondents to act as the experts of their lives. For insiders, building rapport is considered much easier, but the risk of advancing unverified assumptions is taken to be more prominent (Buford May 2014). Referring to intersectionality and the danger of methodological nationalism, Carling et al. (2014) problematised a clear-cut division between insider and outsider researchers, introducing middle-ground positions, such as explicit third party, honorary insider, insider by proxy, hybrid insider-outsider and apparent insider. While dichotomous thinking should normally be taken with a grain of salt, scholars belonging to formerly colonised populations, minorities and discriminated groups, tend to insist on the importance of keeping some kind of normative distinction between insider and outsider research. Working on female state legislation in the US, Brown (2012), for instance, claimed that her positionality as a Black woman enabled her to have better access and interactions with African American legislators. Furthermore, she argued that a Black woman's distance from power allows her to more effectively critique the system compared to other racial groups. Brown's intervention reminds us of the fact that, when re-associated with historical patterns of subjugation and exclusion, academic conversations stop being 'just about' methodology and re-enter the political realm. As such, I came to believe that my ethnographic assemblage, even if characterised by affects, emotions and solidarity, did not move me away from my outsiderhood, which primarily means the White privilege affording me with a sustainable livelihood, mobility freedom and security. In a way, my journey was one of re-becoming an outsider, while trying to break away from the researcher/researched dichotomy and building productive political solidarities. The following reflections are therefore more an instance of working the outsider-insider hyphen, than taking any particular side within the continuum (Sheehan 2011).

2.4.1 Whiteness, embodied emotions and relationships as interconnecting actor-networks

Following feminist scholarship's insight into emotional performativity, Wajsberg (2020) launched in a reflexive ethnography of emotions. Emotions are relational and historical. In other words, they are entanglements, whose critical exploration "can offer novel epistemological techniques for studying the politics of knowledge production and the landscapes of power in which we, as researchers, are embedded" (Laliberté and Schurr 2015, 2). Emotions are embodied, in both they are experienced by and through bodies, which, in turn, are carriers of particular racial categories. Faria and Mollett (2016) suggested to "whiten the field" (11) and expose the feelings aroused by whiteness in it, ranging, in their case, from awe to suspicion. My first contact with the *physical* field was particularly characterised by intense emotional states due to the reactions I was (not) getting towards my whiteness. On the plane that brought me to The Gambia for the first time, I witnessed a deportation. When I boarded the plane, the deportee was already to the very back of it, surrounded by four or five police officers. My seat was close to the scene. The young man was complaining for being hurt and begging the police officers to leave him. I started crying. The Black man sitting next to me limited himself to shaking his head in disapproval. I instinctively waved at the flight assistant, asking to be moved. She went, and a few minutes later a female police officer approached me, telling me to rest assured that the deportee would not hurt me. I was shocked by the officer's assumption of me being crying because of fear and not anger at that injustice. Eventually, I was moved to a further seat, spending the rest of the flight turning back continuously and blaming myself for my cowardice. Once in The Gambia, I was ready to take in all the anger, hurt, desperation and blame of the people I would come to meet, in the light of what young Africans daily undergo by the hand of White people like me, just like the deportee on the plane. I was ready to sacrifice myself to ease the burden of my privilege. This did not happen, pushing me to having to face that privilege even more directly.

While I will not claim that I have never encountered critical or confrontational statements and attitudes – for instance being pointed a finger at during an awareness-raising community gathering for enjoying the mobility freedom that Gambians are not having – it is undoubted that the life of White people in The Gambia is far from being uneasy. In an intersectional way, this racialisation is gendered and concerns particularly White women. This is connected to the patriarchal nature of Gambian society, whereby most responsibilities over the economic survival of families are placed on young men. Because of mobility

inequality, these men find themselves in an 'involuntary immobility' impeding them from migrating to find better economic opportunities. Marrying or entering a (sexual) relationship with a White woman visiting The Gambia, therefore, translates into a highly-sought-after economic and/or mobility opportunity (Ceesay 2017). While some feminist accounts have underlined the emancipatory nature of elderly White women turning to younger Black men for sex and love because of being discredited by White men in the West, other interpretations have foregrounded these women's economic privilege, sexual exploitation and participation in the present and past of colonisation (Deliofsky 2021). I went through the emotional states of surprise, disappointment and denial, while, rather than the redeeming resistance I was expecting to receive, sexual allusions, appreciation for my appearance and requests of economic and mobility help were coming my way. However, rather than reject them, I capitalised on the attention I was generally receiving to access the respondents and locations I was targeting for my research.

The "ugly emotions" (Wajsberg 2020) I felt as I was instrumentalising my privilege to fulfil the data-collection requirements of qualitative research, soon mixed with more pleasant emotions, which nevertheless problematised my epistemological disposition towards my fieldwork. Cerwonka and Malkki (2008) stated that "[w]ork and life come to be entangled in the embodied, situational, relational practice that constitutes long-term ethnographic fieldwork" (6). She showed how to reflect critically on these entanglements as a way to sit with complexity rather than romanticise it. Indeed, I would say that human interaction does not stop being such because of its centrality in qualitative data collection. Human beings are still human beings, even when engaged in the practice of interviewing and being interviewed. Quite some research has addressed the issue of sexual tension and encounters in the midst of researching (e.g. Cerwonka and Malkki 2008; Cupples 2002; Kaspar and Landolt 2016; Weiss 2020; Wojnicka 2020). Comparatively less explored appear to be the instances where informants become long-term romantic partners, which is what happened to be the case for me. Hours of conversation and moving together from one happening to the other, sparked reciprocal feelings between me and what originally was my main returnee informant, which turned into a full-fledged relationship during my last fieldwork stay.

Anxious feelings immediately took me over. Was I being unethical? Had I become a bad researcher? Did I have to disclose this relationship or keep it secret? Approaching research methodology through the lens of actor-network theory, Sheehan (2011) argued that "many of us have long been situated in

actor-networks imbued with positivism and the scientific method, positing, for example, objectivity, separation from the research project and detailed methodical plans” (338), regardless of the qualitative methodology we may embrace. I gradually realised that the doubts I was having were positivist relics, going counter to the training in the subjectivity of ethnography I had received at university. I decided to inform my supervisors of the relationship and not hide it to the rest of my respondents. This was out of the intention to disrupt the masculinist idea that the personal belongs to the feminine (Cerwonka and Malkki 2008) and, therefore, one should maintain some sort of neutrality in the public or professional sphere. Surely, this process of acceptance and disclosure was not linear but particularly messy. My partner and I agreed on keeping the relationship hidden to the local team of IOM for fear of being judged as influencing each other on our views about the organisation; only for its international team to see us together at a beach party we were all attending. We had a disagreement over whether to tell the director of an NGO he was working with that we were a couple, as he wanted to keep it hidden for fear of her thinking he would have left The Gambia to follow me and therefore deciding not to extend the project they were implementing, while I preferred not to pretend some sort of sudden distance from him throughout a monitoring visit. These are just a few of the dilemmas we have been confronted with for simply entering a love relationship across races, continents, professional roles and cultural mindsets. This shows that no guidelines or manual exist for navigating such political conundrums, but choices will be contingent, impulsive and oftentimes irrational, entailing making mistakes and learning from them.

Exposing the relationship certainly changed the perception that people had of me. As mentioned above, relationships between White women and Gambian men have a particular socio-cultural connotation, entailing economic and mobility expectations on the part of the former as well as mixed reactions of envy and accusations of opportunism towards the latter. However, I was never to be seen as a neutral researcher to begin with. Seen from the point of view of actor-networks, me being ‘enrolled’ in a sentimental relationship with a local returnee caused me to become more entrenched in the actor-networks my partner was already involved in, deepening emotional connections, friendships and, therefore, my responsibility towards them (Sheehan 2011). Realising this condition more fully prompted me to be more open towards the rest of my returnee respondents too, spending time with them outside of office hours, reacting to their requests of help with the challenges they were daily faced with, giving out gifts for ceremonies and births, or asking for their support when I was in emotional distress. Indeed, avoiding “interpersonal reciprocity” (Sheehan

2011, 339) is arguably no less unethical than following rules of distance and lack of responsibility towards participants' hurdles, especially if considering that "ethical dimensions are highly subjective and dependent on unique relationships within each field situation" (Sheehan 2011, 340). This attitude affected my approach to data collection, in line with Sheehan's (2011) claim that relationships on the field change methodological framings, data collection and interpretation. While in the first two fieldwork stays I would hardly carry out an interview without taking out my recorder or writing full pages of notes even in presence of the respondents for fear of missing an impressive quote for the article I would subsequently write, in the last one I allowed conversations to start spontaneously, preferring to be mindful of the exchange rather than fully equipped for recording it, even if that meant sacrificing exact quotes or minute details. In other words, I ended up *embodying* my research rather than *doing* it, side-lining the urge to resolve the philosophical question of whether having a research agenda actually "impedes a natural forming of interpersonal relationships in the field" (Sheehan 2011, 339)⁵.

I will not argue that deep emotional and relational entrenchments are needed in order to produce better findings. But I will defend the fact that they do not reduce how good the research is either. The uncountable discussions about history, politics, religion, culture had with my partner late at night during Ramadan informed greatly my knowledge of the society I was studying. Taking part in religious feasts and family happenings through our relationship allowed me to experience directly the socio-cultural matrix migration issues are inscribed in. This by no means stopped at my partner and his close relatives. Loosening epistemological barriers between my respondents and I, afforded me the unique opportunity to *be invited* by the returnees in their life-spaces. In other words, I was not soliciting information, but information was coming my way. This is the case of a returnee-friend who approached me to vent his distress at his uncle who, having appropriated remittances from a family member that were meant for him, used the money to take the backway despite all the warnings and prayers

⁵ In my last fieldwork stay, I concentrated on one returnee group. This flexible approach to data collection mostly applied to my interaction with the returnees, while I maintained the procedure of the recorded or formal interview when exchanging with a Ministry representative and the director of a European NGO partnering up with the group. The actor-network of positivism, as Sheehan (2011) would put it, got the best of me at the end, when the anxiety not to have the returnees on record prompted me to ask for a recorded focus group a few days before I left. The returnees were enthusiastic and all started their intervention with thanking me for the support I had given to the group in the previous four months, but I felt deeply uncomfortable for what I perceived as an awkward intrusion of the materiality of research in what I had mostly experienced as a spontaneous collaboration. This points to how weird research procedures may end up appearing in real life, although mostly taught and presented as smooth and rational practices.

of his nephew not to. I was also able to visit the home villages of three returnees in the Gambian rural areas, warmly welcomed by their family members because of being with my partner, whom they considered as an additional son. In one of these visits, I met the father of a returnee now elected the chief of the village, after having been for long in Europe and then deported. This was all particularly useful to deepen my understanding of the spatio-temporal entanglements of internal and international (im)mobility in The Gambia (Gaibazzi 2023). I cannot know whether I would have gathered the same level of insight should things have been different for me in the field. What I know is that I resolved not to disavow what was happening to me in pursuit of some fiction of researcher's objectivity in the social sciences. Rather, I shifted my interpretation of what an ethical research is, corresponding to better rather than less engagement in the field, as explained next.

2.4.2 Affirmative politics as the yardstick for the ethics and validity of research

Speaking of affects and emotions, Ghoddousi and Page (2020) explained that the former are pre-cognitive and disembodied, whereas the latter are inscribed into intersubjective significations of culture and language. They posited that one should not think of them dichotomously, because affects often turn into emotions once they are humanly processed. I would argue that, in my case, the reverse is true. The emotional entanglements of my fieldwork led positive affects to consolidate, "creating new solidarities and collective subjectivities" (Ghoddousi and Page 2020, 5). According to Ghoddousi and Page (2020), affective intensities transform the virtual possibilities of assemblage ethnography into instances of affirmative politics. Affirmative politics is productive rather than antagonistic, and it relies on the reciprocal participation of the researcher and the participants in each other's endeavours.

I will not argue that my research was participatory in the strict sense of the term. Although the research questions were adjusted according to the topics that seemed relevant to the participants along the way, they were never deliberately discussed with them. Even the generative criticism of this research – represented, for instance, by the coining of the expression moral economy of voice contained in Chapter six, to signify how the (il)legitimacy of capitalist logics in EU-sponsored awareness-raising is perceived by the returnees performing it – mostly derives from the analytical reflections I did after leaving the field. Still, I ended up co-writing a blog post with the returnees of the group I was following, on the topic of their problematic inclusion in the review process of the GCM as

grassroots civil-society actors. Since the wish for collaborative research never really emerged from the returnees themselves, I preferred helping them with what they seemed to need me for. Being the migration industry flourishing in The Gambia, especially with the heavy involvement of international and European stakeholders, the returnees were mostly in need of support to navigate the administrative and operational requirements of their Western partners and donors. This is what I ended up helping the returnees with the most, boosting the professionalisation of the returnee group I was following as a Eurocentric global design, a theme which will be extensively scrutinised in Chapter seven. In relation to that, I supported the returnees in writing proposals and reports, preparing presentations and taking pictures at events. In a couple of occasions, I was asked to facilitate some trainings that the returnees had to organise in connection with a project they were implementing. As the returnee group was opening its membership to more young people who had never migrated, I was requested to deliver a presentation on migration for them. This request re-evoked the familiar positivist actor-network, making me doubt whether, for the sake of neutrality, a critical academic should prevent herself from spreading knowledge while being on fieldwork. Nevertheless, I decided to deliver the presentation to a full room of attentive listeners, talking about my unhindered presence there and the deadliness of the backway as two sides of the coin of mobility inequality, rooted in the past and present of colonialism. Everybody in the audience was nodding to my words, silent. After the presentation, more than one person approached me saying that they had never heard such words being pronounced by a White person. In that presentation, I had not taught the young people anything that they did not know and experience already. But I want to believe that overcoming the relics of positivism to talk about mobility inequality from my *embodied situatedness*, may have made, if not more meaningful, at least less harming my presence in that place and at that time.

Finally, I argue that meeting the immediate needs of my respondents and not shying away from problematising my presence in their space is more of an ethical and validity commitment than culturally-inappropriate procedural approaches based on legalism (e.g. the fetish of informed consent) and distance. In other words, rather than either hide my role as a researcher and the reasons of my interest in my interlocutors or play the part of the distant observer, I ended up embracing the awkwardness of my job, trying – often clumsily – to deal with the predicaments of it in the way that seemed more sensible in the light of the teachings and the readings I made. I also argue that my experience problematises a romanticised vision of participatory and action research, whereby researchers join migrants in heroic demonstrations and civil

disobedience against migration management (Ghoddousi and Page 2020). Positive affect was surely part of my involvement with the returnee group – whose members, for instance, would reiterate how I had become part of their family – but the resulting affirmative politics resembled more a discontinuous engagement with migration management than its collective disruption, one day creating affective intensities around the relative infrequency of a White woman criticising the mobility inequality she was benefitting from, and the other working hard to draft a nice report of an activity being implemented within the context of a project against the backway. This duality, ambiguity or indeterminacy will come back as a central topic of this dissertation's discussion.

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CHAPTER 3

At the Crossroads between Care and Control: A Cross-Country Comparison of Assisted Return

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Abstract

Assisted return (AR) is a widespread policy tool offering financial support and counselling to returning migrants. Policymakers present it as a durable solution vis-à-vis undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers. However, AR has been proven to display the concurrence of care and control typical of contested humanitarianism. This concurrence takes different shapes across nation states. Our paper looks at how Sweden, Finland, the UK, Italy, Spain, and Portugal concretely configure care and control in their AR programmes, by focusing particularly on accessibility criteria, the landscape of the actors implementing the measure and their main implementation strategies. We finally find that the care and control balance of a particular layer within the AR national system can hardly be appreciated without considering the (lack of) life opportunities available to the potential beneficiaries of the measure, both within the confines and outside of it. Therefore, our comparative research ultimately conveys that what we call the intrinsic humanitarianism of AR—or its internal care-control balance—can give insight into the durability of the measure only when associated with what we term the extrinsic humanitarianism of AR—namely its broader relationship with forced return. In other words, AR ultimately appears migration control in disguise if it is not coupled with the enlargement of dignified life chances for migrants.

3.1 Introduction

Assisted return (AR) is a type of state-induced return offering migrants 'return counselling' as well as logistical and/or financial 'return assistance' for their trip home (Koch 2014; Lietaert et al. 2017). AR is framed as migrants' voluntary choice as well as conducive to broader development in countries of origin (Black et al. 2011). This is all used by policymakers to present AR as a durable solution to bring undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers, including humanitarian migrants without a right to protection, out of a situation of precarity and criminalisation (Bendixsen 2020). However, the voluntariness of AR is crafted and reproduced by states in the face of the scarcity of viable alternatives available to most assisted returnees (Cleton and Chauvin 2020; Webber 2011)⁶. The relationship between AR and development is also a tenuous one, as the reintegration assistance embedded in the former is mostly used to establish small-scale businesses that can hardly survive in underprivileged contexts of origin (Marino and Lietaert 2022, Chapter four). Furthermore, the precarity and criminalisation experienced by undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers is the product of a conscious political process of exclusion of third-country nationals considered undeserving (Bauder 2014)⁷. The construction of this undeservingness lies, *inter alia*, on the 'categorical fetishism' intrinsic to the legal-based distinction between migrants and refugees (Crawley and Skleparis 2018). Because AR targets the former only, it ultimately constitutes a tool to filter their mobility. AR therefore appears as a contested humanitarian practice embodying the concurrence of humanitarianism and securitisation, or care and control (Chimni 2000; Cuttitta 2018; Fassin 2011; Pallister-Wilkins 2017; Ticktin 2011; Walters 2010).

In this paper, we compare the care-control balance intrinsic to AR in the six European countries of Sweden, Finland, the UK, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Comparative studies of AR tend to be rather descriptive (Beltman 2012; Caselli et al. 2022; EMN 2016; Koser and Kuschminder 2015), while analytical works either focus on single aspects of AR or concentrate on one country at a time (Cleton and Chauvin 2020; Cleton and Schweitzer 2020; Crane and Lawson

⁶ Subscribing to this criticism, we mention the adjective 'voluntary' only as a reference to official policy discourse, rather than with a descriptive or analytical intent.

⁷ To highlight this conscious political process of exclusion, we prefer employing the adjective 'illegalised' to refer to non-citizens lacking or losing residence rights in host countries. We nevertheless distinguish between undocumented and withdrawing/rejected asylum seekers when empirically relevant.

2020; Kalir and Wissink 2016; Kox and Staring 2020; Mahar 2020; Vandevooordt 2017). Our paper constitutes a synthesis of these various approaches, as it sets to investigate AR comprehensively, analytically and comparatively at once. More specifically, we consider the regulatory, organisational and practical layers of AR and, for each of these layers, see “[w]hich objective” between care and control “gains the upper hand [...] between countries” (Lietaert 2022, 111). This particular combination of care and control existing *within* the national configurations of AR we term *intrinsic* humanitarianism. The latter figures alongside policymakers’ tendency to pit AR against deportation, which we call AR’s *extrinsic* humanitarianism. In investigating the interaction of care and control within different AR programmes, or AR’s intrinsic humanitarianism, we ultimately shed more light on the measure’s extrinsic humanitarianism, or, in other words, whether it can engender more durability than deportation. As such, we respond to Leerkes and Van Houte’s (2020) call to “examine variation in post-arrival migration enforcement policies, and how they are used, in order to better understand the deportation turn” (320).

The chapter proceeds as follows. We first dedicate a section to the presentation of extant literature on the linkage between humanitarianism and securitisation in border and migration management. We then outline our methodological approach and introduce our comparative analytical framework. We go on showing the differences and similarities of how the six European countries configure AR across our three layers. We finally provide a critical reflection on the patterns of interaction between care and control in the national configurations of AR, drawing some conclusions about the general humanitarianism of this measure in today’s global socio-economic structure.

3.2 The Care/Control Nexus in Border and Migration Management

According to Cuttitta (2018), humanitarisation corresponds to the contemporary application of moral sentiments to politics as well as the organisation and internationalisation of the pursuit to save lives. In the area of migration, the mobilisation of humanitarian practices, arguments and actors ultimately legitimises and bolsters management and control. This contradiction is elaborated upon in the following.

Chimni (2000) already understood humanitarianism as a quintessentially Western project, aimed to justify war and preserve the neoliberal logic underlying

the advancement of transnational capital by ameliorating the conditions of those damaged by it. With regard to the area of mobility, the author argued that the fusion of human rights and refugee law intrinsic to humanitarianism had the overall effect of lowering the bar of protection offered to non-citizens by host countries. Respectively articulating it as the 'humanitarian border', 'regimes of care' and 'humanitarian reason', Walters (2010), Ticktin (2011) and Fassin (2011) claimed that humanitarianism entails a concomitance of inequality and solidarity enacted by the simultaneous enforcement of a politics of care and reception with one of alienation and abjection. As put by Pallister-Wilkins (2017), humanitarian borderwork "is focused on the enactment of humanitarian principles premised on a humanist belief in the universality of humanity and concerned with preserving human life and relieving suffering [...] while at the same time working to reproduce exclusive categories of life and exclusive territorial spaces" (89). Making use of Reid-Henry's (2014) understanding of humanitarianism as a diagnostic instrumental to bolster laissez-faire liberalism, Pallister-Wilkins (2020) used the example of the hotspot to show how, in securing the bare life of migrants, it protects the liberal order from both illiberal reactions to immigration and radical manifestations of compassion. Dadusc and Mudu (2022) well summarised the potential of humanitarianism for the preservation of the status quo: "[w]hile borders fuel discontent, rage and potential resistance among displaced and immobilised populations, humanitarianism has the role of taming, channelling and subtly repress this discontent" (9). AR typifies this attempt to dissimulate coercion through aid, as it resembles a type of removal which is in line with "the values and institutions of a liberal democratic polity" (Kalicki 2020, 752).

This context produces the paradox whereby humanitarian actors decide to provide relief, therefore bolstering the system of control, rather than leave migrants unattended in order to undermine it. Ticktin (2011) understood this phenomenon as antipolitical, in that it is exercised by actors who pose as apolitical while actually reinforcing the unequal status quo. Indeed, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) accepting to take part in migration management advance a depoliticising humanitarian industrial complex which stands in contrast with disruptive forms of autonomous solidarity (Dadusc and Mudu 2022). Several works have specifically concentrated on the involvement of humanitarian actors in AR. Kalir and Wissink (2016) revealed how, by figuring in the deportation continuum alongside state institutions, civil-society organisations must share the belief that states have a sovereign right to deport non-citizens. Kox and Staring (2020) noticed how the involvement of humanitarian organisations into AR tightened their relationship with state

authorities and funding. This resulted in the organisations privileging or excluding groups of migrants based on the accessibility criteria inscribed into AR. Exemplifying well Stierl's (2018) finding that humanitarian actors act according to "a wide spectrum of humanitarian imaginary" whereby they "choose to (strategically) apply varying scales of selectivity" (709), Crane and Lawson (2020) measured NGO's room for manoeuvre within AR. More specifically, they asked whether the NGOs involved in AR work according to 'caring' or 'curing', whereby the former establishes relations of dependence while the latter tackles the structural causes of inequality producing the need for caring in the first place. The authors' analysis showed that AR enables NGOs to perform minor acts of care, such as referral to other organisations, attention to migrants' stories and assignment of material assistance. These NGOs' more disruptive actions are their support to willing migrants to stay in host countries as well as the advocacy work done vis-à-vis policymakers against their restrictive border regime. Vandevordt (2017) further explained the consequences of a wide NGO involvement in AR, lying in a greater professionalisation which overshadows the securitisation side of the programme through a focus on the durability of return. The author nevertheless added that rather than the approach of the NGOs themselves, it is the legal-political conditions of AR introduced by state authorities which produce the greatest effects in terms of migration control.

As this overview suggests, the literature has extensively demonstrated the continuum between humanitarianism and securitisation in several migration and border practices, including AR. We built our conceptualisations of care and control on this literature, seeing care as the pursuit to save lives, increase well-being and reduce suffering, while conceiving of control as the filtering of mobility. To appraise how these conceptions are concretely embedded in the various facets of AR, we assembled a comparative analytical framework, which is detailed next.

3.3 Methods and Comparative Analytical Framework

Starting with case selection, by picking highly different countries as the units of our comparison, we intended to both fill existing research gaps and maximise research potential. Certain national AR systems, in particular the Dutch, the German and the Belgian, have already received research attention (Beltman 2012; Cleton and Chauvin 2020; Cleton and Schweitzer 2020; Kalir and Wissink

2016; Leerkes and Van Houte 2020; Lietaert 2022; Mahar 2020; Vandevoordt 2017). Therefore, we singled out less researched territories, that is three Northern European countries—Finland, Sweden and the UK—and three Southern European ones—Spain, Portugal and Italy. These countries differ greatly in socio-economic and political terms. Finland and Sweden have high real GDPs per capita and well-endowed welfare states, whereas Spain, Portugal and Italy feature real GDPs per capita which are lower than the EU average as well as less-developed welfare states. The UK occupies a middle-ground position (Eurostat 2021; Fenger 2007; Keskinen et al. 2016). Leerkes and Van Houte (2020) already associated these socio-economic features with specific configurations of national (non-)deportability regimes. They categorised Sweden under the “targeted enforcement regimes” (332), presenting substantial AR support and take-up as well as tolerance towards the (temporary) permanence of certain migrant groups. Spain and Italy were instead listed under the “thin enforcement regimes” (333), which devote less resources and effort to manage illegalised migrants. Furthermore, AR targets different audiences in each of the countries under study. While Italy, the UK, Spain and Portugal host large illegalised migrant populations, partly made of rejected and renouncing asylum seekers⁸ (Alvino et al. 2020; Asylum in Europe 2020; Italian Ministry of the Interior 2019; Portuguese Foreigners and Border Service 2020; Spanish Ministry of the Interior 2019; Sturge 2020; Walsh and Sumption 2020), Sweden and particularly Finland are characterised by a limited illegalised presence, largely consisting of rejected asylum seekers (Andersson et al. 2018; Jauhiainen et al. 2018; Kosonen 2019).

Regarding the empirical material, we based our comparison on law and policy documents as well as stakeholder and practitioner interviews. This data triangulation allowed us to obtain more robust research findings (Fusch et al. 2018). In the first phase, we scanned for relevant legislative, policy and descriptive material on (the evolution of) AR in the six countries under examination. For this, we relied on national and European legislation and parliamentary repositories as well as the websites and publication archives of governmental agencies, IOM and local NGOs. At the end of this phase, we had an overview of the active AR programmes and the actors involved in AR in the selected countries. These actors are either public bodies, international organisations (IOs) or NGOs. We approached them asking for an exchange, thus

⁸ While the distribution of nationalities is relatively varied in Italy and the UK, South American nationals represent the majority of illegalised migrants in Spain and Brazilians constitute most of the non-asylum-seeking undocumented population in Portugal.

commencing a second phase, which went from August to December 2020. During this phase, we obtained a total of 21 in-depth, semi-structured, remote interviews as well as 11 written exchanges. Table 1 summarises the affiliation and role of our respondents per country. To secure anonymity, only the typology of actor is specified. The same approach will be used in the presentation of our empirical findings below. The inconsistent representation of actor typologies and functions per country is the result of both the specific organisational landscape of the national AR framework and the respondents' availability to take part in the study upon being contacted by the researchers. Similarly, the function terminology reflects the way in which the different roles are labelled or called in each country.

Table 1: Organisational affiliation and role of respondents per country

| Country | Organisation | Function |
|----------|--------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Sweden | Public body | Senior Legal Expert |
| | Public body | Senior Officer in Voluntary Return Unit |
| | Public body | Desk Officer |
| | Public body | Section Chief |
| | Public body | Specialist in Embassy Liaison Team |
| | NGO | Project Manager |
| Portugal | IO | Focal Point AVRR |
| | IO | Project Assistant |
| | IO | Senior Project Assistant |
| | NGO | Legal Protection Coordinator |
| | NGO | Social Worker |
| | NGO | Social Worker |
| Finland | Public body | Project Coordinator and Return Counsellor |
| | Public body | Social Worker responsible for AR |
| | Public body | Social Worker/Nurse |
| | IO | Return Programme Officer/Return Coordinator |

| Country | Organisation | Function |
|---------|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Public body | Senior Advisor |
| | NGO | Project Manager and Leader |
| | NGO | Social Worker responsible for AR |
| Spain | IO | Operations Assistant |
| | NGO | Director |
| | NGO | Social Action Officer |
| | NGO | Programme Evaluator |
| The UK | Public body | Head of Voluntary Returns Service |
| | NGO | Head of Resettlement |
| Italy | NGO | Social Worker in charge of AR |
| | NGO | Social Worker in charge of AR |
| | NGO | AR Social Worker |
| | NGO | AR Social Worker |

The interviews and correspondence with Finnish, Portuguese, and British respondents were conducted in their mother-tongue. The remaining exchanges were conducted in English. Most of the actors interviewed are national AR focal points, but some of them operate at the regional and local level. The interviews were recorded with the respondents' informed consent, fully transcribed and subsequently coded. In analysing the interviews, we were guided by the theoretical framework that we developed and detail below, singling out the references to the various layers and the care/control manifestations therein. Especially for the section on the implementation of counselling, we employed the discourses of implementers as they contain "dominant forms of cultural identity" at the basis of everyday operations (Walker 2019, 5). Focusing on these spoken words therefore affords insights in the interpretive and conceptual backbone of practice. Although the interviews with the relevant actors merely scratch the surface of the complexities of practically performing AR vis-à-vis beneficiaries, they nevertheless enabled us to provide a deeper understanding of relational and operational dynamics than what emerges from policy narratives.

Concerning the analytical framework presented in Table 2, it broadly derives from Lietaert's (2022) listing of the fundamental elements characterising the interplay of care and control in AR, namely the latter's institutional positioning, its accessibility criteria and field of actors. However, we arranged these elements differently, as, following the policy-cycle approach (Jann and Wegrich 2007), it makes sense to view the accessibility criteria and institutional positioning/field of actors which are set in laws and regulations as preceding the examination of the concrete implementation of counselling trends. Moreover, we grouped the institutional positioning and field of actors to display which actors are assigned to AR and whether they are connected to forced return in the same section. Furthermore, Lietaert discussed the values, priorities and experience of implementers together with the field of actors, whereas we situated the former in a separate segment as this allows to reveal the main counselling strategies identified in the selected countries. As such, this framework presents the order of a reverse pyramid: it starts from the macro level of the legislative codification of AR (regulatory layer); then, it zooms in on the meso level of the actors involved in pre-return assistance and their mutual relationships (organisational layer); and, finally, it takes a glimpse at the micro level of the main strategies used in performing return counselling (practical layer).

Table 2. Comparison layers and their constitutive elements

| Layer | Constitutive elements |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Regulatory layer: Legislative codification of AR | Time of introduction of law Legal framework Accessibility criteria set in law |
| Organisational layer: Institutional, organisational and relational field | Type of actors involved in assisted return Tasks assigned to each actor Relationships among actors Connection with forced return |
| Practical layer: Implementation of counselling | Information dissemination Counselling strategies |

The sections constituting this chapter's empirical part, appearing next, are arranged according to these three layers and the elements that compose them.

3.4 Return Assistance in Finland, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Italy and the UK

3.4.1 The Regulatory Layer

In the regulatory layer, we zoom in on the legislative codification of AR. Introduced by the type of legislation and year of approval, Table 3 contrasts the accessibility criteria and priority categories enshrined in AR-related national regulations. The groups and rules mentioned are not the same across the countries as they all have codified accessibility and eligibility criteria in a different way.

Table 3. Overview of accessibility criteria set in law

| Country | Legal framework | Year | Target group(s) mentioned in the law(s) |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The UK | Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (Sections 58-59). | 2002 | A 'voluntary leaver' not of British or EEA nationality. |
| Portugal | [translation] Law 23/2007: Entry, stay and exit of foreigners from national territory (Art. 139). | 2007 | Any foreign citizen. |
| Sweden | [translation] Ordinance 2008:778 on re-establishment support for certain foreigners. | 2008 | Rejected asylum seekers, not of Swedish nationality, who never benefitted from AR before. |
| Spain | [translation] Eighth additional disposition of the Organic Law 4/2000 of 11 January on the rights and liberties of foreigners in Spain and their social integration. | 2003 | Foreign people who request to return. |

| Country | Legal framework | Year | Target group(s) mentioned in the law(s) |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Italy | [translation] Law Decree n. 89 of 2011 (converted into Law n. 129 of 2011) translated into article 14-ter of the Consolidated act on immigration; Minister of the Interior's Decree Law of 27 October 2011: Guidelines for the implementation of the programmes of voluntary and assisted return. | 2011 | Third-country citizens who never benefitted from AR (excluding when there is a threat to public order, expulsion following a crime, disrespect of voluntary departure period, risk of absconding). Priority categories: vulnerable subjects; trafficking victims, people with serious conditions, asylum seekers and refugees; foreign citizens no longer fulfilling the conditions to renew residence permit; subjects with pending return orders. |
| Finland | [translation] Act on the reception of persons applying for international protection and on the identification of and assistance to victims of trafficking in human beings (Section 31). | 2015 | Asylum seekers, refugees and victims of human trafficking. |

Concerning accessibility criteria, as the table shows, the legal frameworks of the UK, Portugal, Spain and Italy are wider in scope and encompass a large group of potential beneficiaries. On the contrary, Sweden provides AR to asylum seekers only, while Finland adds to the latter refugees and victims of human trafficking. AR accessibility criteria surely reflect the migrant population typical of a given country. In addition to that, they have generally evolved over time, with an initial focus on asylum seekers and later attention for undocumented individuals, at least as far as counselling goes (Lietaert 2022). This is a first indication of the duality of AR, which should be at once humanitarian care available to 'deserving' groups and securitising control targeting unwanted ones.

Italy's priority categories, encompassing individuals with medical conditions and victims of human trafficking alongside subjects under pending return orders, further exemplify this tension.

Larger or narrower accessibility criteria cannot be automatically associated with either care or control. Indeed, the existence of viable alternatives to return both within and outside of AR must be considered. For instance, narrow accessibility criteria in a context whereby AR is mostly control-oriented (namely having a close connection between AR and forced return as well as compelling counselling) means that less people are persuaded to return. However, if no opportunities for a viable life are available to illegalised migrants outside the purview of AR, they will mostly suffer from marginalisation and criminalisation without being able to be assisted to return. This may bring, in what we may call a humanitarian paradox or, as has been bluntly defined, 'self-deportation' (Spathopoulou et al. 2022), undocumented individuals themselves to seek AR in the absence of better alternatives to remain in host countries. Interviewees from Sweden and Finland, where undocumented individuals cannot access AR, hinted precisely at the need or prospect to change the law to be able to satisfy the requests they cannot currently fulfil (Interview with Swedish public body; Interview with Finnish public body). It still could be argued that, if not attracted by AR, migrants may organise themselves politically to challenge the determinants of their condition or independently seek regularisation paths, perhaps with the help of 'outsider' NGOs. Considering this, deeming care the enlargement of AR to additional groups becomes more problematic, because it may divert migrants from alternative paths to return they may create for themselves. Yet, political mobilisation or regularisation will arguably be pursued or attained by a minority of potential beneficiaries, so the spectre of precarious trajectories outside of AR remains for the majority of them. Therefore, our humanitarian paradox persists, making it necessary to investigate the following layers to be able to judge the prevalence of either care or control in this one.

3.4.2 The Organisational Layer

Figures 1–6 depict the field of actors implementing AR by country, along with their tasks and relationships. The boxes display the actors with their respective tasks, while the lines represent the referral or training direction(s). The tasks range from the promotion of AR and counselling to the decision on the AR application and the practical organisation of the trip. Referral occurs when a secondary actor—involved in outreach and/or counselling only—redirects an

applicant or a potential returnee to a primary actor, namely the main implementer which decides over assistance applications and therefore allocates the support.

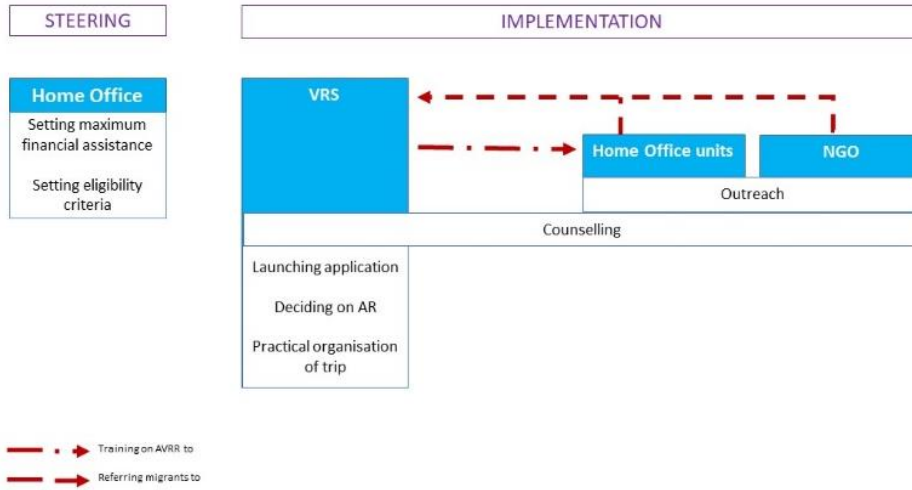


Figure 1. British Institutional Framework

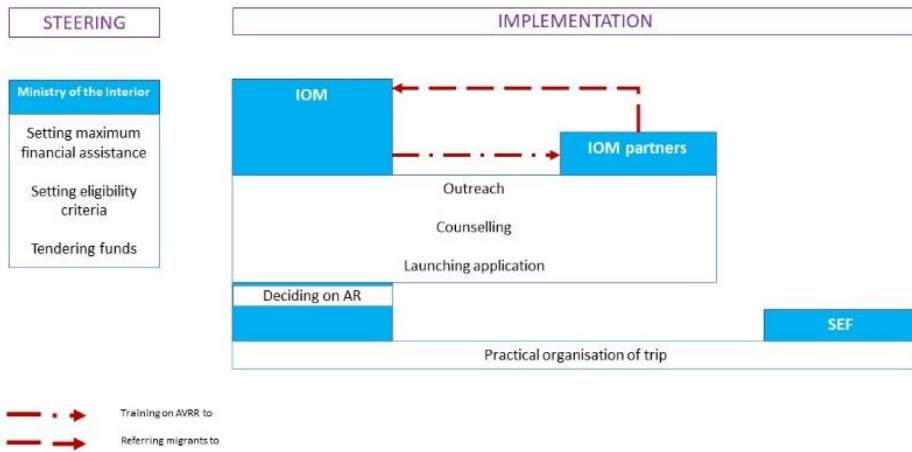


Figure 2. Portuguese Institutional Framework

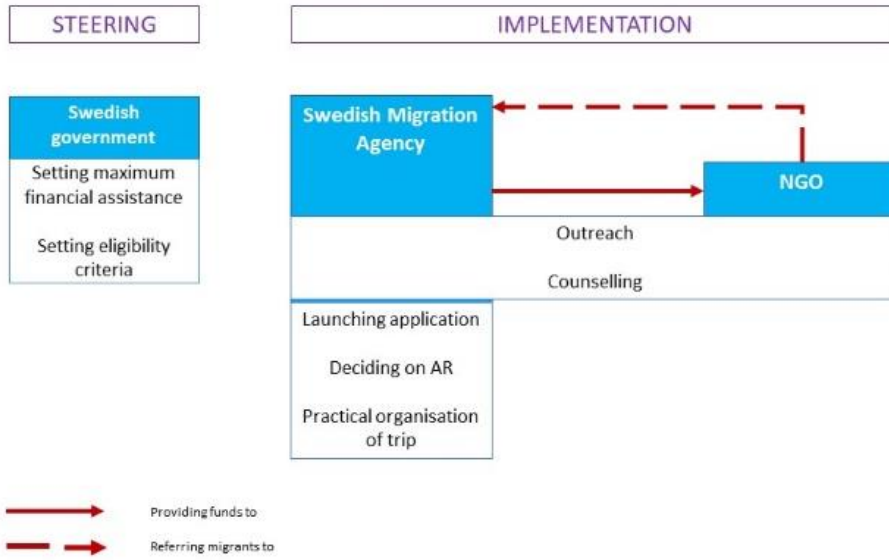


Figure 3. Swedish Institutional Framework

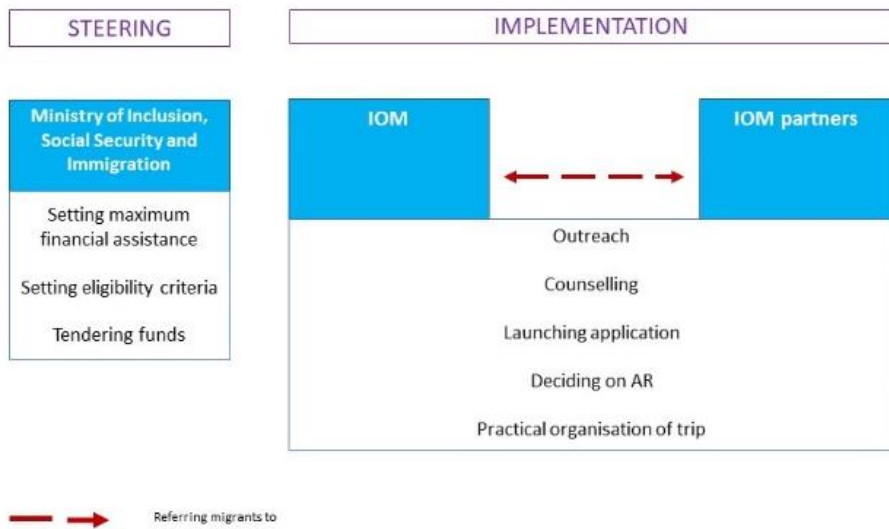


Figure 4. Spanish Institutional Framework

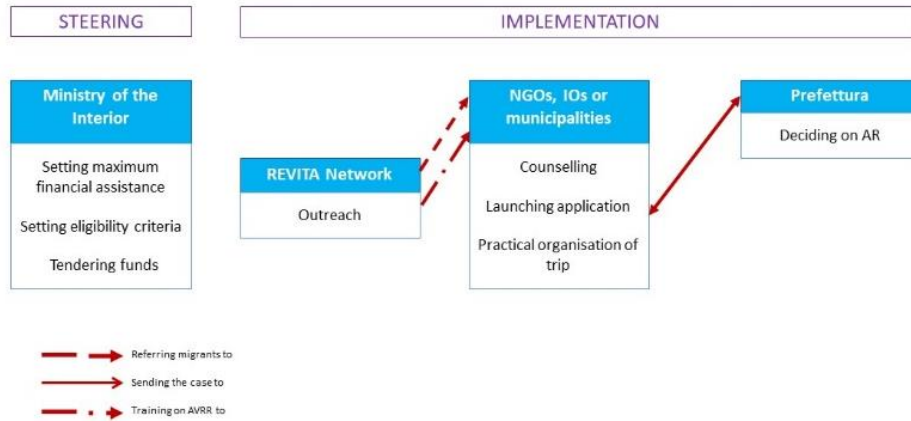


Figure 5. Italian Institutional Framework

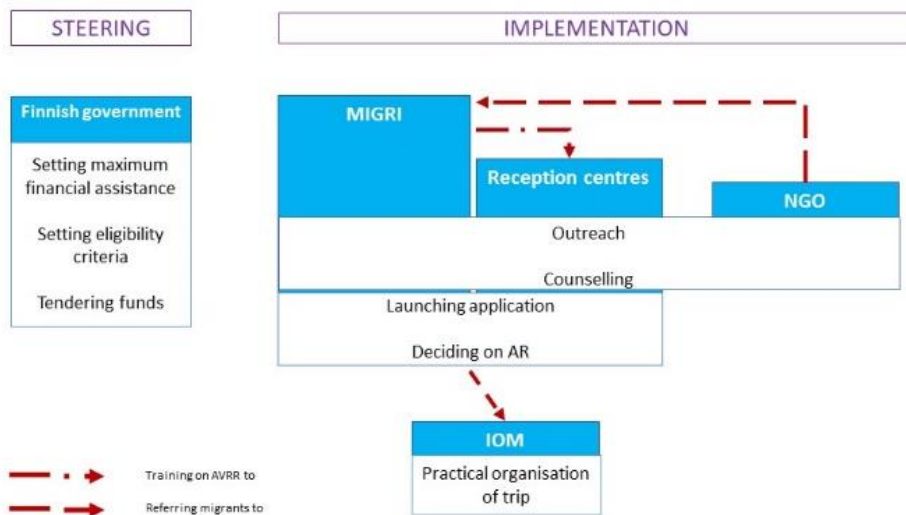


Figure 6. Finnish Institutional Framework

Comparing Figures 1–6, a considerable diversity in how AR is organised across the six countries is again recognisable. The different configurations show a preponderance of either governmental actors, NGOs or IOM in the management and implementation of the service. With the UK Home Office taking over all AR tasks from IOM and NGOs in 2015 (Evans et al. 2015)—including training of staff from other Home Office units (Interview with British public body)—and the Swedish Migration Agency equally being the sole decision-maker and organiser

(EMN 2017a; 2017b), Britain and Sweden appear the most centralised systems. Finland presents little NGO involvement just as the previous two countries, but the Finnish Immigration Services share the task of deciding over assistance applications with the asylum reception centres, which are usually run by either municipalities or NGOs. In relation to this, Finland had a formal project carried out by the Finnish Immigration Services—involving 15 AR coordinators—targeting case-workers in reception centres. This had mainly the purpose of making social workers accept AR as a valuable option for rejected asylum seekers rather than a way to get rid of the latter (Interview with Finnish public body). IOM Finland was dismissed from the decision-making function it previously exercised, but Finland still assigns it the practical organisation of the trip. In Italy, a plethora of different actors operationalise AR (and the coordination and training of these actors was at the core of the RE.V.ITA project ended in 2020); however, decision-making over AR applications is an exclusive prerogative of the Prefettura, a territorial body of the Ministry of the Interior having administrative functions (Testo unico sull'immigrazione). The greatest role for IOM is found in Portugal, where it decides over who receives assistance. In Spain, IOM shares the implementing and decision-making role with NGOs, although it is more prominent than them. IOM is active in training partners in both countries (Interview with IO in Portugal; Interview with IO in Spain).

As to the various actors' general approaches, while some governmental officers expressed their reluctance to think outside the box of enforcement and conceive of/work towards alternative pathways to return for illegalised populations (Interview with British public body), other governmental agents claimed that they approach the individual cases independently from the political aim to increase return rates (Interview with Finnish public body). Certain NGOs were limited in their thinking, as conveyed by NGO respondents who disqualified the prospect of a sans-papier life as a different option from returning (Interview with Finnish NGO). As far as IOM is concerned, despite it not being a governmental actor, its dependence upon nation-state funding has historically rendered it impermeable to the endorsement of unorthodox migration solutions (Pécoud 2018). Institutional settings can be certainly seen as a function of the national political tradition, whereby, for instance, the Scandinavian countries traditionally showcasing strong welfare systems, present the major involvement of governmental agencies in AR. In Britain, excluding NGOs was a conscious choice to tighten governmental control over the measure, while Italy occupies a middle-ground position whereby the Prefettura makes decisions over applications only. Spain and Portugal follow more of a managerial approach, relying heavily on IOM for outreach, counselling and decision-making on AR. At

face value, greater governmental involvement may signify a preponderance of control in the specific AR configuration, while NGO centrality would be taken as a signal of care being prevalent. Indeed, the state's direct involvement in AR partially manifests its commitment to show a softer face in the migration realm, while actually limiting NGOs' room for manoeuvre in acting more lenient towards illegalised individuals (Schweitzer 2022). However, we have shown that, just as with accessibility criteria, the picture is more complicated than this. NGOs being involved in AR does not automatically translate into more care being delivered. Equally, governmental agencies may be autonomous from the government, meaning that their involvement in AR does not directly lead to more control being exercised. This means that looking into which actor does what in each country does not immediately elucidate AR's care-control balance. For that, we ought to ascertain whether and how 'voluntary' and forced return are connected in any given context as well as the counselling strategies adopted by the various actors in the different countries. These two dimensions, the former belonging to the current layer and the latter figuring in the practical layer, are explored in turn.

For Finland and Sweden, the information on the (dis)connection between forced and 'voluntary' return was derived from the rich conversations we had with respondents, whereas it was mainly deduced from the institutional structure in the remaining cases. From this, we gathered that in the UK, forced and 'voluntary' return both fall under the competences of the Immigration Enforcement Directorate of the Home Office, the ministerial department responsible for immigration. The control-oriented mission of the Immigration Enforcement Directorate is confirmed by its stated vision, namely "t]o reduce the size of the illegal population and the harm it causes" (Home Office 2020). AR being entirely carried out by a Home Office unit shortens the distance between the implementation of 'voluntary' return and deportations. Further investigation is needed to assess whether the Home Office Voluntary Returns Service (VRS) passes on information on AR applicants who absconded, hence tightening forced and 'voluntary' return. In Sweden and Finland, AR is implemented by governmental agencies, which are nevertheless detached from the relevant ministry. However, in the former context, the Swedish Migration Agency implementing AR evaluates the risk of absconding of the potential returnee and consequently considers whether to refer the latter to the police for deportation (Interview with Swedish public body). The Finnish Immigration Services tasked with AR are not involved in decision-making over forcible removals (Interview with Finnish public body). This signals that an apparently similar configuration with a large involvement of a governmental agency in AR implementation still leads to substantially different outcomes and practices. Although non-

governmental actors operationalise AR in Italy, the decision on the attribution of assistance is left to the Prefettura, which belongs to the Ministry of the Interior. Such Ministry oversees both forced and AR; however, the former is the remit of the Department of Public Security, whereas the latter is managed by the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration. IOM and NGOs are in charge of AR in Spain and Portugal, with no governmental involvement. This sanctions an immediate disconnection between ‘voluntary’ and forced return in these contexts. More specifically, it is the Immigration and Borders Service (SEF) which decides upon and carries out deportations in Portugal. Not at the implementation but at the steering level, the distance between forced and ‘voluntary’ return in Spain is instead detectable in their placement under two different ministries: the Ministry of the Interior supervises deportation while the Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations handles AR.

This overview leads us to argue that in countries such as Sweden, AR appears to be a sympathetic alternative to being removed forcibly offered rejected asylum seekers; yet, in contexts where migrants are not scared into accepting AR, they may avoid deportation but still remain prey of exploitation and ostracism. Once again, we can hardly consider a disconnection between ‘voluntary’ and forced return as care per se if we do not take into account whether alternative livelihoods are created for migrants on whom AR is not imposed. To see whether these alternatives exist within the scope of AR, we ought to turn to the counselling layer of it.

3.4.3 Practical Layer

Within this third section, we focus on the moments when potential returnees are informed about AR as well as heard and helped to shape their upcoming reintegration, corresponding to ‘counselling’. More specifically, counselling could be approximately divided into three basic elements: the spreading of information on AR, the contribution to the individual’s choice to return, and the organisation and planning of reintegration once the choice is made. The first two elements are more meaningful for the purpose of this analysis. Concerning the first element, larger or narrower information campaigns may be performed to actively reach out to potential beneficiaries; information may be given to those who contact implementing actors themselves only; and AR may be advertised throughout the asylum procedures, for the migrants already in contact with the authorities. The first form is broadly found in Spain, Italy and Portugal, where IOM is the core of information and dissemination about AR within formal and informal referral networks (Interview with IO in Spain; Interview with Spanish

NGO; Interview with IO in Portugal). The UK appears closer to the second form. To spread information on AR, it relies on Home Office community engagement advocates in contact with migrants as well as the voluntary cooperation of NGOs having access to migrant communities. According to a respondent, the limited promotion of AR by the Home Office is partially correlated to strong media reaction following a governmental campaign advertising the measure in the past. Consequently, it appears that AR is less known among undocumented migrant groups. Asylum seekers should be more aware of the option of returning voluntarily as Home Office employees in reporting centres are supposed to convey information on AR (Interview with British public body). The approaches of Sweden and Finland differ from the previous ones because (rejected) asylum seekers are among the only target groups therein. In both countries, asylum seekers hear about the possibility of AR in reception centres. In Finland, social workers in reception centres should convey information on AR throughout the asylum application and therefore before its potential negative outcome. However, it appears that this does not happen consistently because of general reluctance in reception centres to consider the return option (Interview with Finnish public body). On top of this, both Sweden and Finland are recently attempting to get in touch with rejected asylum seekers and undocumented migrants through dedicated projects involving municipalities and NGOs normally closer to these populations (Interview with Finnish public body; Interview with Finnish NGO; Interview with Swedish public body; Interview with Swedish NGO). The humanitarian paradox found in the previous layers re-occurs here. The active encouragement to take up AR and its continuous advertising—especially in reception centres and during the asylum procedure— may be read as host countries' heavy interest in unwanted foreigners bearing in mind that return is one of the primary paths that they should take. At the same time, preventing information from being spread might result in genuinely interested subjects not knowing of the existence of a service that could be beneficial to them.

Moving on to the second element of counselling, a useful distinction has been made by the European Migration Network (EMN) (2019) between a migrant-centred approach, “focus[ing] on providing support that is adapted to the situation of the clients, to their specific needs, their country of origin and journey, and their own capabilities” (5); a compliance approach, “focusing on convincing the migrant to return or to comply with a return decision” (2); and a mixed approach, “which would strive to achieve a balance between providing the individual with the support and information which suited his/her own needs and experiences best, while implementing and complying with the national return policies” (5). Sweden, the UK, and Finland all provide counselling through government-related

bodies. However, substantial differences in their approaches were found. Sweden appears to typify the compliance mode, becoming visible through the following practices. The Swedish Migration Agency gets in contact with the rejected asylum seeker right after the asylum denial (Interview with Swedish public body). If s/he is unreachable, the case is transferred to the Police (Interview with Swedish public body). During counselling, if a readmission agreement is in place between Sweden and the country of origin, this is used as a tool to compel the rejected asylum seeker into returning voluntarily. When that is not the case, the bleak prospect of living undocumented outside reception centres is raised, next to the loss of the right to reintegration aid if 'voluntary' return is not taken up. Alternatives to return appear not to be explored (Interview with Swedish public body). Differently from Sweden, in the UK, the VRS of the Home Office is contacted by the applicant already resolved to return (a sign of the fact that, as stressed above, AR is also open to individuals not in contact with British asylum authorities). The Home Office unit is reachable by phone and the AR application is filed through an online form. Motivational or psychosocial counselling therefore amounts to the bare minimum. Alternatives to returning are not discussed, and this is justified by the governmental nature of the VRS. In interacting with potential returnees, caseworkers do not shy away from bringing up deportation, although the latter is presented as a concrete prospect rather than a way to pressure individuals into entering AR (Interview with British public body). The Home Office not contacting potential returnees directly and keeping counselling to a minimum can be read as less indicative of a compliance mode. However, the impersonal and apparently superficial counselling (even if structured this way not to appear too compelling vis-à-vis potential returnees), might result in limited time and opportunity for these subjects to develop a genuinely voluntary and conscious return decision. Counselling in Finland is given by social workers at asylum reception centres, which are all run by different actors, implying different counselling strategies. Often, the social worker conducting the counselling had a pre-existent personal relationship with the AR applicant, connoting particularly the counselling experience. Social workers are totally independent in making their AR application decisions, also when allocating increased assistance (Interview with Finnish public body). When specifically counselling rejected asylum seekers who have been out of reception centres for long, the Finnish Immigration Services present 'voluntary' return as one option, although there are not many others left. AR applications submitted in despair are not considered, and caseworkers at the Finnish Immigration Services attempt to maintain neutrality towards the rejected asylum seeker's decision, whether it is to return or not. Finally, the Finnish Immigration Services

value their operational independence from governmental political goals highly (Interview with Finnish public body). This is indicative of a more 'mixed' approach than the Swedish. As already stressed, NGO participation is limited in Sweden and Finland. However, at least two NGOs have some counselling tasks in these two countries. It appears that they judge their involvement a pragmatic response to the (politically created) hurdles undergone by rejected asylum seekers in both countries (Interview with Swedish NGO; Interview with Finnish NGO). Such NGOs are aware of the need to contextualise the voluntariness of the return decision and maintain a neutral stance towards alternatives to returning (Interview with Swedish NGO).

In Spain and Portugal, IOM is tasked with AR counselling, next to NGOs which either run their own AR projects or only do dissemination and referral to IOM. In Spain, because of the high number of applications and applicants' geographical dispersion, counselling is often offered through digital means. Applicants approach IOM Spain when they have already made up their mind and want to return, after exhausting all chances to remain legally in the host country. Such applicants therefore might be impatient to return: counselling thus entails managing expectations as to the timing and circumstances of AR (Interview with IO in Spain). In Portugal, IOM's counselling is geared towards the verification of the applicant's conditions and circumstances. The IOM counsellor is totally independent in deciding whether to ultimately afford assistance (Interview with IO in Portugal). The NGOs running their own AR projects in Spain seem to contemplate alternatives to returning in their counselling approach (Interview with Spanish NGO). In the cases in which an AR applicant is not eligible for the specific project or when caseworkers realise that the return decision cannot be considered adequately voluntary, NGOs offer the individual appropriate care and referral (Interview with Spanish NGO). In Italy, different NGOs provide counselling. They pointed out that the obligation for the Prefettura to authorise AR applications causes many delays and hurdles for the attribution of support (Interview with Italian NGO). In addition to this, NGOs are paid according to return targets achieved. This might impact return counselling towards attaining the highest number of returnees possible. However, in practice, counselling is generally described as aiming to assess the migrant's real and deep intention to return, to the extent that the possibility for the migrant to change her mind during the process is envisaged and this actually occurs frequently (Interview with Italian NGO). In the words of a respondent: "[we don't] run after them, it's the opposite, if they really want, if they deeply want to be part of this project [...] they have to get back here every time [we reschedule] the interviews" (Interview with Italian NGO). Counsellors are aware of the exhaustion that leads potential

returnees—often paperless and homeless—to apply for AR, and try to provide the quickest way out to convinced applicants. At the same time, they are critical towards the political situation currently surrounding the migration issue. One respondent uttered: “we are treating these people very badly, we exploit them and then we try to get rid of them or pretend we don’t see them if they’re not useful anymore” (Interview with Italian NGO). These indications point towards the prominence of a migrant-centred approach to return counselling in Italy, net of the bureaucratic hurdles and targets induced by the ministerial Prefettura.

In sum, counselling approaches vary within and between actor groups, pointing to the inadequacy of predicting the strategy of the implementer based on its identity. While the Swedish Migration Agency uses tools as specific as mentioning readmission agreements to persuade migrants of the appropriateness of the return decision, the UK Home Office appears to limit itself to arrange AR, mostly remotely, for already convinced beneficiaries. IOM’s approach seems particularly pragmatic and geared towards the arrangement of the trip, while NGOs based in the North appear more reluctant to steer their counselling towards the evaluation of alternatives to return than their Southern counterparts. In the contexts where the latter approach appears preponderant, notably Spain and Italy, it remains to be seen whether such referral manages to produce dignified and accessible life trajectories, therefore rendering this particular type of counselling a manifestation of care within the contested humanitarianism of AR.

3.5 Discussion on Care and Control in AR by Way of Conclusion

In this article, we have taken a comparative look at what we term the intrinsic humanitarianism of AR, namely its internal care/control balance. We have done so across three composing layers of AR. In relation to accessibility criteria, making AR available to more groups may signal an extension of support (and therefore care), but this ceases to be true if a close connection to forced return or a compelling counselling means that the migrants’ involvement in AR will ultimately push them into returning, whether they really want it or not. At the same time, leaving undocumented migrants out of AR or not pushing them into taking it cannot be deemed part of a care approach (as in control not being imposed on them), because the alternative to return will most likely be precarisation and criminalisation. A more evident instance of care we have found

in the counselling approach of NGOs in Italy and Spain only, whereby migrants are referred to social services if they prove ultimately unwilling to return or show particular needs. Whether this actually turns into durable solutions for illegalised populations being created must be demonstrated by empirical research on the outcome of this diversion to different paths. This all enables us to reflect on the idea of care itself, which we have mainly intended as increase in well-being and reduction of suffering. AR assistance cannot be deemed care if closely connected to an underlying push towards return politically constructed as 'voluntary'. At the same time, the absence of this controlling assistance cannot equally be connoted as care if it does not translate into viable alternative pathways for migrants to be pursued. With this, we ultimately confirm existing research on the extrinsic humanitarianism of AR, judging it, in the absence of conducive conditions for migrants which would render their return decision truly voluntary, a milder version of deportation.

This conclusion allows us to briefly reflect on the concept of durability as it is associated with AR. Our overview as well as existing literature demonstrated that illegalised populations are virtually offered no other choice but either to take up AR or live undocumented. The discourse on durability, therefore, conceals the inevitability of this dichotomy as well as the historical and contemporary responsibilities of host societies in the subjugation of Southern peoples. This aspect was already present in the development of durable solutions for refugees, started in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although more than one solution, including integration, was envisaged to deal with refugee populations—who, contrary to illegalised ones, are legally recognised by host authorities—the latter came to see return as a logical consequence to the cessation of hostilities in origin countries, regardless of whether refugees actually desired to leave (Chimni 2000). This suggests that, with illegalised populations and refugees alike, policymakers' discourse on durable solutions ends up encompassing one solution only: return. The narrowness and top-down imposition of this scenario suggests return not being a durable solution, but just a solution tout court. Furthermore, still in contrast with refugee populations whose return is normally allowed when circumstances have somehow changed at home, illegalised populations return to unchanged or even worsened contexts, hence rendering it hard to think of AR as a sustainable option for their well-being (King and Kuschminder 2022). Consequently, the discourse of durability applied to AR as a way to deal with illegalised populations in the North ultimately appears as yet another tool in the discursive box of migration management, short of a serious and far-reaching reform of the international migration and socio-economic system.

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CHAPTER 4

The legitimisation of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration

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4.1 Introduction

The sustainable reintegration of migrants returning from host countries to their countries of origin is the goal of the so-called Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programmes, which offer returnees support to travel home and post-return financial, vocational and psychosocial assistance (Kuschminder 2017). These programmes have grown exponentially over the past decades, involving over 1.6 million returnees worldwide (IOM 2019a, 10). Assisted return and sustainable reintegration were included in the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) which is the leading text of global migration governance (Betts and Kainz 2017). The Global Compact's Objective 21 calls for facilitating

“the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants into community life by providing them equal access to social protection and services, justice, psycho-social assistance, vocational training, employment opportunities and decent work, recognition of skills acquired abroad, and financial services, in order to fully build upon their entrepreneurship, skills and human capital as active members of society and contributors to sustainable development in the country of origin upon return” (Global Compact 2018, 30).

The inclusion of sustainable reintegration in the Global Compact is the culmination of an extended discursive evolution, starting with the inception of the policy objective of sustainable return. Over the years, several definitions of and interpretative frameworks for the sustainability of return and reintegration have been devised (Black et al. 2004; IOM 2015; 2017a; Koser and Kuschminder 2015) and more or less comprehensive reviews of those definitions and frameworks have been performed (Danish Refugee Council 2011; Filipi et al. 2013; Strand and Aalen 2016; Whyte and Hirsland 2013). Nevertheless, the concept of sustainability in the context of return remains “slippery” (Özdem and Payne 2019, 404) and “ambiguous” (Kuschminder 2017, 7), not least because policy concepts are by no means politically or ideologically neutral (Atkinson and Joyce 2011; Bakewell 2008; Boswell et al. 2011). Sustainable reintegration embodies (European) receiving countries' interest in reducing migrants on their territories (Lietaert and Van Gorp 2019) and is thus inextricably linked with (European) migration management as a knowledge-based discourse whereby

nation states differentiate between and hence govern differently “who can be of ac/count and who cannot” (Oelgemöller 2017, 1).

Such a politically sensitive and increasingly relevant policy objective being surrounded by indeterminacy and opacity commands deeper investigation. Paving the way for the better assessment of policy outcomes and addressing the long-standing quest for greater clarity around the sustainability of return (Danish Refugee Council 2008; Koser and Kuschminder 2015; Strachan 2019; Van Wijk 2010), this chapter traces the evolution of sustainable reintegration from its emergence as sustainable return in the 1980s to its normalisation as a prominent policy objective of global migration governance today. More specifically, we engage in a content review of almost 100 texts addressing or conceptualising sustainable return and reintegration, retrieved from the policy, organisational and academic domains. Within these domains, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – advancing and implementing AVRRE programmes worldwide (Graviano and Darbellay 2019) as well as producing knowledge and imparting authority upon policy approaches (Geiger and Pécoud 2010) – has greatly contributed to the discursive formulation and promotion of sustainable return and reintegration. The sustainability of return and reintegration has long attracted the attention of NGOs and researchers, who – both in cooperation with the IOM and independently – have additionally elaborated upon this concept. Finally, sustainable return and reintegration have been mentioned in normative frameworks and underpinned several international debates and fora. The documents and texts stemming from these endeavours were therefore examined in the light of Nay’s (2014) framework on the normalisation, fragmentation and assimilation of policy objectives.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, we situate Nay’s (2014) framework on the legitimisation of policy constructs on which we draw for our examination, along with the methods we followed to gather our corpus of documents and perform our analysis. Hereafter, the specific processes of the early normalisation, fragmentation, assimilation and renewed normalisation leading to the legitimisation of sustainable reintegration – consisting in the emergence of sustainable return and its multi-actor appropriation, followed by a discursive upgrade into sustainable reintegration and the latter’s final consolidation – are individually disentangled in dedicated paragraphs. A concluding section contains our reflections on the implications of such processes for migration-related discourse and practice, with a particular focus on the need for more critical debating over the (non-)definition of sustainable reintegration.

4.2 Theoretical framework and methods

The present chapter digs into the evolution of the sustainability concept since it was first attached to assisted return by disentangling the processes of normalisation, fragmentation and assimilation related to the legitimisation of policy constructs (Nay 2014). In concrete terms, a policy concept is *normalised* after being codified, discussed in diverse fora and included in regulatory frameworks. Normalisation relies on the production of authoritative analyses by means of expert knowledge and the development of statistical appraisals and assessment tools stemming from the operationalisation of the policy objective. *Fragmentation* regards the multiplication of definitions and interpretations of the policy concept, potentially away from its initial conceptualisation and circle of emergence. Finally, the original creators of the policy concept tend to *assimilate* critical or alternative conceptions by reformulating them in conforming terms. According to Nay, these legitimising processes are bolstered by “knowledge networks” comprising policy-implementing actors as well as various expert profiles and having “the capacity to gather, shape, publicise and circulate the policy standards, information and knowledge used in policy making” (Nay 2014, 214).

For the purpose of this analysis, an elaborate search was conducted to ascertain how ‘sustainability’ has been used in publications on assisted return. Given the pivotal role of the IOM, its repository was taken as a starting point to access relevant publication series, such as World Migration Reports, the IOM’s Annual Reports of Activities and AVRR Key Highlights. This approach was supplemented with a general search for IOM publications mentioning the term ‘sustainability’, revealing interesting material from IOM central and field offices. Furthermore, we made searches in the online publication repositories of organisations and think tanks which are active in migration-related knowledge production as well as queries in the databases of the European Union (EU) and the European Migration Network to collect significant texts and pertinent legislation and reports. The scholarly works referenced in the above material were finally added to the corpus. The combination of these searches resulted in 98 reports on which we performed a summative content analysis whereby we focused on the contextual usage of the policy objective rather than its frequency (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The singled-out passages were arranged chronologically, then categorised as belonging to the normalisation, fragmentation or assimilation processes and herein presented accordingly. We recognise that this method might not disclose all publications on the topic. Yet,

the elaborate search allowed for a reliable investigation of the changes in the meaning of sustainable reintegration over time.

The sections below address our findings regarding the overlapping and intertwining processes of the normalisation, fragmentation and assimilation of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration. However, rather than stopping at the assimilation phase, we take the discussion one step further and explore the supplementary normalisation of such enhanced definitions. The legitimisation of sustainable reintegration is thus portrayed as a cycle resting on the productive relation between research and policy, in which distinguishing lines are increasingly blurred. Table 12.1 contains a schematic overview of these processes, highlighting the key actors involved, the main conceptualisations, when the process occurred and the central events.

Table 1. Overview of evolution and development of sustainable reintegration

| | Main actor(s) involved | Main conceptualisation(s) | Time frame | Relevant event(s) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Early normalisation | UNHCR, IOM, EU and EU member states | Political and material re-insertion of refugees. Absence of returnees' re-emigration connected to income stability. | 1990s–2000s | Conflicts in the 1990s. Increase in asylum applications in the 2000s. IOM International Dialogue on Migration. |
| Fragmentation | NGOs and researchers | Individual/aggregate and subjective/objective sustainable return. 'Mobile livelihoods': 'Mixed embeddedness'. Sustainable return as reintegration in safe and secure environment. | 2004–2015 | UK's Department for International Development workshop on the sustainability of AVR. |
| Assimilation | IOM | Sustainable return as reintegration averting push factors. Sustainable reintegration including economic, social and psycho-social dimensions. | 2013–2017 | 2015 'migration crisis'. |
| Further normalisation | IOM and EU | Sustainable reintegration including economic, social and psycho-social dimensions. | 2017 onwards | Adoption of Global Compact on Migration in 2018. European Dialogue on Return and Sustainable Reintegration of Migrants in 2019. |

4.3 Early normalisation: sustainable return is equated with the absence of re-emigration

Tracing the origins of sustainable reintegration revealed that destination countries were already providing 'incentives to return' to guest workers in the aftermath of the 1970s recession (Rogers 1981). In that context, some scholars pitted returnees' 're-adaptation' – which translated into socio-economic readjustment and sense of belonging – against their propensity to re-emigrate to former host countries (Gmelch 1980). This early preoccupation with the re-emigration of returnees remained a core aspect of the discourse on the sustainability of return, which is the policy formulation that has dominated the early normalisation phase detailed below.

The interest of host countries in the return of foreigners carried on with post-conflict assisted repatriation mainly operated by the UNHCR, which was established as the preferred durable solution for refugees (Chimni 1999). After aiding returning refugees with their basic and immediate needs, the UNHCR (1997a) sought to ensure the 'sustainability' of its activities in stimulating longer-term rehabilitation projects. In this context, the "UNHCR's approach ha[d] become more ambitious, concerned not simply to secure physical survival but also to enable social, economic and even political processes which it sees as crucial to [sustainable return] [...] which implies a situation where a constructive relationship between returnees, civil society and the state is consolidate" (Macrae 1999, 3). Sustainable return, standing as a synonym for effective reintegration, was therefore initially used by the UNHCR in the frame of refugees' assisted repatriation (UNHCR 1997b). This composite and legally based conceptualisation specific to refugees was developed in subsequent texts such as the paper of the United Nations Mission in Kosovo on minorities' right to sustainable return (UNMIK 2003) and the UNHCR's (2004) Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities. However, this strand remained largely separate from the evolution of sustainable reintegration in return-migration discourse on which we focus in the present chapter.

Indeed, at the turn of the millennium, (European) governments were persuaded to extend the offer of reintegration-oriented assistance to undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers present on their territories, as this approach had boosted repatriation to post-conflict Bosnia and Kosovo (IOM 2003; 2010a; Koser 2001). Beyond the provision of reintegration assistance, our analysis showed that the AVRR programme re-adapted discourse and language

from repatriation programmes for returning refugees. It was agreed in 1997 that the IOM would tend to the return of irregular migrants and failed asylum-seekers, with a view to protecting host countries' asylum systems from non-eligible individuals (IOM 1998; UNHCR 2001). Wider reintegration assistance for these returnees was aimed at guaranteeing their 'economic self-sufficiency' (IOM 2000, 52).

Inauguring a fruitful relationship with academia, the IOM commissioned a first comparative assessment of European AVR programmes in 2001 (Koser 2001). This report presented the train of thought at the basis of these programmes – namely that offering assistance for migrants' effective reintegration would render their return sustainable and therefore prevent them from re-emigrating irregularly. As such, sustainable return could translate in local development and consequently reduce emigration overall. Entering an important debate which subsequently continued, the author of the report noted that those assumptions had never been confirmed by research and it looked as though migrants enacted development if left mobile. Alongside return numbers and cost-related criteria, the comparative assessment indicated that the sustainability of return was viewed by all implementers as an important aspect through which to judge assisted-return schemes. In a specific framework, sketched to evaluate these programmes and drawn on different stakeholders' views, the indicators for sustainability consisted in “[i]ndividual and family reintegration in the short- and medium/long-term [and] re-migration rates” (Koser 2001, 36). In sum, the absence of re-emigration was linked to the sustainability of return and this association generally endured. In a green paper, the EU similarly asserted that “every sustainable return of an illegal resident is in the common interest of all Member States in order to avoid secondary movements” (European Commission 2002, 22).

In a first study explicitly aiming to investigate differences in the sustainability of return (IOM 2002), income (in)stability was connected to the (un)successfulness of returnees' reintegration and hence their propensity (not) to re-emigrate. This connection was explored further in a subsequent IOM's research carried out under the aegis of the European Commission and scrutinising the anticipated reintegration needs of possible returnees, who had to be listened to because they possessed “a longer-term view, i.e. a more sustainable one” (IOM 2004a, 65). From this survey, the IOM derived that the right reintegration assistance could prevent returnees from re-emigrating – putting its emphasis on a restrictive permanent return – as their initial reasons for leaving matched their reintegration concerns. It should be noted that, despite emigration causes and reintegration

needs being broad, the IOM emphasised the provision of business-establishment aid as overarching solution, arguably because the correction of security and political factors is beyond the scope of the circumscribed reintegration assistance it can deliver. In an extensive appraisal of European policies and practices on return migration, the IOM went further in reporting that sustainability-oriented reintegration support could convince more migrants to return and keep returnees where they are, while working towards the removal of the *general* root causes of irregular emigration (IOM 2004b). This is relevant to the so-called migration-development nexus which commanded a tighter cooperation between migrant-receiving and -sending countries in the return and reintegration domain (Betts and Kainz 2017).

By this time, despite sustainable return being the preferred expression, references to reintegration were also arising in relevant publications. The *World Migration Report 2003* did not define sustainable reintegration but presented it among the targets of the “comprehensive and cooperative migration management approach” (IOM 2003, p.54). Testifying to the related project of standardising the language around return migration, a first step towards terminological unison was made in the first IOM Glossary, which defined reintegration, instead of sustainable return, as the “[r]e-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group or a process, e.g. of a migrant into the society of his country of origin” (IOM 2004c, p.54). Such reintegration could be cultural, economic and social.

Still sustainable return was the primary objective of this normalisation drive, in which debates, discussion and conferences also played a part. Within the framework of the IOM’s International Dialogue on Migration (IDM), a workshop on managing return migration with a focus on the sustainability of returns was attended by both states and diverse stakeholders from all over the world (IOM 2010b). EU legislation normalised sustainable return further as the latter was mentioned (without a definition) in Directive 2008/115/EC (Official Journal of the European Union 2008), along with the call for greater international cooperation on the matter of return migration. Overall, several publications in the 2000s repeatedly mentioned sustainable reintegration and return without defining them (inter alia, IOM 2005; 2008), signalling an increasing popularity of these expressions which was not (yet) matched by a compelling drive for terminological clarity.

In sum, stemming primarily from the European context, sustainable return derived from the multi-level conceptualisation of refugee repatriations and

became entrenched in the domain of return migration through the knowledge-producing cooperation between IOM and research, the formulation of normative texts and contextual international debates. In this initial phase, the policy objective – often used interchangeably with (sustainable) reintegration and not clearly or unanimously defined – largely meant the protracted presence of the migrants in their countries of origin via the assisted set-up of for-profit activities.

4.4 Appropriation by various actors and the proliferation of reinterpretations: sustainable return is fragmented

As sustainable return figured in IOM publications, normative texts and discussion fora, it attracted the interest of scholars and NGOs which – mainly independently from the IOM in this case – reinterpreted and rendered more sophisticated the originally normalised equation with returnees permanently staying in their countries of return. This trend originated again in the field of refugee return to then spill over into the return-migration domain more generally. In particular, towards the end of the 1990s and in relation to refugee repatriation, some scholars began to criticise the story of an unproblematic home-coming for returnees which was narrated by international organisations and some pundits alike (Strand and Aalen 2016). This contention applied particularly to the undefined ‘sustainable minority return’ to post-conflict environments, which entailed various degrees of redress (Black 2001; Mesic’ and Bagic’ 2010; OHR 1999; Williams 2006).

The experience of post-conflict return to the Balkans was the subject of a seminal report that provided the very first multi-dimensional, research-based, rigorous and measurable definition of sustainable return (Black et al. 2004). This report by Black and his colleagues unearthed a series of crucial reflections which laid the basis for all subsequent discussions on the matter of sustainable return. As refugee return impacted on communities of origin as a whole, the aggregate dimension of sustainable return was explored alongside the individual one, although the former is more difficult to actually measure and is therefore generally overlooked (Fransen 2017). Aggregate sustainable return occurred “if socio-economic conditions and levels of violence and persecution [for the home country or region] are not significantly worsened by return, as measured one year after the return process is complete”, whereas individual sustainable return existed “if returnees’ socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution

is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return” (Black et al. 2004, 39). According to the authors, sustainability – which could be physical, socio-economic or political – encompassed returnees’ individual perceptions, their objective conditions and the broader return context. Because of the post-conflict setting of the study, the report stressed the political dimension of return as the incidence of violence, persecution and conflict. Remarkably, this dimension has received virtually no attention in the subsequent literature on the sustainable return of illegalised migrants and rejected asylum seekers, signifying a deep and uncritical rift between the policy and academic approaches to refugee and non-refugee return (Strachan 2019). Moreover, Black and his colleagues importantly and clearly explained that absence of re-emigration – subsumed under the category of physical sustainability and known as the narrow interpretation of sustainability (Black and Gent 2006) – was not explicitly cited in their definitions because the socio-economic and security factors contained therein would precisely push any returnee (not) to re-emigrate. Alongside some indicators of sustainable return based on the above definitions and layers, the factors influencing the sustainability of return – age, migration experience, return decision and assistance – were sketched out. Some later studies expanded this list (Koser and Kuschminder 2015; Kuschminder 2017). Finally, the report drew on the concept of sustainable livelihood as an additional variation of sustainability, referring to an existence which “can be maintained without external inputs, and [...] sufficiently robust to withstand external shocks” (Black et al. 2004, 26). This significant concept was used in later publications, too (Mesic´ and Bagic´ 2009; Ruben et al. 2009).

Still within the context of refugee returns, Black and his colleagues’ research was featured in a workshop on the sustainability of AVR to the Balkans, organised by the UK’s Department for International Development. In the introduction to the workshop, it was contended that sustainable return is “[m]ore than return because physical return may not be sustainable on its own, and policies to promote return should seek a sustainable solution. Less than return because integral to a sustainable solution for returnees and countries of origin [...] is the re-opening of choice’ (DRC 2004, 3). This was taken further by Stepputat (2004), who saw sustainable return as involving ‘mobile livelihoods’. More specifically, Stepputat maintained that “the question of local integration, resettlement or return is a political question of conflicting interests between countries of asylum and countries of origin, a problem that technical and economic programmes of return and sustainable integration cannot do away with” (Stepputat 2004, 21), referring to the inconsistency between the thorny politics of return migration and the technical machine of migration management. This political predicament

might be a reason why the dimension of the re-opening of choice for returning refugees and migrants has found more favour among the academic community than that of the policy-makers. Nevertheless, others denoted that a degree of permanence by returnees is essential in ensuring the improvement of countries of origin which, in turn, renders return palatable (Black and Gent 2006).

Some then considered sustainability as yet another trendy word in global politics (Mesic´ and Bagic´ 2009), which had become almost meaningless (Black and Gent 2006). Yet, it represented “an important starting point for dialogue between donors and migrants’ countries of origin, and between interior and cooperation/development ministries, each with different perspectives on how [success] can best be judged” (Black and Gent 2006, 33). This difference in perspectives on sustainability was exemplified in a report by the Austrian element of the European Migration Network, namely, the pool of EU’s experts on migration. When the relevant actors were asked to voice their own interpretation of sustainable return, some referred to the lack of re-emigration, whereas others – for instance the NGO Caritas – put its emphasis on the access to basic services and items (National Contact Point Austria 2006).

By that time, the normalised correlation between return migration and development was disputed. It was argued that returnees could hardly spur development in origin countries as they struggled on both a societal and a personal level (Van Houte and Davids 2008). Accordingly, some called for greater attention to be given to social and personal sustainability (DRC 2004). Trying to account for this deeper dimension, Ruben et al. (2009) substituted reintegration with ‘mixed embeddedness’, as the latter concept captured more accurately the multidimensionality of return migration. Having economic, social network and psychosocial dimensions, it “refers to the ways how individuals find and define their position in society, feel a sense of belonging and possibilities for participation in society” (Ruben et al. 2009, 945). This publication introduced the crucial idea of the multi-faceted identity underpinning returnees’ embeddedness, which cannot easily re-adapt to original values and norms.

Still within the debate on whether reintegration can lead to development and/or re-emigration, a significant contribution edited by Cassarino (2008) – building on a previous expansion of existing theories on return migration (Cassarino 2004) – underscored the impact of return preparation, viewed as the intermixing of the willingness and readiness to return, the ability to mobilise resources for returning and the migration experience (Cassarino 2008, 19). Cassarino (2014) subsequently read return preparedness in conjunction with the degree of

completion of the migration cycle and the annexed motives to return. On this note, coercive and standardised assisted-return programmes not respecting migrants' willingness and pressing on their feeble capacity to develop countries of origin could, in themselves, jeopardise sustainability (Danish Refugee Council 2008; Whyte and Hirslund 2013).

Beyond the strictly academic domain, some confrontation around sustainability arose within the EU framework too. In 2010, the HIT Foundation related that, despite the term featured in many European policy papers and norms, no common and authoritative definition of it existed at EU level. However, the foundation was able to collect a few relevant conceptualisations, such as “[sustainability] means that returnees: [...] go and never come back to the individual member state [...] go and never come back to any other member state of the European Union [...] establish a new livelihood in their country and can sustain their family [...] contribute to economic and social development of the country of return [...] decide to use legal and official means of migration in the future” (Van Wijk 2010, 8). Within this definition range, the normalised correlation endured as it was repeated that “[s]ustainable return can have several definitions, but it generally implies the absence of re-migration after return because the returnee is fully integrated socially and economically in the home community” (European Commission et al. 2012, 7). Echoing earlier assumptions on the relationship between return and overall development which could counter the aggregate root causes for migration, the European Migration Network portrayed sustainable return as “return which deters new irregular migration of the returnee and – where possible – of other third-country nationals in the Country of Return” (EMN 2016, 9). Expanding on this reasoning, the European Parliament (2017) finally understood sustainable return “not only as [an] absence of re-emigration, but also as a returnee's positive impact on the development of their communities of origin” (1).

With the interest in the terminological dimension of sustainability mounting, new questions arose as to whether there could be one universal definition of and approach to sustainable return (Cherti and Szilard 2013; Whyte and Hirslund 2013). The substantial review of AVRR performed by Koser and Kuschminder (2015) and published by the IOM sought to bring some clarity to this debate. The authors devised a specific definition of sustainable return, occurring when “[t]he individual has reintegrated into the economic, social and cultural processes of the country of origin and feels that they are in an environment of safety and security upon return” (Koser and Kuschminder 2015, 49), on which they based a composite return and reintegration index. The authors notably questioned the

equation between sustainable return and the absence of re-emigration, arguing that “people may re-migrate even if their circumstances upon return are demonstrably better than when they first left, if their status in the community has decreased, or if their perceptions do not acknowledge their realities” (Koser and Kuschminder 2015, 15). Finally, and for the very first time thus far in both the academic and policy realms, the authors wished to clearly and purposively distinguish between reintegration and sustainable return, because “people may return to their country of origin and stay long enough to be considered sustainable but without actually reintegrating” (Koser and Kuschminder 2015, 15), or they could reintegrate while still craving re-emigration. Although Koser and Kuschminder did not see reintegration and sustainable return as synonymous, they still thought that the former generally led to the latter. Shortly thereafter, Carling’s (2002) model on aspiration and ability in migration was applied to the matter of return to differentiate among (un)sustainable return, volatile return and re-migration. This approach importantly differentiated between unsustainable return – for “[t]hose who do not aspire for reintegration, but are unable to re-migrate” (Strand and Aalen 2016, 11) – and re-emigration for returnees who reject reintegration, yet manage to leave their countries.

At around that time, questions on sustainable return were proliferating. For instance, Kuschminder (2017) asked “[a]fter what period of time should an individual be considered to be sustainably returned? For example, does sustainable return occur after one, two, or three years? Does sustainable return mean the individual should never migrate again? Alternatively, does a time limit need to be placed on sustainable return?” (13). Most importantly, the author suggested substituting sustainable return with sustainable reintegration as the latter “allows for an understanding of a holistic process of reintegration that is sustainable over the long term. This articulates a clear and sound policy goal, versus one of rooting people unsustainably in one place” (Kuschminder 2017, 15), stressing the importance of language in migration management (Cassarino 2014). The next section indicates that the IOM capitalised upon this suggestion.

4.5 Getting the best of both worlds: assimilation in sustainable return and reintegration

The circulating innovative and alternative stances on sustainable return were captured and re-rendered by the IOM, hence discursively boosting its initial approach. Black et al. (2004) as well as Van Houte and de Koning (2008) were

among the references of a report issued by IOM on the impact of health on sustainable return. A hard-to-achieve combination of access to supportive social networks, economic stability and a reliable health system was said to be necessary for returnees' "positive focus on their futures" (Mommers et al. 2009, 106), making sustainable return "a function of – for lack of a better word – luck" (Mommers et al. 2009, 95). Returnees with precarious health conditions – including mental stress – and in unstable political contexts found it more difficult to be employed or direct an enterprise, hence jeopardising their sustainable return (IOM 2014). In an exposition of assistance programmes from North Africa within the novel focus on return from transit countries, Cassarino (2008) inspired the assertion that AVRR "[a]llows the migrants concerned to freely prepare for their return, enabling them to identify potential opportunities for socioeconomic reinsertion into communities of origin, thereby enhancing the sustainability of their return" (IOM 2013a, 14), with the ultimate aim of averting re-emigration.

A general favour for post-economic indicators – like Amartya Sen's capabilities approach – was making inroads in the IOM's domain (IOM 2013b; Samuel Hall and IOM 2017). In this theoretically evolved context, a plain case of assimilation occurred in 2015. This year marked the beginning of the alleged migration crisis, especially in Europe, where a considerable entry of migrants established return migration as an effective containment strategy (Slominski and Trauner 2018). Citing Black and Gent (2006), Cassarino (2008) and Ruben et al. (2009), the IOM engendered a new definition of sustainable return, which "should be understood either as: (a) successful reintegration in the country of origin, which includes the economic, social and psychosocial aspects and the capacity of the individual to cope with push factors, both old and new, on the same level as the local population or (b) eventual legal remigration made possible by skills acquired during the reintegration process" (IOM 2015, 19). This definition followed the assumption that reintegration matches sustainable return and goes beyond returnees' economic reinsertion, also contemplating their social and psychosocial conditions. More importantly, acknowledging the central role of mobility in the contemporary world, this report conceded that Europe's view on sustainable return, centred on the absence of re-emigration, was excessively restrictive and declared return could still be judged sustainable if the returnee made use of legal emigration pathways by means of reintegration-related acquired skills. By connecting further mobility trajectories to the benefits of reintegration assistance for skills-building, the IOM was simultaneously giving voice to the contention that sustainable return wrongly chained returnees to their countries of origin and legitimising its own migration management role. Furthermore, by stressing the legal component of returnees' potential re-

emigration, it was preserving the decisional primacy of immigration countries which are generally far from generous in their offer of legal migration opportunities (Baldwin-Edwards 2008), regardless of the skills level.

In 2017, IOM defined, for the first time, sustainable reintegration in lieu of sustainable return, referencing Koser and Kuschminder (2015) and thereby addressing existing terminological limitations (Majidi and Nozarian 2019). In the “integrated approach to reintegration”, sustainable reintegration corresponded to returnees having reached “levels of economic self-sufficiency, social stability within their communities, and psychosocial well-being that allow them to cope with (re)migration drivers. Having achieved sustainable reintegration, returnees are able to make further migration decisions a matter of choice, rather than necessity” (IOM 2017a, 3). It appears that irregular re-emigration, seen as the product of necessity, would be averted by a sustainable reintegration enabling returnees to choose to move for reasons not related to their survival. However, this view reduces agency, implying that choice and necessity are clear-cut and returnees can be dragged from the latter to the former by means of reintegration assistance. Again on the point of further migration, it was established that “[t]he latter can take place and can still be a choice regardless of whether reintegration is successful, partially successful or unsuccessful” (IOM 2017a, 3). To some, this explanation looked as an advancement with regard to returnees’ mobility compared to previous approaches (Majidi and Nozarian 2019; Samuel Hall and IOM 2017). However, in the same report, it was specified that “returnees are unlikely to reintegrate if they find themselves in situations whereby moving again or relying on a family member abroad is considered necessary for their physical or socioeconomic survival” (IOM 2017a, 3), meaning that a permanent stay was still deemed a positive indicator of sustainability.

The integrated approach to reintegration was composed of individual, community and structural levels and informed a sophisticated measurement tool, aimed at facilitating evidence-based policy-making. This consisted in individual- and community-level indicators for sustainable reintegration, streaming into a reintegration score. Validating the assumption that the attention towards discourse, language and terminology reflects migration management’s attempt at universalising its approaches, such score allowed for “an aggregated and standardised understanding of an AVRR beneficiary’s level of reintegration” and was meant to “be integrated globally, in all reintegration monitoring activities in the field of AVRR” (Samuel Hall and IOM 2017, 13). The 2017 definition of sustainable reintegration also informed the framework for AVRR released in 2018, which aimed at “calling for the adoption of coordinated measures, policies,

and practices between stakeholders responsible for migration management and development at the international, national and local levels” (IOM 2018a, 2). This striving for standardisation and homogenisation materialised in the renewed normalisation of the last terminological and discursive approach to sustainability in return migration.

4.6 Reactivating the legitimisation cycle: a new normalisation

Testifying to the intention to consolidate and normalise the IOM's 2017 definition of sustainable reintegration, the latter was embedded and reproduced in all subsequent IOM reports (IOM 2017b; 2018b; 2018c; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d). The consistent utilisation of a single conceptualisation paved the way for the entrenchment of sustainable reintegration in the Global Compact for Migration, marking with its regulatory stature the policy objective's ultimate normalisation. Although sustainable reintegration was not defined in the compact's Objective 21 dealing with return migration, it was said to be conditional on the equal access of returnees and the local population to socio-economic and political services, which would enable migrants to accelerate the sustainable development of their countries of origin (Global Compact 2018). This rather speculative formulation, looking closer to the discourse on sustainable refugee return mainly attributable to the UNHCR, forcefully brought back the previously contradicted association between return and reintegration and development.

The signature of the Global Compact for Migration incentivised the holding of dedicated conferences, such as the 2018 European Dialogue on the return and reintegration of migrants, repeated in 2019 under the name of European Dialogue on Return and Sustainable Reintegration of Migrants. During these events, international political actors, researchers and practitioners exchanged best practices and perspectives for the improvement of reintegration programmes, contributing to the ossification of sustainable reintegration within the boundaries of global migration governance.

4.7 Final reflections on (not) defining sustainable reintegration

This chapter has retraced the chronological and discursive evolution of sustainable reintegration from its first appearance as sustainable return by linking it to the related normalisation, fragmentation, assimilation and re-normalisation cycle which encompassed authoritative and rigid definitions as well as critical appraisals. Since this policy objective has expanded beyond the narrow field of refugee returns, the IOM has taken the lead in its discursive formulation and advancement, cooperating directly with consultants and academics or re-employing the latter's independent re-definitions and views. Within this 'knowledge network' of researchers and organisations (in)directly connected to each other, migration management's intention to generalise and standardise the way return migration is interpreted and acted upon harnessed and rivalled autonomous and divergent interpretations. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to trace definitive divides between the legitimising processes or unquestionably and conclusively assign each of the relevant actors to one or more of them. Rather, we sought to exemplify how a concept may become pivotal for policy after being (re-)negotiated and (re-)discussed in various fora and by diverse actors, be the latter formally associated or not.

The net result of the above reconstruction of this evolution of sustainable return into sustainable reintegration and the latter's final formulation is still that "there is no universally agreed definition of sustainable reintegration" (IOM 2019a, 11). Some have tried to fill this gap, as terminological unison is seen as useful for operational and explanatory purposes. However, a fixed and standardised definition of sustainable reintegration could ossify the predicaments which have been highlighted with respect to assisted-return and migration management, namely the fact that it speaks to a hypothetical world lacking transnational asymmetries, socio-economic inequalities and multifarious political barriers (Oelgemöller 2017; Pécout 2015). Other shortcomings are its technical and economic nature (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011; Strand et al. 2008), its sedentary bias (Jeffery and Murison 2011) and its inattention towards returnees' sense of belonging (Lietaert et al. 2017). Return-migration experiences are hard to generalise or standardise, as situations of wellbeing and struggle can occur simultaneously, with migrants' views on their own return and reintegration experiences varying over time (Lietaert et al. 2017).

In this regard, some interesting insights can be borrowed from the extensive discussions on sustainability within the literature on sustainable development, where the term has already been caught in the contest between terminological determinacy and flexibility. In parallel to the engendering of authoritative definitions of sustainable development mainly within the United Nations (du Pisani 2006), several scholars have approached the concept of sustainability critically. Although discursive precision is thought to lead to clearer policy and research outcomes (Armstrong and Kamieniecki 2019), debating over the meaning of sustainability is considered as an act of reaction to the “imperatives of necessity, desirability and universality” (Luke 2005, 230) that mainstream discourse entails. Sustainability, development and similar elusive concepts always stand for particular worldviews, or “complex constellations of ontological presuppositions, epistemic capacities, and ethical and aesthetic values that converge to dynamically organize a synthetic apprehension of the exterior world and one’s interior experience” (Hedlund de-Witt 2014, 8315). In this context, rather than a purportedly universal cloak for the partiality and relativity intrinsic to any policy concept, sustainability should be a ‘dialogue of values’ harbouring the unending dialectics of irreducible points of view (Ratner 2004). A genuine and inclusive interaction of values, views and interpretations across sectors and geographical locations could result in mutable and widely accepted conceptualisations of sustainable reintegration, susceptible to create more democratic and beneficial approaches to the topic of return migration. This might be particularly important for the next phase of global migration governance corresponding to the implementation of the Global Compact for Migration, whose clause on sustainable reintegration, echoing previously normalised associations, could stimulate bottom-up and unorthodox reflections on the policy objective.

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CHAPTER 5

Translating EUrope's Return Migration Regime to The Gambia: The Incorporation of Local CSOs

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Abstract

The end of a long-standing autocratic regime in The Gambia renewed Europe's geopolitical interest in the externalisation of (return) migration management to the West African country. Since 2017, Europe has financed several programmes implemented by a combination of international and local actors. Analysing original qualitative data through the lens of the sociology of translation (SoT) offered by actor-network theory (ANT), this paper explores the incorporation of locally owned civil society organisations (CSOs) within the socio-material network of externalisation. As such, it engages with the understudied perspective of Southern implementers in the context of migration management. In our analysis, we put central two notions of SoT: intersement and enrolment. With the first, we show how the development and migrant-protection interests of locally owned CSOs are brought in alignment with the European objective of curtailing irregular migration. This process of intersement is never complete, but leaves room for excess positions, which here correspond to the locally owned CSOs' criticism of Europe's appropriation of Gambian natural resources, practical organisation of migration management and excessive immobilisation of Gambians. The notion of enrolment refers to the processes of negotiation addressing part of these excess positions. Even with enrolment being successful, locally owned CSOs keep imagining, and to some extent, performing alternative ways of dealing with migration. Such alternative thinking and practicing will overtake the European only if multiple and stable connections arise around it. Our ANT-driven analysis demonstrates that local implementers endorse European migration management because they broadly see it as beneficial; yet, with their criticism, requests and imagination, manage to limitedly alter it, and may, potentially, transform it.

5.1 Introduction

Migration is a defining feature of the culture of The Gambia (Gaibazzi 2020), the tiniest country of mainland Africa. Leaving an economy mostly reliant on agriculture and tourism characterised by high unemployment, approximately 90,000 Gambians had emigrated mostly to the US, the European Union (EU) and West Africa in 2015 (IOM 2017). The pooled resources of families and communities are poured into such migration endeavours, leading to the moral and practical imperative to share the capital accumulated abroad (Cham and Adam 2021; Gaibazzi 2020). It is mostly young males who embark on migration, to whom very few regular mobility opportunities are available. This scarcity of legal routes directs them towards the dangerous irregular route commonly known as the backway (Conrad Suso 2019).

Since its independence, The Gambia has endured long periods of autocratic rule, the latest of which lasted 20 years and was imposed by Yahya Jammeh. Many of the Gambians who left the country irregularly during Jammeh's dictatorship and applied for asylum in the EU, were granted protection there (Schapendonk 2020). In 2016, Jammeh was ousted, what changed the attitude of EUropean⁹ authorities towards Gambian nationals' asylum applications. Rejections of the latter in the whole of the EU have surged from below 500 in 2011 to above 5,000 in 2019 (Eurostat 2021). The spatio-temporal event of the termination of an autocratic regime has determined the sudden re-collocation of Gambian nationals from the 'refugee' and thus protection-deserving to the 'migrant' and hence undesirable category (Drotbohm and Winters 2020). With the regime change, the isolation of The Gambia within the international community has also ended (Cham and Adam 2021). As a result, The Gambia has been turned into a prominent target of externalisation, or the 'out-sourcing' and 'off-shoring' of the EUropean border to third countries (Bialasiewicz 2012).

Financial instruments from both the EU and individual EU Member States have been underpinning projects in the domains of returnee reception and reintegration, the tackling of the so-called root causes of irregular migration, and capacity building in The Gambia since 2017 (Altrogge and Zanker 2019). These projects fall under the scope of migration management, which is a policy and knowledge paradigm controlling migration through the application of technical

⁹ As in Bialasiewicz (2012), this spelling signifies the totality of the European Union (EU) and EU Member States.

solutions (Collyer 2019; Geiger and Pécoud 2010). In The Gambia, the externalisation of migration management is primarily performed by international organisations (IOs), development agencies and both international and locally owned civil society organisations (CSOs).

Within this multi-project and multi-actor landscape, we put locally owned CSOs at the centre of attention. The involvement of CSOs in West Africa is not only understudied (Bisong 2021), but also raises questions on how these actors are positioned and incorporated in Europe's quest to control migration. This is particularly interesting since, in the case of The Gambia, these CSOs are embedded in the same cultures of mobility discussed above, that generally stimulate migration (Gaibazzi 2020; Schapendonk 2020). By focusing on locally owned organisations in The Gambia, we aim to 'decenter' our gaze from Europe, IOs and the state, which have monopolised existing research on the externalisation of migration management (Cuttitta 2020; Triandafyllidou 2020).

This paper is based on desk-based research and ethnographic fieldwork, the latter of which comprising two fieldwork periods in The Gambia and one remote data-collection phase, carried out across 2020 and 2021. Before we outline the dynamics concerning the position of local CSOs in the externalisation of migration management to The Gambia, we build a theoretical framework that articulates the phenomenon of externalisation as a manifestation of borderwork within the European migration regime. Based on actor-network theory (ANT) and in particular the sociology of translation (SoT) approach, we then frame Europe's externalised migration regime as a socio-material network, which locally owned CSOs are locked in and end up transforming. As highlighted for development studies (Donovan 2014) and border studies (Scheel 2021), ANT serves a powerful lens to recognise the transformative potential of allegedly subordinate or dependent entities and contexts, while considering the significance of material reality in establishing and reproducing connections between and beyond them. Additionally, ANT allows for the zooming in on micro shifts in and tactics of power, attending to manifestations as diverse as enticement, resistance, negotiation and alteration. Overall, our ANT-based analysis relates to the accounts of how non-hegemonic groups and spaces impact geopolitical realities, found in the field of subaltern geopolitics (Sharp 2011; Smith 2011). Furthermore, it shows that subaltern participation in the European migration regime is not linear or established once and for all, but precarious and contingent. This is an expression of the alter-geographies of everyday externalisation, which "shatter Europe's, historically, colonially embedded spatio-temporal imaginary, and

wherein Europeans dominate both European African spaces” (Pallister-Wilkins 2021, 3).

5.2 Externalisation as Borderwork in the European Migration Regime

EUrope advances a system of mobility containment vis-à-vis African populations that induces and rewards their sedentariness, with the effect of (re)producing transcontinental inequality and mobility injustice (Freemantle and Landau 2020; Stock et al. 2019). As part of these processes, EUrope’s border is increasingly externalised to African nations, as “destination countries promote, support, delegate, impose, or directly carry out activities related to migration and border management outside their territories [...] in order to prevent unwanted arrivals at their territorial borders” (Cuttitta 2020, 2). Externalisation introduces a diversity of practices including, among others, visa policies and border controls (Bigo and Guild 2005); the up-scaling of return from and asylum application in so-called transit countries (Van Dessel 2019); migration partnerships and readmission agreements (Bisong 2020; Cassarino 2018); as well as information campaigns and development aid to fight against irregular migration (Collyer 2019). Reintegration support for returning migrants is part of this development bid, as policy makers deem it conducive to the general development of countries of origin, which should reduce the overall drive to migrate irregularly (Marino and Lietaert 2022, Chapter four). This renders return migration central to the externalisation of migration management. Migration management’s various practices can only unfold with the help of IOs such as UNHCR and IOM (Geiger and Pécoud 2020; Koch 2014; Scheel and Ratfisch 2014), development agencies and both international and locally owned CSOs. More specifically, the latter include development, faith-based and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as returnee groups (Bouilly 2008; Cuttitta 2020; Pian 2010; Vammen 2021; Van Dessel 2021).

This variety of actors, composing fragmented yet burgeoning architectures of migration governance (van Riemsdijk et al. 2021), co-constitute the border in a way that goes beyond the traditional relationship between territorial boundaries and states (Casas-Cortes et al. 2013), indicating that the latter are not the sole producers of note-worthy geopolitical dynamics (Hyndman 2012). In other words, the practices of these actors – including those that are more locally embedded – can best be approached as ‘borderwork’ (Cold-Ravnkilde 2021; Rumford 2012).

The latter may be developmental, with Western security interests advanced through the attribution of various forms of development aid (Andersson 2014; Frowd 2018), and affective, if concerned with stirring negative emotions towards migration in the audiences of dedicated awareness-raising campaigns (Vammen 2021).

This borderwork unfolds within EUrope's migration architecture, which should be understood as a multi-dimensional migration regime (see Horvath et al. 2017; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010). The latter consists of the disordered, conflictual and undetermined encounters between local and global structures of governance involving a multitude of actors and practices (Bartels 2017; Cuttitta 2020). Power inequalities and spaces of negotiation constantly (re-)emerge therein, manifesting themselves in the "continuous repair work" stimulated by the regime's "gaps, ambiguities and outright strains" (Sciortino 2004, 33). The tensions inherent in the migration regime point to how the colonial past influences contemporary relations, without determining them (Gaibazzi 2020; Gaibazzi et al. 2017; Ould Moctar 2020). Indeed, "African actors adopt different types of strategies, ranging from anticipation, incorporation, passive acceptance, and outright opportunism, to partial or total resistance", therefore "challeng[ing] and giv[ing] nuance to the image of a single imperial, neo-colonial and/or dominant EU neighborhood approach and discourse" (Deridder et al. 2020, 27).

We question then how locally owned CSOs are incorporated in EUrope's migration regime where they externalise migration management through the performance of borderwork. While some recent studies focus on the ways Southern CSOs perceive EUrope's migration agenda (Aguillon 2020; Pastore and Roman 2020; Sylla and Cold-Ravnkilde 2021), incorporation dynamics are often overlooked. This can be explained by the fact that some authors put emphasis on an overarching governmentality that deterministically absorbs different actors (e.g. Walters 2010). Others simply explain NGOs' engagements by underlining material gains (e.g. Berkovitch and Gordon 2008). We seek to unpack further the 'black box' of incorporation dynamics by employing ANT as our main theoretical lens. This lens is particularly suitable to disentangle the determinants and implications of the building of connections in expanding networks, such as EUrope's externalising migration regime.

5.3 Actor Network Theory and the Sociology of Translation

To delve into the incorporation of locally owned CSOs in Europe's externalised migration regime, we utilise ANT as our theoretical framework. ANT is a social theory "interested in the provisional [. . .] ordering of entities beyond one universal principle" (Müller 2015, 30) which "plac[es] stabilized entities at the end of analysis" (Donovan 2014, 872). These entities are not "a priori given", but "results [. . .] of associations between heterogeneous actors" (Donovan 2014, 871). These actors are both human and non-human. As such, they retain the same ontological value and associate in socio-material networks (Müller 2015; Scheel 2021). More precisely, the chain of associations is spearheaded by a 'key' actor or 'primary' entity, which goes on incorporating additional actants (Stalph 2019). The scale and stability of entities or projects depend upon the number and solidity of connections among (non-)humans attained as well as the 'sociotechnological compromises' necessary for these connections to be entrenched (Latour 1996a; 2005). However, more resourceful and well-connected entities do not automatically have the biggest impact on the ground, because every new actant absorbed in a project has potential for transformation. Indeed, while more connections bring reach and durability, they also cause the 'inevitable alteration' of the initial scheme, what Latour terms 'translation' (Donovan 2014, 871). Translation is the process by which one actor reinterprets – and hence displaces – the goals, problems or identities of other actants (Heeks 2013; Latour 1996a; Lewis and Mosse 2006). In other words, translation can be viewed as both the alignment between the identities of the enrolled actants and the enrolling actors and the inescapable, irreducible and unforeseeable modifications produced by enrolment itself. Being "grounded in materiality, constructivism and networks of associations" (Donovan 2014, 869), ANT posits that it is the close following of the concrete (dis)connections between the (non-)humans constituting networks that can explain their functioning (Latour 2005; Scheel 2021). The expression actor-network consequently combines the actor as the container and initiator of innumerable translation exchanges and the network corresponding to "what connects the actors together" (Latour 2005, 180).

Each and every transformation brought about by translation impacts the network as a whole and all of its composing actors (Scheel 2021). However, the expansion of a network ensuing from translation is never final or established once and for all. As socio-technical networks are fragile and mutable, ANT sheds

light on the “the tactics and practices through which the relations between the entities participating in a network are established, ordered and stabilised in processes of translation” (Scheel 2021, 6). Accordingly, ANT-inspired research deals with the practical, concrete and real-life passages whereby connections are entrenched, multiplied and conserved over time. This complies with a non-essentialising ‘flat’ approach to social analysis, commanding not to prioritise any actor, item or context within networks (Donovan 2014; Mosse and Lewis 2006). Overall, ANT is a productive pathway “towards understanding contemporary innovations, organizational changes, societal changes, and the cultural changes” (Williams 2020, 2). Following these premises, we see EUrope’s migration regime as a socio-material network that gradually expands to a number of additional (non-)human actants, ending up transformed in the process.

To approach the incorporation of locally owned CSOs into the socio-material network of EUrope’s migration regime, we recur to the various ‘moments’ underpinning a SoT outlined by the ANT scholar Callon (1984). Among them, the most relevant to our analysis are the *interessement* and *enrolment* of identified actants, whereby they are locked in prescribed positions. More specifically, the moment of *interessement* corresponds to “the group of actions by which an entity [...] attempts to impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors” (Callon 1984, 8). This is done through ‘*interessement devices*’ that “can be placed between [the identified actants] and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise” (Callon 1984, 9). The attempt at stabilisation of the key actor leaves nevertheless room for some identification excess, which is mitigated in the *enrolment* phase. Indeed, *enrolment* “describe[s] the group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the *interessements* and enable them to succeed” (Callon 1984, 10). Our focus on *interessement* and *enrolment* ultimately enables us to scrutinise the position of locally embedded CSO’s vis-a-vis the complex and patchy institutional landscape through which EUrope’s externalised borders are enacted (Bourne et al. 2015; Broeders and Dijstelbloem 2016; Glouftsiou and Scheel 2021; Pelizza 2021; Pollozek 2020; Scheel 2021). Before we present how this conceptual approach results in insightful empirical findings, we outline our methods and clarify how we concretely differentiate organisations according to their local or international character.

5.4 Methods

This paper is based on a combination of methods. First, we carried out a document analysis of policy and research sources on the operational and funding relationships built between EUrope and The Gambia since the end of Jammeh's rule. We started from the seminal work by Zanker and Altrogge (2017), which has been the first to indicate the organisations implementing migration-management projects in The Gambia and their sources of funding. We then scanned the repositories of each of these organisations and accessed relevant reports and documents. Furthermore, we surveyed the 'action fiches' of each project financed by the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) on the dedicated website (European Commission 2021).

Second, we conducted ethnographic fieldwork in The Gambia in March 2020, remotely in June and July 2020 due to COVID-19, and again in-person between September and October 2021. The in-person fieldwork took place around the urban area of Serekunda, where the majority of actors engaged in migration management are located. The three fieldwork phases combined produced 27 semi-structured interviews and several hours of participant observation in the setting of one returnee group. The 27 interviews derived from eleven organisations in total. More specifically, one locally owned governmental body, two IOs, two international development agencies, one international development NGO, two locally owned faith-based NGOs, one locally owned humanitarian NGO and two returnee groups. Seven of these organisations were interviewed twice. In a handful of occasions, more than one representative of an organisation was interviewed. Overall, respondents ranged from project manager, director and secretary general, to reintegration counsellor, communication officer and returnee-group member. The respondents gave consent for their responses to be collected, analysed and anonymously presented through written and, in some cases, oral authorisation. All the material fed into the reconstruction of the socio-material network of EUrope's externalised migration regime in The Gambia, while the data from locally owned organisations informed our understanding of interestment and enrolment. An ANT-based clarification of our categorisation of CSOs across the international/local divide is in order.

The actor-network, that simultaneously contains and is contained by other actor-networks, problematises a cartographical interpretation of distance and shows how the local and the global co-exist, co-constitute and co-occur instead (Murdoch 1998). Policies themselves, when they are translated from the outside and into practice, encompass both the global and the local (Anholt 2020).

Therefore, a 'hybridity' lens should be preferred to an ineffective search for what is 'truly' local (Roepstorff 2020). Consequently, we adopt the 'local' category while being aware of its inherent limitations. Yet, we do not view it as the negative, romanticised or authentic version of the global, but as the latter's simultaneous creator and creation (Triandafyllidou 2020). In this sense, we draw on Johnson's (2016) non-geographical characterisation of the local as the informative, contextual and embedded experiences of the marginalised and the governed. More specifically, we identify the local component of the European migration regime in The Gambia with less powerful (or (stably) connected) stances, and therefore classify locally owned CSOs as those being directed by and fully composed of Gambians. This is because we consider non-Gambian elements (e.g. a European directorship) manifestations of a closer connection to Europe as the key or primary actor. In sum, it is by zooming in on Gambian owned CSOs as the signifiers of less numerous associations that we are able to ask how Europe's externalising migration regime manages to enrol actors from mobility-prone contexts. While we indicate which organisations are locally owned in our descriptive section, we remove all explicit references to the specific membership of our respondents, to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality.

Beyond the observation, the accounts offered by the respondents on their own motivations and views – which veritably turned them into ethnographers of their own engagement (Mol 2002) – are central to address the research question at hand. With Walker (2019), we indeed argue that implementers' own categories, frameworks, rationales and explanations, stand for "dominant forms of cultural identity" (5) that guide everyday operations. This is in line with ANT's tenet that "actors themselves make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics, even their own ontologies" (Latour 2005, 147). In relation to this, we cannot ignore how our positionalities as Western and White might have impacted the responses received and their presentation in this paper. We are indeed cognisant of the imperialist undertones of White research in Africa and that the researcher constitutes and is constituted by the field she engages (Bass et al. 2020).

The anonymised interview transcriptions and the field notes were analysed thematically (Braun and Clarcke 2012) using the data-analysis tool NVivo. This material was first coded descriptively, staying as close as possible to the original wordings and sentences. All references to funding, operational and organisational links we then categorised as constitutive of the socio-material network of the externalisation of migration management to The Gambia. In line with the concept of *interessement*, we recognised the instances of locally owned

CSOs expressing positions which EUrope locks in its regime through funding and partnerships as intersement devices. We subsequently singled out the examples of criticism and doubting representing the identities and interests which escape the intersement phase. With relation to the moment of enrolment, we selected the references to the acts of compromising necessary for the escape to be partially offset. Finally, we identified the statements on the alternative ideas re-imagining migration management that point to the (potential) transformations entailed by the expansion of a socio-material network to new actants.

5.5 The Translation of the EUropean Externalising Migration Regime in The Gambia: the Intersement and Enrolment of Locally Owned CSOs

Our findings are presented in two steps. First, we zoom out and visualise the organisational and financial underpinnings of EUrope's externalised migration regime as a socio-material network. Second, we zoom in on the actual dynamics of intersement and enrolment of locally owned CSOs. As discussed above, intersement entails actants' interests to be aligned with the key actor's scheme through intersement devices. Funding is a prominent example of intersement device. However, this alignment is neither easily accomplished nor irreversible, as concerned actants may want to define their interests and identities differently. This is captured in the criticism voiced by Gambian owned CSOs. We show how compromising and negotiation is the kernel of enrolment, whereby part of the discord and discontinuities is strategically overcome. This inevitably leads to (potential) transformations of both the actants and the network – the essence of the process of translation – which we tackle in the last section on Gambian owned CSOs re-imagining migration management.

5.5.1 Visualising the Network of Externalisation in the Gambia

The EU has externalised its migration agenda to The Gambia through two prominent financial instruments, namely the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) (see Zardo 2020). Funds from individual EU Member States have been also used. All these resources go into different objectives. First, the logistics of migration

management, namely the transportation of organisations' staffs and beneficiaries as well as the renting of offices and activity spaces. Then, the promotion of migration management, through the dissemination of informational and advertising material. Additionally, the provision of business grants and vocational training to returnees and potential migrants. These are some of the material facets to externalisation as a socio-material network, whereas the organisations implementing the related projects are part of the network's social component. The reach and clout of these organisations depend upon the degree of stability and closeness of the connections they have between themselves and, especially, with Europe as the primary actor. For instance, the IOs administering large budgets or EU Member States' development agencies are by definition more closely connected to the European key actor. These differences in connection and closeness are portrayed in Figure 1, with the relative reach of each (non-)human rendered by the size of the corresponding circle and its spatial location.

The key actor of the externalised migration regime in The Gambia is Europe. The nearest organisation to this actor is IOM, which is project-based and donor-driven, and hence close to Western countries of destination (Pécoud 2018). IOM is in charge of the implementation of two large projects financed by the EUTF. One is the 'Strengthening the management and governance of migration and the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants in the Gambia', for which 3 million 900 thousand Euros have been allocated. The other is the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in The Gambia. The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the second-largest actant, implementing the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) worth 11 million Euros of the EUTF. ITC is additionally involved in the Tekki Fii (Make it in The Gambia) programme alongside the German, Belgian and Portuguese development agencies GIZ, Enabel and IMVF. The programme received funding for 23 million Euros. Each of the implementing actors was assigned one of the work packages composing Tekki Fii, with the Italian development NGO COOPI being subcontracted by Enabel. YEP and Tekki Fii aim to counter the 'root causes of irregular migration', identified in the lack of employment, training and education opportunities for young Gambians.

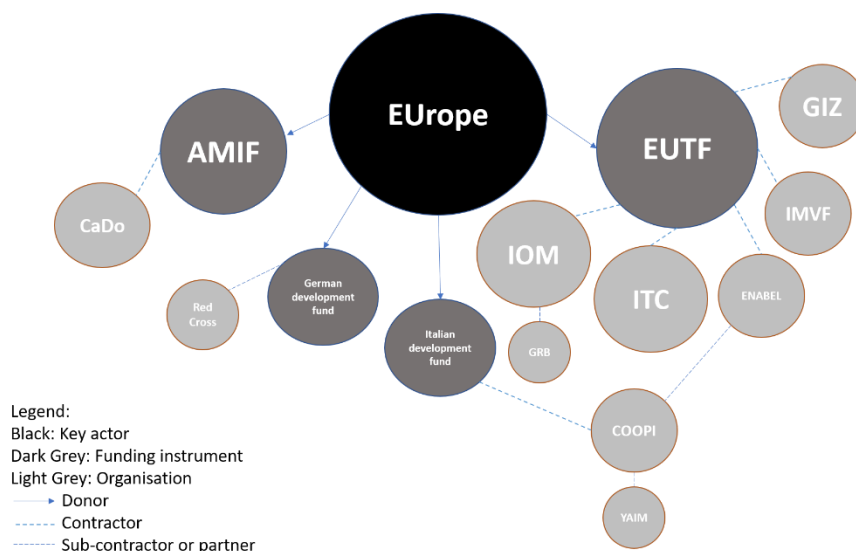


Figure 1. Funding and organisations implementing migration management in The Gambia in 2019. Source: original elaboration of the authors.

The AMIF is at the basis of ERRIN (European Return and Reintegration Network), the EU's coordinated network on assisted return and reintegration which landed in The Gambia in 2019. Within ERRIN, selected Service Partners oversee the return of migrants from adhering EU Member States to specific groups of countries of origin, where enlisted Local Service Providers receive and support the returnees. Caritas International Belgium (CIB), the ERRIN Service Partner in charge of The Gambia, takes over assisted return cases from different ERRIN Member States and assigns them to the Catholic Development Office (CaDo) as the Gambian Local Service Provider. According to our typology, CaDo is a locally owned faith-based NGO. For mutually referring beneficiaries and sharing expertise, CaDo has an informal yet stable relationship with the Gambia Red Cross Society, which we categorise as a locally owned humanitarian NGO. The latter partnered with the German agency Bildung und Berufliche Qualifizierung (BBQ), under German development funds, for its volunteers to offer returnees reintegration coaching.

Next to well-established organisations, grassroots and self-organised associations have been crystallising. Among them, Youth Against Irregular Migration (YAIM) was conceived by Gambians held captive in Libyan prisons, determined to advocate for greater help upon return and more awareness of the dreadfulness of irregular migration. YAIM has partnered up with COOPI, via

financing by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), to work on returnees' psychosocial reintegration and sensitise on the dangers of irregular migration. A similar returnee-led group, Gambia Returnees from the Backway (GRB), grew from a collective reintegration project revolving around a farm in Berending (North Bank Region) to a large association often collaborating with bigger partners such as IOM in sensitisation and other projects. Both YAIM and GRB are locally owned grassroots organisations.

Overall, seeing the EUropean regime as a socio-material network allows to conceive of capacity and extension as functions of looser or tighter connections with ontologically equal human and non-human actants. Among the latter, funding is to be identified as an interessement device employed by EUrope to stabilise the identities and interests of locally owned CSOs in a way that aligns with the project of externalisation, as will be shown next.

5.5.2 Interessement: Identities and Interests are Locked in Position

Despite locally owned CSOs being different in identities and purpose, common basic positions emerged from the analysis. Locally embedded CSOs overall referred to the nation-wide quest for development, returnees' reintegration needs and the necessity not to waste Gambian lives on the irregular journey as overarching interests. With funding as one of its interessement devices, EUrope places itself between these positions and potential alternative projects, entities or networks, de facto locking Gambian owned CSOs in its regime. Nevertheless, this locking is neither complete nor definitive, as tackled subsequently.

All interviewees suggested that, if useful to the (economic) development of The Gambia, external funds are welcomed regardless of the political project they might stand for. One respondent, who has worked extensively with international organisations as freelance consultant, added that the externally-funded programmes lacking substance and genuine cooperation with locals, but having the sole intention to advance the name and stature of the donor, are the only ones deserving rejection and scepticism on the part of Gambians (Respondent 4). The project manager of one NGO and representatives of two returnee groups confirmed that, when evaluating proposals for partnerships from abroad, politics is not a ground for acceptance or refusal per se, but the final decision is made exclusively on the basis of whether the actor in question aligns with the values of their organisations (Respondent 5; Respondent 3; Respondent 6).

Returnees, on their part, feel the responsibility of converting the financial aid aimed at them into broader development for their country. As former migrants receiving reintegration aid or campaigners against irregular migration, the attention of destination countries towards returnees has increased considerably. They have experienced the violent repercussions of the exclusionary European border first-hand and are therefore well aware that donors are far from universally benevolent. However, turning down financial possibilities on account of this background would translate into much-needed opportunities being lost. As the member of a returnee group put it, “if we deny everything, it means we are denying our own people at the end” (Respondent 3). One NGO member tending to the reintegration of returning migrants argued that, despite reintegration aid being smaller than the emotional and financial burden of migrating in the first place, “it’s better than coming home with nothing” (Respondent 1). A member of a different NGO went even further, maintaining that traumatised and stigmatised returnees left to their own devices might constitute a social danger for the communities (Respondent 2). Additionally, migration management in The Gambia is a wide source of employment. When returnees are involved in sensitisation activities by bigger organisations, they earn allowances which represent in certain cases vital livelihood supplies. The member of a returnee-led group recounted that, during a meeting called by a bigger organisation to arrange a sensitisation campaign,

The only thing that was [returnees’] concern was if they would go to a tour, the allowance they will pay. [. . .] That will not help us, you will use that money, go, and you cannot save that money because it is not coming regularly. [Laughs] so you will use it, you eat it, and pray for, to be part of the next [campaign] (Respondent 3).

In a second interview, the same association member pointed out that this employment supply is proving particularly useful and valuable in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under these conditions, returnees were unable to continue with their reintegration projects and instead were deployed by large organisations to carry out health-related sensitisation and activities (Respondent 3).

Similar development interests inform locally owned CSOs’ motivations for discouraging migration. In addition to being a prominent Western political objective, discouraging Gambians from taking the backway was seen by one NGO member as essential to protect migrants’ lives and retain much-needed

able bodies (Respondent 1). Make it in The Gambia is therefore a slogan which resonates with Gambian actors, and in particular with the returnee groups composed of people whose migration plans failed or were thwarted. Emigration opportunities being scarce, the member of a returnee group fell back on the consolation that “anywhere you are as a human being, you can make it there”, meaning that one can attain success in the poorest country too (Respondent 3). However, a member of another returnee group and a representative from a local NGO emphasised that the ‘make it in here’ cannot overrule and should coexist with migrants’ right to leave and stay, in order to preserve human dignity at all stages of migration (Respondent 3; Respondent 7). These nuances are at odds with the uncompromisingly sedentary position of EUrope, laying the ground for the criticism voiced by Gambian implementing actors reported next.

5.5.3 The Excess of Interesement: Locally Owned CSOs’ Criticism

However strong the interesement devices, connections in socio-material networks are frail and mutable, and interest-alignment is never complete. In other words, non-aligned positions and views can remain in place beyond interesement. Such excess interests might lead the network to collapse, if the connections between the composing actors are not continuously nurtured and fostered.

The first contestation has to do with EUrope’s behaviour vis-à-vis Gambian natural resources. Among these resources, fisheries are pivotal for the subsistence of local communities. In 2019, the EU struck a ‘sustainable’ fishing deal with The Gambia, gaining the right for European vessels to fish for tuna in Gambian waters in exchange for financial compensation and capacity-building support (European Commission 2021). Although the EU pledged not to target fish that is normally prerogative of small-scale Gambian fishermen, it has been proved for other West African countries that European vessels often surpass the boundaries set in fishing deals and end up overexploiting fisheries to the detriment of local subsistence (Okafor-Yarwood and Belhabib 2020). The member of a returnee group indeed resented that when “the layman Gambian [...] goes to fishing he only catch this bunga fish, fish with a lot of bones because they are the ones that is there” (Respondent 3). The representative of a different returnee group contended that such asymmetric deals strip Africa of its assets, thus going counter to Europe’s alleged intention to curb irregular migration (Respondent 6). Furthermore, both returnees pointed to the high costs of the deployment of project managers, consultants and directors from Europe to The

Gambia, who cannot be serious about ending migration because they would consequently lose their jobs (Respondent 3; Respondent 6). One of the two respondents further observed that the money invested by Europe in The Gambia is nothing more than a (limited) reimbursement for the large amounts of money spent by Gambians on rejected visa applications (Respondent 3).

The second point of contention is Europe's insufficient disbursements and hasty reinstatement of returns after 2016. According to one NGO member, the EU should have waited to have the adequate structures and resources in place before returning large numbers of Gambians to a country undergoing a delicate democratic transition. He also asserted that, with reintegration funds being inferior to the material and emotional costs of emigrating, the sustainability of returns is generally jeopardised, increasing the likelihood of returnees turning to the backway once more (Respondent 1). The member of one returnee group talked extensively about the experience of reintegration. To get reintegration funds, returnees are encouraged to establish small-scale businesses by means of in-kind assistance. This assistance is obtained through invoices issued by material providers and submitted to donors abroad. The respondent related that returnees often come up with hasty reintegration plans with a view to striking a deal with vendors and get cash rather than material via fake invoices. This is a prominent example of European money being repurposed for a different objective from the procedural one, demonstrating further how the process of translation may lead to unexpected and unorthodox results. The respondent continued by explaining that the reason for this transgression is in migration management not recognising the real needs of returnees, who are unable to fully focus on entrepreneurship as they must simultaneously deal with trauma, debt repayment, accommodation, family expectations and health. According to him, these difficulties are not recognised by big organisations which are only preoccupied with numbers and targets to showcase to donors abroad. He equally addressed strong criticism to the configuration of the fight against the root causes of irregular migration, revolving around short-term trainings often not translating into stable jobs as well as loans and grants generally unsuitable to create a business from scratch (Respondent 3). This aligns with the finding that the 'sustainable return' project of destination countries is more interested in advancing the unrealistic entrepreneurialisation of former migrants than addressing the multifaceted challenges they are faced with (Marino and Lietaert 2022, Chapter four).

The third aspect of contention with Europe is the mobility injustice inherent in migration management. One NGO representative and one returnee-group

member observed that 'illegal' migration is a political construct conceived by the international community to differentiate between the nationalities entitled to mobility and those who are not (Respondent 1; Respondent 6). As this pushes unprivileged individuals to risk their lives in order to reach greener pastures, the representatives of two NGOs said to be advocating for the right to leave one's country and the right to stay abroad (Respondent 1; Respondent 7; Respondent 8). Further remarks by the same respondents conveyed nevertheless that their views about mobility injustice are not radical, but compliant with states' restriction of immigration provided that human dignity and life are safeguarded (Respondent 1; Respondent 8).

Finally, returnee groups hinted at the issue of misrepresentation and exploitation in partnering up with well-established IOs. One returnee-group member resented the latter's tendency to misrepresent the targeted engagement of individual returnees as a stable cooperation with returnee associations. He also said that such IOs tend to utilise quotes, images and names from returnee groups, exploiting their visibility and popularity among the youths without engaging them fairly and genuinely. He concluded that, overall, organisations in migration management, preoccupied with visibility and recognition, do not cooperate meaningfully beyond slogans and advertising. According to the same respondent, this engenders widespread duplication of activities as well as proliferation of returnee groups, who divide rather than unite their efforts. He gave one stark illustration of how this duplication unfolds in the way IOM replicates the sensitisation endeavour of returnee groups, rather than supporting what the latter already accomplished:

They will use the migrants as messengers [in sensitisation campaigns], just like what we are doing, you know, we are already messengers. From 2017 up to now we, I can say we visited all the regions in The Gambia, all the districts in The Gambia, maybe not all the communities but all the districts that are here, [. . .] so we are already messengers (Respondent 3).

The issue of (the representation of) cooperation and duplication intersects with the anxiety of returnee groups around their identity and existence, which they fear might be manipulated by bigger organisations, as emerging from the words of the same respondent. More specifically, he articulated that IOs are reluctant to recognise the existence of grassroots groups as such, and prefer individualised forms of contribution and support. However, he underlined that the

collective dimension is central to returnee associations, being it a tool to appear stronger and increase the likelihood of having their demands met (Respondent 3). Another source of fear for self-organised associations is the social implication of engaging in externalisation. One returnee respondent claimed that IOs strive to find and portray cases of successful beneficiaries to both show they are reaching their goals and motivate more individuals to enter their projects. However, he thought that this ends up compromising the very protagonists of those 'success stories', who might appear accomplished and affluent in the eyes of their communities even if that is not really the case (Respondent 3).

Returnee groups' desire to hold their ground vis-à-vis external interests and their inability to shape their own involvement might lead to terminological clashes. For ANT, words are among the disparate types of actants which can be weaved in socio-material networks (Latour 1996b). Words also relate to the ANT notion of spokesperson, as the act of speaking on behalf of others is intrinsic to the moments of translation (Callon 1984). If the narrative of the spokesperson fundamentally differs from that of the represented project or actants, the translation stream can be disturbed. This occurred in the case of a sensitisation campaign against irregular migration staged by one self-organised group – posing as the spokesperson of the migration-management project – in partnership with a foreign development cooperation NGO. As articulated by representatives of the returnee group and the foreign NGO, the former conceived of its mission as discouraging Gambian youths from taking the backway because of its dangers, whereas the latter intended to stop at informing potential migrants about the difficulties they might encounter on the way (Respondent 3; Respondent 9). The NGO member clarified that this difference in interpretation derives from her organisation being supportive of migration as a human right, yet still engaged in people protection and therefore motivated to raise awareness on the potential risks of travelling (Respondent 9). This episode further testifies that, underneath the apparently consistent surface of migration management's praxis and rationale, divergent narrations and interpretations connect to the disparate positionalities of involved organisations, resulting in unexpected implementation scenarios. These positionality contrasts – which are never congealed but always in flux – manifest particularly salient along the international/national (mutually constituted) divide.

Overall, it appears that interest alignment does not prevent representatives of locally owned CSOs from criticising and doubting the earnestness of Europe's fight against irregular migration from The Gambia. Gambians' scepticism and criticism has stimulated some European engagement to correct a few thorny

points. It also results in alternatives to the status quo being imagined. These will be the topics of the next section.

5.5.4 Enrolment and Transformation: Compromises and Alternatives

As discussed in the theoretical section, ANT's concept of enrolment points to the instances of compromising reached to maintain the connections between actor-networks and thus the regime in place. Our respondents reported some instances of limited concessions made by European donors and partners. Furthermore, ANT underlines that an existing network is just one of the endless others that can be conceived and imagined. Whether one network emerges out of the realm of possible others is only a matter of entrenched connections. This leaves space to (re-)imagine current situations. In this regard, our Gambian interviewees mentioned concrete and potential alternative paths: if no sufficient connections and ties arise around them, they will remain intangible ideations.

The compromises found mainly regard the expansion of (financial) assets for returnees' reintegration and projects in general. One NGO member argued that his organisation's advocacy efforts effected the introduction of the option for returnees to benefit from temporary shelter without their reintegration packages being financially affected (Respondent 1). Furthermore, in consultative meetings that were called after the wave of returns from Libya of 2017, returnees complained about the lack of reception at and transportation from the airport upon their arrival, leading, according to a returnee-group member, to the subsequent correction of this shortcoming. He added that limited allowance and transportation were also inserted in the context of training provision after they were long advocated for (Respondent 3).

Some more requests have been made by locally owned CSOs, but not yet fulfilled by Europe. An NGO member mentioned having requested that Gambian actors are informed about reintegration plans discussed with counsellors in Europe prior to migrants' return, because they often prove unfeasible and end up being modified in the post-return phase. Additional financial resources and training for staff were also asked for (Respondent 5). NGO representatives generally demanded larger reintegration packages and the possibility for returnees who were not involved in a specific return programme to still access reintegration support once in The Gambia (Respondent 1; Respondent 5; Respondent 8).

In addition to the above, Gambian organisations act beyond EUrope-funded migration management's confines. We have come across examples varying from providing support to migrants en route via technological arrangements to the cultivation of a garden used as an informal social space. This illustrates that locally embedded CSOs partially escape the logics of externalisation through their everyday practices. Moreover, their affiliation to the EUropean regime does not prevent Gambian actors from imagining, envisioning and conceiving of different ways to do and act upon (return) migration. One NGO member affirmed that rather than accepting return decisions, The Gambia could have asked the EU to temporarily keep Gambians and teach them skills. This is because he saw skilled returnees as better able to contribute to development in a post-transition environment. This respondent insisted that external resources should be invested in upgrading national skill-acquisition centres and economically productive sectors (Respondent 1). Conclusively, one returnee-group member emphasised that, instead of fuelling the obsession for things foreign through the financing of migration journeys, Gambian communities should be investing in their own country and particularly in agriculture (Respondent 3). These last examples demonstrate that, despite the interest and enrolment moments produce the (contingent) incorporation of locally owned CSOs from a migration-prone society into the externalisation of migration management, they do not totally remove the possibility for dissent and misalignment. Quite the contrary: the very incorporation of Gambian owned CSOs needed to expand the EUropean socio-material network, leads to the corresponding sowing of the seeds of change. This simultaneous reinforcement and weakening brought by the multiplication of connections is the core of translation.

5.6 Conclusion

In this paper we have explored the incorporation of locally owned CSOs in The Gambia, a country where migration is a highly popular source of livelihood embedded in cultures of mobility. We have particularly focused on the ways in which these actors are pulled to and position themselves vis-à-vis the EUropean migration regime. In so doing, we have not only provided details on how the regime as actor-network expands, but also on how processes of translation dislocate the initial purposes of the same. As such, we have indicated that the chaotic, defiant and multifaceted nature of the migration regime underlined in existing literature, is not only the product of the continued engagement of disparate actors with migration management, but underlies the very incorporation of such actors in externalisation.

We have shown that material resources as interest devices are among the tools used by Europe to lock endogenous interests in alignment with migration management. In the case of Gambian owned CSOs, the captured interests have mainly to do with the need for national development, the protection of returnees and their communities and the saving of Gambian lives. In this sense, the European policy mantra of tackling the root causes of irregular migration and keep Gambians at home does resonate to a certain extent with the local organisations. However, the latter simultaneously see European migration management as deficient when considering Europe's appropriation of Gambian resources and limited disbursement of funds for reintegration and aid. While some bottom-up requests have been met by Europe, the seeds of change lie in locally embedded CSOs thinking of alternative ways to approach the issue of migration. That this alternative thinking and practice turns mainstream is currently unlikely. This is because of the stronger and more extended associations held by Europe and the organisations close to it, which make them more powerful vis-à-vis less established Southern realities. Whether these power relations will be overturned remains to be seen. For the moment, our translation-informed analysis has shown that, however piecemeal, the expansion of the externalised European regime of migration management to locally embedded CSOs has led to some transformation of the network. Thus, we have contributed to the debate on the transformative potential of purportedly weaker entities and contexts, already acknowledged by the theoretical strand of subaltern geopolitics. As such, Europe sees itself and its migration-management project altered and contested by its very determination to incorporate ever more actants therein.

As incorporation is fragile and mutable, further concessions will have to be made in order for the connections entrenched by Europe to endure, potentially leading to even more acute instances of alteration. Therefore, the Gambian invocation for dignified emigration opportunities and truly transformative development projects should not be deemed a utopian call for a fairer world, but a position constitutive of what is Northern, international and global. This coexistence at any given latitude of global and local, Northern and Southern, is an alter-geography, whereby patchiness and mutual influence inhabit Europe's simplified topography.

5.7 References

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CHAPTER 6

The moral economy of voice within IOM's awareness-raising industry: Gambian returnees and Migrants as Messengers

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Abstract

The 'politics of voice' of awareness-raising bends returnees' stories towards moral tropes against illegalised migration. These stories are commodified, bringing awareness-raising within the migration industries. We address this commodification using data from an ethnographic study of the Migrants as Messengers (MaM) project run by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in The Gambia since 2019 and through the concept that we call 'moral economy of voice'. Its constituting dimensions are outlined in our analysis of vignettes on how the clashes between IOM and the returnees over awareness-raising industry's capitalist logics are cast in moral terms. We show that the returnees orally complained at IOM's mis-categorisation, mis-compensation and appropriation of their products. When acting as members of an independent group, however, they rejected IOM's conditional support for their communication projects altogether. This all engenders an evasive paternalism whereby returnees' survival partly depends on IOM, but the latter affords them neither full vulnerability nor maturity status. As such, returnee stories' commodification mechanisms are as contentious as their discursive bending. We therefore hint at returnee groups' potential for withstanding exploitative dynamics as well as advocate for a fairer engagement of returnees in awareness-raising.

6.1 Introduction

Awareness-raising campaigns on migration entail informing the public on the risks of migrating irregularly and how to make it at home rather than venture abroad. For that, they rely on the showing and performance of emotional scenes involving trauma and suffering as well as motivational messages on the appropriateness of staying put. As such, they claim to go beyond migration control and be oriented towards human rights and development. In reality, they contribute to the paternalistic containment of the mobility of Africans advanced by migration management (Freemantle and Landau 2022; Landau 2019). Sensitisation campaigns have been normally implemented by civil-society organisations (CSOs) under the supervision of international organisations (IOs) within a framework of inter-state cooperation (Pécoud 2010). They are mostly funded by countries in the Global North, which have more recently developed the conviction that returnees are best posed to persuade their peers not to migrate irregularly (Musarò 2019; Vammen 2021; Williams 2020). These returnees are often involved in different forms of assisted return, a migration-management programme offering return and/or reintegration assistance to migrants accepting to go back home physically uncoerced (Maâ 2021; Marino et al. 2022a, Chapter three). Fine and Walters (2021) connected the heavy involvement of returnees in awareness-raising to the emergence of what they called the ‘political imaginary of deportation’, which is based on the exaltation of the decision to return that they termed the ‘deportation twist’. The authors found this trend to be prevalent in the discourse of the dominant actor in the field of awareness-raising, namely the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The political imaginary of deportation rests on the transformation of migrant stories into sanitised advertisement for the desirability of return and sedentariness, which the authors labelled ‘politics of voice’. Fine and Walters (2021) mentioned the commodification of these transformed stories, in line with the finding that awareness-raising is a neoliberalised component of the racialised and exploitative migration industries (Cappi and Musarò 2022; Cranston et al. 2018; Maâ et al. 2022; Shaidrova 2022).

The moralisation and commodification of assisted returnees’ stories entailed by the politics of voice point to the concept of moral economy. This concept originally addressed the relationship of expectation and dependence between the governed and the elites (Scott 1976; Thompson 1971). From the perspective of immigration policies, Fassin (2005) connoted it as a socially-constructed normative and emotional framework. Differently, Siméant (2015) and Palomera

and Vetta (2016) used moral economy to refer to the potentially disruptive meanings and practices associated with specific beliefs about how (il)legitimate unequal capitalist processes are, especially when linked to questions of hegemonic responsibility over the subsistence of the subaltern. For the latter authors, in particular, this equated to concentrating on how political economy's mechanisms of profit and exploitation are morally translated on the ground (Palomera and Vetta 2016). Tying these three more recent perspectives together, what we then call 'moral economy of voice' has to do with the propagation of moral tropes on return just as much as the confrontation of morally-charged positions about economic exchanges between IOM and the returnees. The discursive and affective side of the moral economy of voice has already been relatively well explored in the literature (Musarò 2019; Vammen 2021; Vammen and Kohl 2022; Watkins 2017; Williams 2020). For this reason, we hereby turn to the commodification side of the moral economy of voice, uncovering the struggle engendered by how IOM and the returnees contextually shape and react to the (il)legitimacy of certain capitalist logics in awareness-raising, within a setting of expectations over survival responsibilities. To do so, we make use of vignettes about the Migrants as Messengers (MaM) sensitisation project run by IOM in The Gambia since 2019. This insight was acquired from a broader ethnographic study on externalised migration management in the West African country performed by the first author since 2020.

With this paper's move, we complement the literature on the semiotic landscape and the bordering effect of awareness-raising campaigns (Fine and Walters 2021; Musarò 2019; Vammen 2021; Van Dessel 2021; Watkins 2020; Williams 2020), while enriching the accounts on the incorporation of returnees in the migration industries, which have mostly emphasised their expression of complaints about the hierarchical organisation of migration-management work or acceptance of the latter for opportunistic reasons (Maâ 2021; Maâ et al. 2022; Rodriguez 2019; Shaidrova 2022). More specifically, we show that the relationship of social reproduction between IOM and the returnees is as materially as discursively determined; yet, in doing so, we colour the understanding of political economy's abstract working by revealing the moral character of the unequal exchange between these atypical economic actors. In the remainder of the paper, we first have a section devoted to the conceptualisation of our lens of moral economy of voice. Then, a methods section gives way to our empirical findings, presented according to ethnographic scenes exemplifying three constituting moments in the Gambian MaM's moral economy of voice. In the conclusion, we reflect on what this all entails for how the respective roles of IOM and the returnees socially reproduce.

6.2 Conceptualising the moral economy of voice: the grounded mediation and (il)legitimacy of awareness-raising's capitalist logics

Returnees, increasing in number since the consolidation of the 'deportation turn' (Gibney 2008) and oftentimes involved in various kinds of assisted return (Marino et al. 2022a, Chapter three), are the face of what is called 'peer-to-peer' awareness-raising (Maâ et al. 2022). Sharing their traumatic experiences of the journey as well as the successes of their return and reintegration through channels as diverse as community gatherings, social media, dedicated websites, radio and television, they play the part of intermediaries between the Northern paternalism of migration management, allegedly protecting migrants from dangers it itself creates, and local communities (Landau 2019; Maâ 2021). The trend of peer-to-peer awareness-raising connects to what Fine and Walters (2021) termed politics of voice, found particularly in IOM's communication. According to the authors, IOM does not silence migrants as it has been the case in the landscape of refugee humanitarianism, "but seeks to bend [their voice] towards its own agenda" by "selecting, curating, and publicising the more successful and more optimistic aspects of their stories of return and resettlement" (Fine and Walters 2021, 3064). IOM's politics of voice feeds into a particular political imaginary of deportation, which is based on the positive connotation of assisted return – including the construction of the desirability of returnees' homecoming and deportation as self-reinvention – that Fine and Walters (2021) defined the deportation twist. The authors essentially argued that the vocal stance taken by migrant activists to counter the silencing of migrants found in conventional humanitarian communication, is appropriated in IOM's politics of voice to sponsor the desirability of return and sedentariness. Within the imaginary engendered by this politics of voice, returnees as activists persuade the audience that the need for return is a self-evident truth by highlighting how their entrepreneurial metamorphosis, purportedly aided by assisted-return programmes, is contributing to national development.

The discursive dimension addressed by Fine and Walters (2021) rests on an expanding economic backbone. The authors indeed argued that the "migrant voice can be a valuable commodity in the public sphere" (Fine and Walters 2021, 3064), being "deployed as a kind of marketing tool" (Fine and Walters 2021, 3068) and becoming "a stake in political struggles, a form of political capital that various actors in the migration field seek to harness" (Fine and Walters 2021, 3072). The commodification of migrant voice is part and parcel of the

industrialisation of awareness-raising, which has become a neoliberal endeavour that securitises the Global North against the alleged risk posed by the South, displays the industrialisation of media and migration, and establishes IOM as the main source of delivery and standardisation of sensitisation campaigns (Cappi and Musarò 2022; Magallanes-Gonzalez 2021). Within such an awareness-raising industry, returnees are subjected to 'racial differentiation', feel a loss of ownership over their own stories, and do sensitisation on a volunteer basis, to the extent that it "[becomes] an ambiguous form of labor" (Maâ et al. 2022, 11–12).

Recognising the discursive and affective as well as commodification sides of awareness-raising led us to the long-standing concept of moral economy. In migration studies, this concept has been used to variously refer to informality in labour relations between immigrants; expectations and socio-cultural interpretations of economic exchange in migrants' communities of origin; and the value-systems informing the rules of in- and exclusion of migrants in host societies (Alpes 2017; Ambrosini 2022; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 2012; Dinler 2016; Hiah and Staring 2016; Kleist 2017; Morris 2021). However, its origins are traceable to the works of Thompson (1971) and Scott (1976), which approached the failed expectations of the crowds vis-à-vis the provision duties of the authorities and the risk-aversion strategies of peasants from colonial societies. As such, these two different studies both mobilised moral economy to refer to what Siméant called "a relational conception of legitimacy" (165). This dimension appears downscaled in later interpretations of moral economy that the author identified, either foregrounding the interaction between moral and social norms and economic activities or, as in the case of Fassin (2005)'s assessment of immigration policies in France, corresponding to particular normative architectures and frameworks. Referring to the investigation of the moral perceptions of humanitarian-aid recipients, Siméant (2015) consequently argued for the return to a sociology of (de)legitimation, with moral economy signifying "a set of values derived from living conditions that are marked by a preoccupation with subsistence, linked to the reciprocal expectations of elites [...], and which concern the fair distribution of wealth and the responsibility of leaders" (171). This connects to the original potential of moral economy to account for "domination without assuming the unconditional internalization of consent" (Siméant 2015, 16). Calling for the return of moral economy to radical reflections on the workings of capitalism, Palomera and Vetta (2016) echoed Siméant (2015) in conceiving of the notion as the perceptions, habits and values mediating the expansion of capital, potentially strengthening or overturning social inequalities. The authors, therefore, underlined the usefulness of moral

economy to go beyond the universally adversarial reading of political economy, seeing the former as the embedded translation of the latter's abstract mechanisms of profit and exploitation. In other words, moral economy represents "[...] the anthropological way to study the political economy" (Palomera and Vetta 2016, 428).

Our conceptualisation of moral economy of voice encompasses the more recent approaches introduced above, as it has to do with the circulation of normative frameworks about the appropriateness of return, hinging on moral disagreements mediating economic exchanges between IOM and the returnees. The landscape of norms and affects characterising the moral economy of voice has already received quite some research attention. The literature has indeed highlighted that awareness-raising campaigns are exercises in moral space-making (Watkins 2017), producing a 'mediatised border' which corresponds to "a techno-affective network of mediations around migrants and refugees" (Musarò 2019, 4). They therefore infuse borderwork with an affective dimension, rousing negative emotions towards migration in audiences made of potential travellers and "shifting the very location of migration governance from a territorial space to the human body and consciousness" (Vammen 2021, 16; Vammen and Kohl 2022; Williams 2020). In this paper, we shed more light on commodification in the moral economy of voice, uncovering the contrasting ways in which IOM and the returnees contingently shape and react to the (il)legitimacy of some of awareness-raising's capitalist logics, against the background of issues of dependence, entitlement and subsistence. The milieu of our investigation of the material side of the moral economy of voice is IOM's Gambian leg of the Migrants as Messengers sensitisation programme, the contours of which will be traced next.

6.3 Methods

Tiniest country on mainland Africa and former British colony, The Gambia has endured the violent 20-year-long dictatorship of Jammeh, that estranged the international community and intensified the predisposition of the Gambian population to emigrate (Hultin et al. 2017). Because of the difficulty of getting hold of a visa, hundreds of mostly young males have turned to the irregular journey commonly known as the 'backway' (Conrad Suso 2019; Gaibazzi 2014). During the Jammeh era, the migrants taking the backway could find asylum in the EU (Schapendonk 2020). However, the 2016 elections marked the demise of Jammeh's regime and the installation of a democratic government led by

Barrow, bringing The Gambia back to the forefront of the outsourcing of the EU border (Gaibazzi 2020; Nzally 2018). This outsourcing has relied heavily on the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), with IOM, international development agencies and CSOs implementing several projects in the areas of border management, development, and return and reintegration (Aucoin 2022; Cham and Adam 2021; Marino et al. 2022b, Chapter five). MaM is among these projects. Via funding from the Dutch government, it ran as a pilot project in Senegal, Guinea and Nigeria between 2017 and 2019 (Dunsch et al. 2019). Since its 2019 launch, the Gambian chapter of MaM has encompassed 71 volunteers who partook in 145 in-person outreach activities and 113 videos (IOM 2022).

The core material for this paper derives from ethnographic fieldwork performed by the first author around the Greater Banjul area and, to a lesser extent, the North Bank and West Coast Regions in September and October 2021. This is part of a broader ethnographic study of European externalisation to The Gambia that the first author has carried out between 2020 and 2022. All the participants to this research granted oral and, in a handful of cases, written informed consent to being interviewed and observed. The fieldwork revolved around the engagement and activities of Gambian MaM volunteers as well as of one returnee group. More specifically, I observed MaM volunteers engaging in filming and photography training, moviemaking and awareness-raising. I additionally observed the daily activities of the returnee group, including the realisation and promotion of its own communication material. This was integrated with multiple non-recorded interviews and informal conversations with the core members of the returnee group as well as four recorded interviews with MaM volunteers, two of whom also belong to the returnee group. To complete the picture, I interviewed the communication team of IOM The Gambia and had exchanges with the representatives of both international and local organisations involved in migration management as well as religious actors and journalists to better grasp the overall context surrounding the theme at hand. The interviews and exchanges were conducted in English, but the first author could develop a good understanding of Wolof during her stays, enabling her to grasp comments and speeches made in the local language as well.

The interview and observation material was analysed through directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005), whereby the codes utilised derive both from existing research and the original data. This analysis pointed to the centrality of grievances and clashes around norms and expectations connected to the economic background of awareness-raising, which inspired our development of

the concept of moral economy of voice. In an iterative analytical process, we used this concept to approach our data again, sharpening the organisation of our empirics around three defining dimensions corresponding to the ethnographic scenes outlined below. In presenting our empirics, we remain aware of the limitations and implications of White, European and middleclass research in the Global South. This applies equally to the phases of data collection, analysis and dissemination (Bass et al. 2020). Especially in both the unhindered mobility of Western researchers and their preferential access to research sites and actors, the upcoming findings should therefore be considered as manifestations of White privilege. One way in which we have dealt with this asymmetry is trying to expose the grievances and struggles of returnees with ethnographic scenes which stay as close as possible to the circumstances and words registered.

6.4 Exploitation, alienation and conditionality in the Gambian MaM's moral economy of voice

The following ethnographic scenes manifest the contrasts engendered by how capitalist logics are morally mediated by IOM and the returnees in MaM The Gambia, constituting the composing dimensions of the commodification facet of the moral economy of voice. The first clash regards the construction of the voluntariness of returnees' engagement in MaM; the second, IOM's appropriation of a trauma-laden sensitisation movie made by the returnees; and the third, the failure of an attempted partnership between IOM and the returnees interacting from a self-organised group. These dimensions all give insight into the contours of the relationship of social reproduction between the returnees and IOM, which will be directly addressed in the last section.

6.4.1 Scene one: MaM volunteers or (aspiring) employees?

It is lunchtime when I meet two returnees, A. and M., at the premises of a multimedia company who hired them for an acting job after encountering through MaM. I asked them about the functioning of the project. They explain that MaM volunteers are provided with an app through which they take photos and videos of other returnees and send those back to IOM for editing and publication. The app also features prompts and potential questions to be asked. I am struck by A. and M. saying that they are not notified of when a particular piece of content depicting them is published online. The returnees go on claiming that if it was not for the desire to persuade other Gambians not to take the backway and save them from the risks it poses, they would not easily share their experiences. IOM publicises these experiences, but silences their actual struggles and predicaments:

Sometimes they will only ask you to talk about the opportunities and your success stories. How successful you are, when you are not even successful. A successful person will have a very good compound where you lie down, you drive your car, you afford everything you want to. [...] And you say that person is successful, no?. (Interview with MaM volunteers, 22 October 2021)

Subsequently, A. and M. share their frustrations about the limited financial compensations they receive for participation in activities. The frustration of not being adequately compensated for their contribution is voiced further by M.:

You just pay us little money, you want us to implement the project, we implement the project, at the end of the project there will be less than 20% of that money in my account because I will use all that money in food and transportation. So, at least those who are implementing the projects, they should be paid well. (Interview with MaM volunteers, 22 October 2021)

According to M., this treatment is particularly unfair when considering that IOM could hardly achieve any concrete result without the volunteers, who are able to convince the audiences because of having first-hand information about the struggles of migration and return. Furthermore, A. highlights the discrepancy between the little allowance given the returnees and the revenues, social protection and facilities of IOM staff. She vigorously utters: “[...] you are giving lots of millions for the implementation of the project and those who are implementing it are poorer than anyone!” (Interview with MaM volunteers, 22 October 2021). Both volunteers underline that IOM does not provide continuous occasions for engagement and, what is more, fails to foresee phase-out strategies for when projects end. They agree that they could use cash-for-work opportunities or a land to develop after MaM’s termination. A. concludes that returnees would have appreciated being assigned a stable job, but all IOM’s vacancies require a university degree. As the lunch break comes to its end, A. and M. have to go back to the acting site. A. only leaves me after asking multiple times to make their challenges visible. I think of how this contrasts starkly with the response one of IOM’s communication officers has given me, in the organisation’s premises of Kairaba Avenue, just the day before:

One of the misconceptions and accusations we get is, and I really hate this, it really bothers me, some people will say we are paying returnees. We are not paying them, we don’t pay them at all! We just give them allowance. If you need to go to Basse, we will help with the accommodation!. (Interview with IOM staff member, 21 October 2021)

The above scene has to do with how IOM and the returnees struggle over their moral translation of the capitalist logic instrumentalising non-wage labour, or what, in relation to the exploitation integral to the harnessing of data from asylum seekers, Tazzioli (2022) has termed ‘extractive humanitarianism’. On the one hand, IOM performed ‘moral category work’ to frame returnees’ engagement as voluntary and their compensation as allowances (Cornelissen and Cholakova

2021); on the other, the returnees reacted to the perception of the illegitimacy of this exploitation through verbal attacks at two main issues. First, the reintegration challenges they are still facing; second, the lack of accessibility to regular employment opportunities at IOM and the inequality of treatment and retribution across statutes and races. The latter remark, in particular, echoes similar comments made by returnee and migrant intermediaries across Africa (Maâ et al. 2022; Magallanes-Gonzalez 2021). However, just like Tazzioli's (2022) asylum seekers who collaborate with international organisations for fear of losing the chance to get asylum if they do not, the returnees maintain their engagement on the basis of what Maâ et al. (2022) have dubbed MaM's 'humanitarian reframing' (7), or the desire to protect potential migrants from the deadly backway as well as the need of income during a reintegration trajectory paved with expectations and stigma (Wanki et al. 2022). In Tazzioli's (2022) terms, this interacts with exploitative dynamics in spurring the participation of the returnees in their own governmentality or confinement.

Indeed, our respondents raised the determination to persuade their Gambian fellows not to embark on the deadly backway as their reason for participation in MaM, also in consequence of the solidarity imperative stemming from West African Islam (Babou 2002). This should be coupled with the observation that MaM constitutes a source of livelihood instrumental for returnees' survival. All the MaM volunteers approached for this research, the majority of whom were repatriated from Libya in 2017, returned with some form of assistance. Upon their return, they received a reintegration grant of approximately 1000 dollars. Among them, only one utilised the money for the purpose of education. The rest employed the grant to start up some sort of for-profit business. However, none of them could continue with the established undertaking because of competition with well-established foreign and local businesses, the social pressure of family and friends to share any wealth earned, and the choice to cash in the in-kind material received for the settling of the debt that enabled the migration. Furthermore, the returnees are compelled to come up with reintegration plans shortly before or after their return, when the emotional burden of their experience ends up affecting their entrepreneurial efficiency. Yet, these challenges are not met with adequate flexibility, as IOM morally conceives of assisted return as a one-off reintegration grant which cannot be re-allocated in case of failure (Marino and Lietaert 2022, Chapter four).

6.4.2 Scene two: movie stars until the spotlight goes off

This afternoon, a group of volunteers from the Gambian MaM cohort, will shoot the movie with which their country will compete in the Global Migration Film Festival. This is a worldwide film competition launched by IOM in 2016 with the objective to highlight issues connected to migration through the big screen. The MaM volunteers have an appointment with one local staff member of IOM, who will bring the necessary equipment for the movie to be shot. Before reaching the meeting place, however, the volunteers all gather in A.'s nearby compound. I am invited too. The atmosphere is joyful and playful. The volunteers talk, laugh, make fun of each other. Beyond their common participation in MaM, they belong to two different returnee groups and a network of victims of human trafficking. However, at this moment, there seems to be no rivalry, competition or division when they interact all together. After this short stop at A.'s compound, we move towards the place where the meeting with IOM is supposed to occur. It is a welding workshop. Part of the movie should be set and videoed here, where some of the actors will point at it as an example of successful business and available opportunity to make it in The Gambia. After a long wait, the IOM staff member arrives with the equipment, excusing himself for the delay. The MaM volunteers assess the equipment brought by the IOM employee and notice immediately that something is missing. The boom microphones with which to record voices while shooting outdoors, appropriate lighting as well as tripods to hold the cameras are unavailable. The returnees appear discouraged as a consequence. Furthermore, the delay causes the volunteers to postpone the recording of the scene at the welding shop to the following day, and move to a different setting where to play a different part of the script. We therefore walk to another of the volunteers' compound. There, the actors change clothes and get ready for the performance.

One female volunteer plays the part of a returnee who is discriminated against by her family and the rest of the community because of them assuming that she has worked as a prostitute abroad. Because of the lack of the right equipment, returnees must improvise. The boom microphone is replaced by a broom, the cameras are held manually. Groups of kids and curious onlookers gather around the volunteers as they move from the compound to the street outside it, and then again to another compound, to shoot the various scenes. The volunteers have to work fast to complete the shooting before the sun sets. The last scene shows a gathering held by the alkalo, or the community leader, to reprimand all the people who have mistreated the misjudged returnee. As the shooting finishes, the satisfied and enthusiastic returnees go back to the first compound where the IOM staff member, who has not intervened directly in the activity, is waiting for them. He distributes forms that the volunteers have to fill in and sign to prove they were present that day. This allows them to receive the 600D (approx. 9 euros at current exchange rate) transport allowance provided by IOM. Much less than 600D will be spent by the volunteers to return home. Some of them, whom I join, even decide to walk back, to be able to keep the much-needed sum. A few days later, I meet some of the volunteers who took part in the moviemaking. They are bitter and discuss animatedly among themselves. They have just learnt that IOM sent their movie to a private multimedia company for assemblage and editing. They resent that while they came up with the script, rehearsed, organised and did the actual shooting of the scenes, all without any compensation besides the canonical transportation allowance, the multimedia agency will make a profit out of the finalisation of their movie. As some MaM volunteers have acquired editing skills through the various trainings they attended and some of them held those skills already, they feel frustrated and disappointed that the finalisation of their movie was outsourced to a company whose compensation they could have earned instead.

The preceding scene exemplifies the clash in how IOM and the returnees morally mediate the capitalist mechanism of alienation. This is related to the social and creative nature of production, which is “[...] both an expression of our subjectivity and the chief mechanism through which this subjectivity is developed” (Øversveen 2022, 445). This process of production leads to objectification, namely the creation of an object which is external from the producer herself. Objectification becomes alienation when it entwines with exploitation, or, in other words, when the object of production is absorbed by capital. The creative and social nature of production well transpires from the description of our ethnographic scene. The returnees, all belonging to different returnee groups, interacted, joked and bonded when they met up for the making of the movie. They all demonstrated patience and resilience when waiting a long time for the IOM staff to show up. They promptly adapted their schedule to the delay, and inventively came up with alternative solutions to the absence of certain equipment they were counting on. They divided up into different roles smoothly and without friction. Their scenes were well rehearsed and could be shot rapidly and efficiently. They ended up mobilising the neighbourhood, creating an occasion for social interaction among the community. Furthermore, the returnees were divulging their direct experience of trauma and discrimination through the movie, in line with the finding that migrants’ painful experiences are regularly instrumentalised for backway deterrence in The Gambia (Aucoin 2022). This also conforms with the neoliberal expansion of capitalist exploitation in new territories, entailing, *inter alia*, “the commodification of emotions in new forms of labour” (Øversveen 2022, 447). It is this kind of product that IOM appropriated and outsourced to a for-profit company for editing, confirming the relevance of private entities, alongside humanitarian actors and IOs, in the sensitisation industry (Van Dessel 2021). What caused the returnees to orally complain was, in addition to the alienation itself, the perception of the worthlessness of the multimedia training acquired through MaM, as they felt their experience as movie stars ceased the moment they offed the spotlight.

6.4.3 Scene three: what is bought is cheaper than a gift

Saturday afternoons are dedicated by one returnee group to so-called drama training. In practice, it entails the scripting, rehearsing and shooting of media material to be shared by the returnee group on its social-media pages. On this particular Saturday, as they are brewing attaya outside of their headquarters, sad news reaches the returnees. They learn that African migrants are being shot at in Libya for having fled a detention centre. Having passed by Libyan prisons themselves, this information hits them particularly hard. They promptly decide to comment the news on social media. I. starts improvising a poem on those migrants' tragic destiny. The returnees finally agree to record a message of M., the secretary general of the association, commenting the news. In the recorded message, which will be published on TikTok, M. invokes African leaders to intervene and preserve the lives and dignity of all Africans and black people in general. He ends the message with the usual admonition against taking the backway, which can only lead to those tragic outcomes. After recording the message on the Libyan incident, the returnees go back to the promotional video on their services which they were working on. However, the members find that the equipment they have at their disposal is insufficient to produce quality audio-visual material. One of them has the idea to contact IOM to ask for better equipment to be borrowed. Subsequently, I learn that IOM has accepted to provide the returnee group with smartphones, but that, to justify this donation with the donors, the returnees will have to produce additional material for MaM in exchange. Weeks later, I am shown how IOM has been complaining that the returnee group has not met the targets it set for the donation of the phones. After attempting to negotiate a reduction in the number of footages it has to deliver for MaM, the returnee group has ultimately agreed to return one of the two phones it has received because of not being able to produce enough content for both its own communication and MaM.

This third scene reflects the contentiousness of the grounded mediation of the process of conditionality, which has long been a feature of the aid industry before spilling over to the domain of migration governance, whereby flexible migration partnerships with Southern countries are imbued in requests by the EU (Bisong 2020). Lie (2015) spoke of ‘developmentality’ to specify that conditionality actually works towards the recipients’ self-government because the shift from top-down approaches to the attribution of more freedom in partnership-based development still operates within the epistemic boundaries set by the Global North. These mechanisms played out in IOM’s attitude towards, this time, an independent group made up of returnees. In The Gambia and elsewhere, peer-to-peer sensitisation actually started being performed in partnership with returnee groups and then shifted to the individual engagement of single ‘volunteers’ with MaM (Marino et al. 2022b, Chapter five; Vammen 2021). This point is not trivial; yet, existing literature often addresses returnee involvement in sensitisation in general terms, either failing to specify whether engagement is singular or collective or not exploring this specification analytically. Several self-organised returnee groups exist in The Gambia. As seen in the second scene, MaM is indeed an occasion for returnees to bond and cooperate across returnee groups. Yet, with its recurrent events and trainings, it ends up removing time and energy from independent activities. The returnee group at the core of the above vignette sought to maintain some form of independent communication. Faced with scarce technological resources, the returnee group expected the well-endowed IOM to help, asking the organisation for better smartphones to use for their own shootings. IOM’s demand for more communication material being produced for MaM in exchange for the attribution of the smartphones was again experienced as illegitimate by the returnees, as they felt they had already earned the items through their long-standing efforts towards IOM’s sensitisation cause. Not considering returnees’ efforts worthy of (extra) recognition, IOM insisted on the smartphone attribution being exchanged for more work, using donor rationality as its justification. As such, conditionality here rests upon and reinforces the capitalist logics of exploitation and alienation showcased by the previous scenes as well as encapsulates the fictitious freedom inherent to developmentality. Indeed, IOM renders the returnees free to use the phone as they best see fit, as long as they produce extra material for MaM. Acting in their independent capacity, from which they give each other support as well as obtain access to partnerships with non-governmental actors beyond IOM and MaM (Marino et al. 2022b, Chapter five), the returnees finally pulled out of the smartphone deal when IOM showed unwilling to meet what they felt was their entitlement.

6.5 Concluding discussion: IOM's evasive paternalism and the resistance potential of returnee groups

In this paper, we have researched the commodification side of what we have termed the moral economy of voice, concentrating on the grounded mediation of the capitalist logics of the awareness-raising industry, or, in other words, the clashing ways in which such logics are specifically shaped and reacted upon by IOM and the returnees, respectively. In the first two ethnographic scenes, we have shown the returnees orally complaining at IOM categorising them as MaM volunteers, underpaying them and outsourcing the product of their work. In the last scene, acting in their collective capacity, they alternatively withdrew from a conditional partnership with IOM. On a closer look, these dynamics give insight into the relationship of social reproduction between the returnees and IOM, especially around themes of dependence and expectation. With its moral insistence on the voluntariness of returnees' involvement in MaM, IOM obscures the vulnerability of the participants, which is also caused by the deficiency of the reintegration support they received. It therefore eschews any prolonged responsibility over a viable reinsertion for the volunteers as well as counters the idea that it could come through formalised employment, as this would entail providing the returnees working rights and benefits that the organisation is not willing to give. This attitude equates, however, to IOM undermining the maturity and independence of the returnees as well, manifesting in it dismissing their professional competences or hindering their collective undertakings. Regarding the first point, the outsourcing of the editing of the movie proves that, although the returnees are exposed to numerous training sessions sponsored by IOM itself precisely in the area of video-making and -editing, the expertise they build is not considered worthy of professional compensation and recognition. This limits returnees' doing to the creative exercise of amateurs and ultimately restricts the engagement opportunities readily available to them to those directly contributing to host countries' immobilisation of Southern populations, that IOM embodies and advances (Pécoud 2018). Additionally, both the downsizing of returnees' professional capacity and their relegation to the sensitisation realm undermine the very objective of professional development that assisted return, also championed and implemented by IOM, is designed to reach (Marino and Lietaert 2022, Chapter four). Regarding the second point, the insistence of IOM and its donors to enforce a specific managerial and operational approach that they themselves have designed, impedes them from endorsing and supporting the endogenous initiatives of returnee groups, which may even prove more

effective in bringing about the reintegration results that Northern actors claim to be after. This all engenders a situation whereby IOM partially covers the returnees' need for income through its allowances, but will neither afford them total care nor emancipation. This behaviour appears an evasive variant of the paternalism of assisted return as a humanitarian yet controlling creation as well as awareness-raising's discourse (Landau 2019; Marino and Lietaert 2022, Chapter four; Watkins 2020). IOM's evasive paternalism stimulates the returnees to remain in awareness-raising, while protesting at both the organisation failing their expectations for consistent survival support and the injustice of their illegitimate belittlement as full-fledged economic actors.

The instances recounted in this article thus impede any automatic assignment of subsistence responsibility to the hegemonic elites and entitlements to the subaltern, respectively. They also confirm that returnees are subjected to a double vexation: first, their stories of struggle and challenge are transformed into optimistic slogans supporting the appropriateness of return, as Fine and Walters (2021) discursively detail; second, the way in which they are engaged to tell these stories is broadly based on unequal involvement and unfair categorisation. We have seen that this treatment is not met by the returnees with clamour, but mostly through oral complaints. However, it appears that when they act from independent groups, emboldened by their reciprocal support and the opportunities for better partnerships coming from additional non-governmental actors, the returnees are more uncompromising towards the requests of IOM seen as lacking in legitimacy. This collective dimension begs further research scrutiny, to assess whether it may turn into a substantial avenue for more strenuous resistance to the most unfair aspects of the moral economy of voice. This article interprets these struggles in the light of a new conceptual lens; yet, it is just as well an outlet for giving these grievances the visibility they are denied on other platforms. The circumstances and complaints included in our ethnography, then, act as explicit calls for returnees to be engaged more fairly by big organisations in expressing the full extent of their composite tune of migration and reintegration.

6.6 References

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CHAPTER 7

A civil-society organisation in externalisation... or not? Using critically coloniality, subaltern knowledge and border thinking to approach the being and doing of a Gambian returnee group

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I zoom in on one of the self-organised returnee groups emerging in The Gambia after the increase in returns caused by the 2016 democratic turn. The motivation for the creation of the group came from the returnees' common experience of detention in Libya, leading them to take up so-called assisted voluntary return to be repatriated. Once returned, the returnees were involved in several sensitisation projects against irregular migration. Assisted return and awareness-raising against illegalised migration are facets of the externalisation of return migration management, as repeated throughout this dissertation. The exposure that the returnees got from their connection to externalisation brought them into contact with a European NGO active in the field of sports. The NGO and the returnee group entered a project-based partnership funded by a donor involved in civil-society development. The project they set to implement had two main components. First, utilising sports to spark discussions around irregular migration – or the backway, as is vernacularly known – with the Gambian youth and, second, developing the capacity of and enlarging the returnee group. I use this empirical case to approach the following research questions: where do externalised migration management and civil-society end?

The theoretical framework that I instrumentalise to address the questions is that of coloniality (Quijano 2000). According to Mignolo (2000), coloniality engenders the colonial difference, where two kinds of what the author called local histories meet. On the one hand, the Eurocentric local histories, that, with their exportation, turn into what the author labelled global designs. The rationalistic projects of development and civil society, focusing on the depoliticised attainment of goals of socio-economic improvement by means of specialised organisations that operate at distance from the state, fall under the scope of such coloniality designs (Escobar 1999; Mignolo 2000). The African continent is a preferred context for the exportation of development and civil-society designs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2014). Global designs are reacted upon by the local histories harbouring subaltern knowledge and border thinking, two more expressions used by Mignolo (2000). The author maintained that the latter is excessive to both local histories and global designs because of springing from the intersection of them. While it may stem from intellectual endeavours, border thinking is especially found in the diversity of subaltern experiences, making it appropriate as a lens to look at a locally-embedded returnee group from.

Applying the coloniality lens to rich ethnographic material enables me to reflect critically on the challenges of disentangling subaltern knowledge, coloniality and border thinking as well as on the borders, as it were, of externalisation and civil society. In particular, I discuss whether the project under examination can be considered externalisation-related, since the NGO had never worked in the area of migration before, the funder is not interested in migration per se and the returnees themselves brought the fight against the backway to the table when asked what they would have wanted to work on in the framework of the partnership. Furthermore, I reflect on whether the group can be deemed a civil-society organisation, having adopted several of the latter's characteristics during the project, but still approaching implementation in a unique way.

In Chapter five, I mentioned that returnee groups have appeared at the forefront of the socio-material network of externalisation primarily performing awareness-raising against irregular migration. Some attention has been devoted to the discursive frameworks and politics of deportee associations, the media coverage of female collectives antagonising illegalised migration, and the unequal engagement of refugee-led organisations within the localisation strategy of the humanitarian sector (Bouilly 2008; Lecadet 2017; Pian 2010; Pincock et al. 2021). Additionally, generic references to returnee groups have been made in recent publications on the embedding of returnees in a racialised migration industry (Maâ et al. 2022; Shaidrova 2022). I integrate this literature by putting centre stage the interplay between coloniality and a self-organised group of assisted returnees, showing how global designs, local histories and border thinking contextually interact in unexpected ways. I therefore join the corpus of works that, more than reconstructing the colonial genealogy of externalised borderwork (see Brambilla 2014; Lemberg-Pedersen 2019; Moctar 2022), engage with the multifarious ways in which coloniality contemporarily characterises it (Afailal and Fernandez 2018; Araújo 2011; Boeyink et al. 2022; Distretti 2021; Gaibazzi 2023; Opi 2021; Picozza 2021). Furthermore, with my reflections on (the relationship between) subalternity, civil society and externalisation, I intend to enter into dialogue with the recent debate over the prospect of moving away from the latter concept (Pastore 2023).

The remainder of the chapter goes as follows. The theory of coloniality is presented in the next section, which precedes an overview of the methods. I then introduce the returnee group and the European NGO and move on to the empirical part, where going through the design and implementation of the project enables me to delve into the declinations of the colonial difference between (the diversality of) subaltern knowledge and the coloniality of power. The concluding

section discusses what all this means for the returnee group's border thinking and the borders of civil-society and externalisation.

7.2 Theoretical notions in coloniality

Reflections on coloniality emerged in response to existing theorisations on the concept of the world-system (Grosfoguel 2002). Rather than see the latter primarily as the product of economic relations, scholars such as Quijano (2000) retraced its economic asymmetry back to the racialisation of non-Western peoples initiated with the colonisation of the American continent. Far from being supplanted with formal decolonisation, this racialisation is coupled with an enduring Eurocentrism holding Western knowledge superior and the Western experience the ultimate culmination of humanity's linear path of evolution. The resulting coloniality of power is constitutive of what we know as modernity, leading Mignolo (2000) to talk of a modern/colonial world system run through a colonial difference. Thinking from the border of this difference corresponds to "an intense battlefield" where the "absorbing and displacing [of] hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern" takes place (Mignolo 2000, 12). In other words, border thinking brings the coloniality of power in conversation with resurfacing non-Western knowledges, which were subalternised in the process of the universalisation of European epistemology. The latter rests on the concealment of the location of Western enunciations, through which Europe's local history could claim universality and hence translate into global designs. In border thinking, therefore, non-Western local histories do not hybridise, but alternatively assimilate, neglect, resist or re-appropriate purportedly-universal ones.

That of development is among the global designs identified by Mignolo (2000). Escobar (1999) reflected on the birth of development and how it gave rise to a politics of truth prioritising certain forms of knowledge over others. The professionalisation hinging on this alleged truth functioned according to the problematisation of poverty and the application of strategies and approaches cast as neutral and inevitable. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were instrumental in this sense, located within a growing development industry. The trope of development as an axis of coloniality is found in Africa too, where decoloniality means the erection of African futures upon diverse and plural trajectories overcoming Western epistemicides, resource extraction and the neocolonisation spurred by Africa's alleged deficit in democracy and human rights (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2014). Just like in other non-Western contexts,

development, neoliberal marketisation and democratisation here depended on the construction of civil society around the deployment of Western and Western-inspired NGOs since approximately the 1980s (Shijvi 2007). While some of these NGOs may be morally motivated, the majority follows donor concerns and is made up of people looking for career opportunities. Furthermore, they do not manifest any “historical, social and theoretical understanding of development, poverty and discrimination” (Shijvi 2007, 35). Neoliberalism interacts with the NGO discourse in that NGOs take the capitalist organisation of society for granted and, in the mainstream division between state and society on the one hand and society and the individual on the other, embody the idea that socio-political interests are intelligible and fairly distributed. As the prerogatives of the state and the market are assumed, NGOs are needed to correct the shortcomings of the two. They, therefore, co-opt and stifle the genuine requests of equality deriving from exploited populations. This encapsulates NGOs’ political essence, beyond the bourgeoisie fiction of their non-partisanship (Shijvi 2007).

In Mignolo’s view (2000), the post-1945 development mission culminated in the globalising neoliberal market. The latter is causing nation-states to lose their centrality, after being characterised, in the case of former colonies, by an unequal internal colonialism. The coexistence of different ethnicities, histories and modes of being in singular territorial locations brought about by globalisation as one articulation of coloniality, allows for the appropriation of global designs by local perspectives, as in the case of the creolisation of colonial languages. This is close to the fragmenting prospect of global diversity, stressing irreconcilable pluralism over any pretension to universality. Mignolo (2000) maintained that thinking with the people rather than about them could break elites’ dominance, actualising a pluralistic future. Thinking with the people from the borders of the colonial difference entails taking their lifeworld seriously and not as uncivilised knowledge to upgrade or cultures for social scientists to document. For this reason, the author looked critically at the emancipatory potential of the attacks to modernity located within modernity itself and posing as universally valid, such as Marxism or critical theory. Furthermore, border thinking springs with more fervour from non-academic contexts and circumstances rather than intellectual movements, such as the postcolonial academic tradition (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994; Chatterjee 1997; Mbembe 2000; Said 1978; Spivak 1988). The following analysis gives a glimpse, however, of the challenges that are posed by the attempt to disentangle coloniality, subaltern knowledge and border thinking when turning to the grassroots.

7.3 Methods

As part of a broader study on the participation of non-state actors in the externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia, the core material for this paper derives from ethnographic fieldwork that I performed at the office of the returnee group and informally with most of its core members in the Gambian regions of Greater Banjul, West Coast Region, North Bank Region, Central River Region and Lower River Region between March and July 2022. I first contacted the returnee group during my first stay in The Gambia in March 2020 and again upon my return between September and October 2021. These initial contacts facilitated my request to perform participant observation at the group's office during my last stay, whereby I not only observed meetings and activities as well as had uncountable off-record exchanges with the returnees, but also contributed directly to the group's day-to-day operations. This meant doing things as diverse as writing press releases, preparing power-point presentations, facilitating trainings, taking videos and photos at events, cleaning, welcoming guests, etc. As a consequence, I came across, with the group's permission, internal and external communication exchanges as well as different types of work-related documents. Additionally, both within and outside the office, I had the chance to meet the returnees' families and friends, and visit the home villages of three of them in the rural areas. Overall, the formal interviews, both on- and off-record, have been fifteen, including those with the management of the returnee group, some newly-joined members, the member of a local CSO, the director of the European NGO partnering up with the group as well as a representative from the Gambian Ministry of Youths and Sports. The interviews and exchanges were conducted in English, but I could develop a good understanding of Wolof during my stays, enabling me to grasp comments and speeches made in this local language as well. The interview and observation material was analysed through a two-staged directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005): I initially carried out an inductive scrutiny of the data which indicated the coloniality framework as appropriate; this framework was then utilised to approach the material a second time and sharpen the coding accordingly. As extensively articulated in Chapter two, different ethical and positionality issues have characterised my ethnographic engagement as a White, European and middle-class female researcher in the Global South. Staying as close as possible to the words registered and circumstances observed in presenting my data is one way in which I have dealt with this asymmetry.

7.3.1 Introducing the returnee group and the European NGO

Before moving to the empirical part, a brief introduction of the history of the returnee group and a few words on the background of the European NGO are in order. The returnee group constituted in a Libyan prison in 2016. Some of the Gambians in the prison thought of creating an association that would have, firstly, supported each other in making it after return and, secondly, carried out awareness-raising to convince young people and their families that irregular migration is not the only way to make it in The Gambia. In its infancy, the group officially registered as a national organisation. Around that time, the returnees immediately attracted local and international media attention, being initially featured on ARTE, Al Jazeera and CGTN. They simultaneously embarked on a networking round of visits to both national and international stakeholders and became close with the National Youth Council (NYC), a governmental agency charged with the implementation of activities and projects beneficial for the young people of The Gambia. Thanks to this closeness to NYC and their own networking efforts, the group partnered up with the German government, the Italian development agency COOPI and UNICEF between their conception and 2021. These partnerships mainly revolved around awareness-raising against irregular migration, both in the form of in-person sensitisation and communication through radio. The group also worked with smaller NGOs, among which an organisation providing services for documentary screening and two more interested in fighting the backway by offering skill training for some of the group members. The group additionally performed voluntary activities, including a radio programme, the development of a farm, support counselling for returnees, sensitisation talks, and the provision of community services. The group also approached politicians, to advocate for a greater involvement of the government in reintegration, ask it to protect its citizens in Libya, and denounce mobility injustice. More recently, the group entered into a partnership with a foundation bringing volunteers to The Gambia for performing community services, in the context of which the returnees would tell their stories of migration.

In 2021, the group got hold of an office renovated within the context of a community-based reintegration project implemented by the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), meant to address the so-called root causes of irregular migration by involving so-called potential migrants in a series of income- or skill-generating activities. Although being involved in the project's task-force, the returnee group was not explicitly invited to take possession of this renovated space. Upon hearing public statements made by YEP staff hinting at the group benefitting

from this project, its members decided to actually do it. For the first time since its inception, the returnee group had a precise location where to meet and organise its activities. By the time the group occupied the office, the active members it comprised had substantially declined compared to the beginning. At first, the group had a large following because it was active in advocating for early returnees to receive the reintegration assistance they had been promised by the several international organisations visiting them back in the Libyan prison. Once reintegration assistance was ready to be disbursed, IOM proposed the group to transform it into a collective reintegration project, what another returnee association, also constituted during the same experience in Libya, had decided to pursue. The returnee group opted for preserving the freedom of each member to develop his or her plan instead. As already mentioned in Chapter six, the undertakings started by the various members did not stand the test of time and failed for various reasons, leading to increased dependence of the returnees on the limited allowance offered by international organisations for their participation in awareness-raising, including the IOM's sensitisation project called Migrants as Messengers (MaM). Yet, over the years, the insufficient reintegration assistance received by the returnees was compensated by the reciprocal support that they could elicit from their collective participation in the group. More specifically, the members of the group would spend time together and with each other's family, reciprocally help with everyday tasks, and offer advice and emotional support to each other.

In 2021, the returnee group met with a European small-scale NGO dealing with sports. Through private and public funds, the NGO invests in the sports sector in partnership with grassroots organisations working with youth affected by abuse, violence, disabilities and financial struggles in Sierra Leone and Ghana. As such, the NGO was new to the field of migration prior to meeting the returnee group. Visiting its website shows that the one in The Gambia is still the NGO's only migration-focused initiative. I will discuss this initiative's design and implementation in turn, from the point of view of coloniality of power and subaltern knowledge. This will lead me to reflect more closely on border thinking in the concluding section.

7.4 The designing of the project: a critical look at the colonial difference and border thinking

The returnee group and the European NGO were put into contact by a researcher who had previously conducted research on the former, a consequence of The Gambia being among migration studies' over-researched contexts (Kristensen 2020; Chapter 2). The NGO offered the group support in two of the areas of its own expertise: the professionalisation of grassroots associations and the mobilisation of young people through sports. Regarding the first point, the NGO professes to be more interested in the process that grassroots organisations undertake to reach their objectives over the results that the aid sector mostly fixates on (Interview with NGO director, 6 June 2022). With relation to the second point, the NGO sees sports as a method to mobilise young people and help them achieve different developmental and social goals (Interview with NGO director, 6 June 2022). Later talks on the continuation of the project between the group and the NGO, in which the latter would stress the need to have sports-related initiatives at the core of the planning, confirm that, because of sports being its 'brand', the NGO does not only advance this as a mobilisation method, but makes it an irrevocable component of its partnerships, regardless of how relatively liberal these can be. The returnee group, on its part, judged the prospect of professionalising as well as boosting its mobilisation of young people towards discouraging their backway plans very favourably. The result of the encounter between the returnee group and the European NGO was an application for funds to a European federation of CSOs handling public money for the implementation of activities which have to do with civil society and development in various regions of the world. This is in line with the finding that NGOs are often intermediaries between donor bodies and local partners (Schuller 2009). This application had to be adjusted more than once to make it in line with the sustainability concerns of the donor. The latter finally accepted to fund a six-month pilot project, with an overall budget amounting to almost 35 thousand euros. These premises already display that the apparent alignment between the aims of the NGO and the returnee group is actually run through by the colonial difference. While the NGO claims to support grassroots associations to achieve their own goals, it still does so within the boundaries of a funded partnership which is subjected to the donor's evaluations and decisions. The donor, in turn, sponsors projects which further the role of civil society in development. As seen in the theoretical section, civil society and development are global designs rooted in a certain understanding of the relationship between

the state and its citizenry, with the latter being expected to involve itself in a scientific and compartmentalised programme of collective betterment.

The project comprised the refurbishing of the returnee group's office; the amending of its constitution and the introduction of policies on sexual harassment and corruption; the establishment of a remunerated management for the group and the capacity-building of it; a networking event; workshops on accountability and transparency, volunteerism and storytelling; a sports match; and a weekly radio programme. The project additionally featured the setting-up of a sports team composed of both potential migrants and returnees in the KMC region. Although this wording is nowhere present in the project's official documents, the sports team is referred to by the returnee group as their regional chapter, meaning their regional extension beyond their national headquarters. All these activities were proposed by the returnees during the consultation stage with the NGO, except for the policies, which were asked for by the latter instead. In the project description written by the NGO and uploaded on the funder's website, the initiative's target groups are called 'returnees' and 'risks': "Returnees are people who have returned to the Gambia after having tried to take the 'backway' to Europe. Risks are young boys and girls at increased risk of leaving for Europe in the nearest future" (Project application 2021, 1). Returnees and risks should interact through sports and convince each other that they can participate in the process of changing The Gambia to make it feasible to stay home rather than migrate. This should be accompanied by the evolution of the returnee group "[f]rom grassroot to a professional organization" (Project application 2021, 10). This position was reinforced by the NGO director, who stated to have developed an interest to work with the group "because you actually don't have any of them saying it would be nice to try again, they are actually very dedicated to the fact that [the backway] is not the solution [...] that's what makes them very strong. That they believe in the goals that they have. And they support each other" (Interview with NGO director, 6 June 2022). In the partnership with the returnees, the NGO contributed its utilitarian conception of sports as a technique to interweave social interactions which can then be mobilised for different outcomes, including the condemnation of the backway. Additionally, it advanced the view that the professionalisation of the group would have enabled it to better navigate the externalisation field and thus avert its returnee members' re-emigration risk. Indeed, the NGO, who is an outsider to externalisation and could have had different positions on them, did not engage with migration categories critically, but saw the group's anti-backway resolution as an indication of it being a motivated and trustworthy partner.

The returnee group thinks from the other side of the above coloniality. It understands sports as a composing feature of local communities' social fabric, to the extent that one member of the group's regional chapter said that wherever young men are found in The Gambia sports will be involved (Interview with regional-chapter members, 14 July 2022). As such, sports are not experienced as a method to produce social relations for a particular end, but a mundane feature of Gambian society. Furthermore, the very association that the returnees wish to upscale is not the expression of rationalised developmental or social aims, but the consequence of a shared experience of neo-colonial violence in detention. According to Mignolo (2013), the situated experience of coloniality is precisely an enabling condition for border thinking. In this case, the returnees' experience led them to embrace an approach – awareness-raising against irregular migration within the framework of reciprocal reintegration support provided by means of a grassroots association undergoing professionalisation and expansion – which was endorsed by the sports NGO and is in line with the broader field of externalised migration management. This circumstance complicates the viewing of border thinking as an instance of delinking from coloniality generated by the awareness of its bearing upon local histories, which is therefore neither a global design, nor a local history, nor a hybrid of the two (Mignolo 2000; Mignolo 2013). I will return to this in the concluding section, after delving into the challenges of disentangling (the diversity of) subaltern knowledge as well as underlining instances of coloniality in going through several steps of the project's implementation.

7.5 The implementation of the project: the challenge of disentangling subaltern knowledge and diversity...

The timeline of activity implementation was established by the returnees, who operated in the absence of staff or direct control from the NGO. This gave them freedom in the way in which they implemented the project plan. The drafting of the new constitution as well as the sexual-harassment and corruption policies is a case in point. The former was drafted in a participatory way by the members of the group and covered themes as different as membership, roles, management, partnering and conflict-resolution. The constitution also addressed the introduction of what the group calls its regional chapter. After all the attendants of the constitution-making workshop adopted the document, the provisions of the constitution have been implemented quite liberally by the

returnees. For instance, the constitution requires that meetings among the national management and the regional chapter occur at regular intervals and produce reports that are discussed at the level of the advisory board, which consists of representatives from the national management, the regional chapter and external bodies. In reality, the advisory board was never constituted. Meetings would not follow a fixed timeline and often involve only concerned individuals. National management representatives would be present at the regional chapter's meetings and later report to the remaining staff; yet, coordination between the regional and the national management would also occur through informal conversations. Furthermore, membership forms should have been filled in and membership cards issued upon payment of a membership fee. While membership forms were printed at a later stage of implementation, this was not done consistently. A similar contextual approach was taken in the codification of the sexual-harassment and corruption policies. In line with the religiousness of the group's members, the former policy did not mention sexual orientation. Furthermore, from the consultation between the attendants of the policy-drafting workshop, it emerged that (joking) comments on a person's appearance, age or private life are common in Gambian culture, leading to the addition of the word 'disrespectful' as a way to distinguish the remarks that would be object of the policy and those which would not. The corruption policy specified that kickback arrangements in procurement are punishable, although being so culturally widespread that the group could not declare to be totally alien to it during the related discussion. The lack of a thorough application of the constitution or the cultural embeddedness of the policies may be categorised as instances of subaltern knowledge, or systems of thoughts which differ from the Eurocentric way of rationalising and acting upon reality. However, the returnees considered the actual documents very important, to the extent that handouts were distributed to a large majority of the group's members. These documents were also instrumentalised in the interaction with a well-established actor of externalised migration management, IOM, as further detailed below.

Although most of its members returned with IOM's assistance and partook in an awareness-raising project launched by IOM in 2019 called Migrants as Messengers (MaM), the returnee group had never officially partnered with IOM in its collective capacity. This individual involvement within MaM, which has been extensively elaborated upon in Chapter six, terminated in the summer of 2022. This termination entailed, by project design, an accent on the strengthening of returnee associations' capacity as a way to guarantee MaM's sustainability after its end. For that, IOM offered the returnee group support to increase its off- and

online visibility, partake in networking and training events as well as write a vision and mission statement. IOM also raised the possibility to give the returnee group equipment for a total amount of a thousand euros. The returnee group asked IOM for some sort of financial sustainability instead, but the IOM staff made it clear that it could not issue payments. At this point, the returnees mentioned that they were already receiving help by a European foundation to develop their own website. Moreover, the project they were implementing with the European NGO already allowed them to update their constitution, including their mission statement. Therefore, the returnees decided to only accept IOM's offer to purchase equipment for them, coming up with a list of items they would have needed. IOM reacted by insisting on the returnee group being incorporated in MaM's website through a microsite. Additionally, IOM contacted the group's management through Whatsapp asking for its members to join evaluation sessions of MaM. This prompted the secretary general of the group to send an email demanding the IO to address this request formally rather than through individualised WhatsApp messages as well as to be invited to activities and meetings earlier than just a few days before the planned date. The new constitution and policies of the group were attached to the email in support of the request. The IOM staff, via email this time, clarified that participation in the MaM evaluation sessions was warranted by the support already given the group by the IO as well as conditional for the former to be involved in IOM's subsequent advocacy and fundraising efforts. Finally, because it was not possible to arrange the procurement of the specific item the returnee group had requested within the timeframe given IOM by the donor, the returnees ended up receiving nothing. This instance of the returnee group utilising the Eurocentric design of written organisational documents to be treated more fairly by a migration IO, problematises a clear-cut distinction between global designs and local histories, hence again raising the question of whether the bottom-up instrumentalisation of coloniality still falls under the scope of subaltern knowledge.

More questions on subaltern knowledge arise when looking at the remainder of the implementation of the project. The returnees organised a collective Iftar during Ramadan to implement what appeared as a networking event in the project design. For it, a division of labour was initiated, with the communication officer making invitations only a few days before the event, the programme officer procuring food and six women belonging to both the national and regional chapter cooking. Regarding the invitees, local partners were preferred over big organisations and family and friends were particularly encouraged to join. During the event, testimonies of return were given and poetry on the topic of the backway recited. This personalised implementation approach illustrates how the

rationalistic global design of development is not always followed in the implementation of single activities, confirmed by the peculiar ways in which internal grievances highlighted by the organisation of subsequent events were addressed. A clash of views over the organisation of the voluntarism workshop between the group's administrator and programme officer for example, eventually brought the former to abandon. The clash spurred a management meeting convened by the group's secretary general, in which accusations of disrespectfulness were exchanged between some staffs. References to how Muslims should react to criticism were made and apologies given. Since this organisational clash was perceived as a moment of crisis in the history of the group, the secretary closed the management meeting with inspirational words to lift the members' mood. He reminded them that getting to the point of being chosen to handle large funding by a foreign donor was not easy and this achievement commanded an overall more responsible attitude. To avoid additional organisational conflicts, it was decided to print an overview of the remaining activities to implement, with the related deadlines. Yet, further observation revealed that this planning overview was also not strictly followed. A later conflict – caused by personal relationship issues this time – was handled after holding a sports match between the group's national and regional chapter. Back at the office, the members who were present spoke in turn, emphasising peace and reconciliation. Above all, they stressed that the returnee group is a family where understanding and closeness should dominate. This family dimension is grasped from the outside, as the statement of a regional-chapter member demonstrates: "I saw that they are very committed and they work like a team, not individually, they love each other" (Interview with regional-chapter members, 14 July 2022). Approaching conflict-resolution by evoking a family dimension and recalling the joint journey from detention to an evolved group may be considered an instance of subaltern wisdom differing from standardised and managerial Eurocentric approaches. However, the references to Islam, despite the latter has been othered by the colonality of power (Mignolo 2000) and the Sufism practiced in West Africa is minoritarian in the Muslim orthodoxy, may be harder to classify as subaltern knowledge because of the religion's trans-local dimension.

Beyond the dynamics of peculiar implementation of certain activities within the scope of the project, outlining the multiplicity of positions around the backway emerged in the course of the partnership, from the members of the national and regional chapters of the group as well as the wider population, highlights further how the monolithic presentation of project titles and designs is contradicted by complexity on the ground as well as raises additional puzzles on subaltern

knowledge and its diversity. This multiplicity of positions surfaced in several further instances, starting with a workshop on sharing backway experiences, intended by the returnees as a training for the regional chapter on migration and the background of the group. Indeed, the members of the regional chapter were proportionally younger than those of the national group. A few returnees were among them, but the majority never migrated and was either completing school or just graduated. On the workshop's first day, the regional chapter were given basic information on migration with a presentation almost entirely organised around IOM data and definitions. During the following discussion, contrasting reactions arose. One participant mentioned the inequality in visa access, another one stressed the importance of making it in The Gambia, while two more maintained that going backway is actually a good idea. On the workshop's second day, videos from the returnee group's past awareness-raising campaigns were shared, with emotional reactions coming from the regional chapter's spectators. Similarly, the weekly radio programme hosted by the group's management confirmed the diversity in opinions on the backway held by the Gambian population. One episode was a confrontation on whether the backway is a suicide mission, with one member bringing arguments in favour and another against. The listeners who called during the show also took sides, with one arguing that even if one is to make it to Europe it will be too difficult to succeed and another one claiming that there are too little opportunities in The Gambia for deciding to stay. In another episode, the returnees started a debate over which actor is doing the most in tackling the backway. The general message was that international organisations' help is not disinterested and that the government is not doing enough in protecting the dignity of its citizens. Yet, when the matter was discussed in the group's online chat, one member praised the involvement of international organisations as the most effective actors in helping migrants and returnees. Additional episodes revolved around diaspora and remittances, with Gambian citizens abroad participating as guests in the programme. One of these guests, a Gambian citizen arrived in Italy through the backway, stressed the importance of following the rules of the host country and criticised the migrants who refuse to integrate and learn the host country's language. This was praised by the callers. A member of the regional chapter figured as the guest of one of the last episodes. He read poetry on the topic of making it in The Gambia and encouraged the Gambian youth to develop self-reliance while avoiding the backway and supporting the returnees to reintegrate. According to Mignolo (2000), diversity is the fragmented future that could counter colonial attempts at universalising the human condition. In this sense, it could be seen as a patchwork of border thinking emanating from different loci of enunciation.

However, the above paragraph shows how a wide diversity characterises individual views embedded in similar experiential positions, namely those of returnees having experienced border violence and (young) Gambians confronted by mobility injustice and additional reverberations of neo-colonialism. Should the critical stances only be read as diversity or is the experiential position of living in coloniality enough for certain views to be seen as subaltern knowledge or border thinking? I will return to this puzzle in the last section. First, the coloniality share contributed by the European NGO to the implementation of the project is introduced next.

7.6 ...from the coloniality of power

As said above, NGO staff was not present in The Gambia throughout the implementation of the project. Yet, one monitoring visit was paid by the NGO director. During this visit, the prospect of continuing the partnership after the pilot project was evaluated. In this evaluation, the topic of the establishment of the group's regional chapter was touched. I have already said how the pilot project documentation does not make reference to a regional chapter, but to a regional sports team only. What is more, the sports team should have been made up of 30 young men in an equal proportion of returnees and 'risks'. The actual regional chapter ended up being more or less gender balanced instead. Additionally, the regional chapter autonomously instituted roles, mirroring the national chapter's management staff, who would serve as focal people in the regional-national interaction. The NGO director seemed not to mind the returnee group's main focus on a regional chapter over a sports team. However, she did recommend that males are prioritised in the future and commented that the regional chapter's functions were too high in number. In this example, the NGO director did not dismiss the group's own understanding of the newly-formed sports team as their regional chapter. However, coloniality transpired from her technical reading of the related management team as well as the preoccupation to maintain the gender proportion included in the project description approved by the donor. If actually followed, this indication would translate in women being side-lined in the follow-up to the pilot project. Indeed, some female members of the regional chapter already lamented the project's excessive emphasis on a sport they did not particularly enjoy during a focus group I had towards the end of the implementation phase (Interview with regional-chapter members, 14 July 2022). Just as in the case of subaltern knowledge and diversity, the question then arises of whether coloniality becomes something different when taking in bottom-

up perspectives. The marks of the cross-fertilisation of local histories and global designs are found in the next instances too.

Across the duration of the pilot project, the staff members had to produce bi-monthly reports for the partner organisation, with tickets having to be attached for each activity implemented. Because of invoices not being widely available in The Gambia, it was agreed between the group and the NGO that the former could produce payment vouchers instead. Furthermore, the group's accountant was asked to keep track of petty expenses, which he had not consistently done since the beginning. Upon her monitoring visit, the NGO director suggested to adopt a double-entry accounting system, systematically recording the group's inflows and outflows of money, to be introduced for more effective expense control. Also due to the accountant's lack of familiarity with this system, it had not been enforced up to the ending of the observation. The NGO director's comments on the need to improve the group's bookkeeping were not isolated, signalling the pervasiveness of global designs among subalternised populations. Indeed, one member of the regional chapter and humanitarian NGO worker also recommended more professional mechanisms to be introduced: "[...] the treasurer who is a governant position is the one who deals with their day-to-day administration expenses and the treasurer doesn't have to do that. So, the administration is weak, which they need support [with]. And also, they need an organigramme that separates governance from the administration. They need a strategic workplan" (Interview with regional chapter and humanitarian NGO worker, 14 July 2022). Here too, coloniality is found in the NGO director's preoccupation with efficient bookkeeping, but coexists with her adapting to the reality of the rarity of invoices being issued for the purchase of services and goods in The Gambia.

7.7 Where do externalised migration management and civil society end?

The ethnographic data displayed above raises questions over the application of the theoretical framework of coloniality to the topic of the externalisation of (return) migration management. The first question has to do with whether the examined project can be considered to fall under the scope of externalisation and migration management at all. As already explained, the European NGO approaching the returnee group to create a partnership is an outsider to the area of migration. To put it illustratively, it developed an interest in the returnee group

because of it being a *group of returnees* rather than *returnees in a group*. It was the returnees themselves, therefore, to bring their anti-backway agenda to the table. This instance leads one to ask: to what extent does the project constitute an example of externalised (return) migration management? The returnee protagonists have been assisted to return and their group constituted in a Libyan prison. Therefore, their doing could be considered an indirect product of (the colonality of) externalisation and return migration management. However, offering more room for manoeuvre than pre-designed partnerships, the returnees could have decided to do something different from awareness-raising with this one. If the returnees themselves, then, put the accent on backway-avert sensitisation, are we still in the realm of externalisation and migration management? If not, what else are we dealing with? Seen from the point of view of colonality, the fact that the returnees have experienced the violence of mobility injustice first-hand and speak and operate from that very position, makes them inclined to be bearers of border thinking. However, can we still talk of border thinking as an act of delinking when the approach chosen by the border thinkers is the same as the Eurocentric one?

When looking at the group-development side of the project, similar evaluations can be made. The colonality approach of the European NGO is recognisable, *inter alia*, in the funding application, the language of the project description as well as the comments on the management and composition of the regional chapter and the administration of the group. However, the NGO has not closely controlled the implementation of the project, which, in many aspects, has not followed the rational and standardised episteme of development. The group, therefore, ended up associating with a scheme belonging to the epistemological project of civil society from the standpoint of seeing itself as a family. As such, if not a hybrid of a CSO and a local group – like the *daira*, a religious association bringing together the followers of a specific religious leader; the *mbotaye*, a predominantly female self-help organisation whereby the adherents reciprocally exchange financial support to be able to organise social events such as ceremonies; and the *kangbeng-kafoo*, a group which may use the *osusu*, or money cooperatives, to provide money to the members in a rotational lending system which does not involve the payment of interests (Njie 2022; Rosander 1998; Rosander 1997) – what has the returnee group turned to stand for?

To summarise, the returnees' approach cannot be seen as fully determined by colonality because it stems from the experience of being *affected by* it. This is the same reason why it cannot be considered a pure local history either. Established that this approach is neither a global design nor a local history, it can

also not be a hybrid of the two. Furthermore, the notion of hybridity carries the difficulty of measurement: even if global designs and local histories were separated entities that, encountering, mixed together, what would the ratio of this mixing be? In other words, would there be an equal representation of local histories and global designs or would the balance tilt towards either of the two? If that was the case, how would an asymmetrical composition of the hybrid be justified? Doing away with the tenuous concept of hybridity, one can therefore categorise the returnees' approach under border thinking and thus something third, reaching the conclusion that the project under consideration is not one of EU border externalisation. Yet, that being the case, the returnees' border thinking essentially equates that very externalisation approach. It might just as well be that border thinking seems to require an *awareness* of coloniality, which most likely results in more confrontational reactions to it. However, why should the position of those who have *experienced* coloniality first-hand without necessarily being able to process it at an intellectual or political level, not be understood as border thinking? To solve this riddle and fully comprehend why the returnees have not adopted more oppositional stances vis-à-vis externalisation, further research should be conducted on the social and political contexts of former colonies like The Gambia. This is an indication of how migration studies could intersect with other strands of research to offer more comprehensive solutions to complex issues.

7.8 References

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CHAPTER 8

General discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the overall findings of this dissertation as a starting point for suggesting prospects of future research. To start with, I refer the reader back to the overarching research problem of this study, spelled out in Chapter one. In that passage, I stated that I intended to establish whether Gambian non-state actors and returnees impinge on the practice and discourse of externalised return migration management. In the first three sections of this chapter, I address three dimensions to this question, corresponding to three, different instances of *re-making*. First, the starting point of what return migration management's discourse and practice are and turned into being, by referring to the examinations of care and control in assisted return and the legitimisation of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration present in Chapter three and four, respectively. Second, the extent to which the enrolment of Gambian non-state actors and returnees in the externalisation of return migration management has translated it towards something different from its original thrust, indications of which are mainly found in Chapters five and six. Chapter seven especially, invites to a third and final reflection on the extent to which Gambian non-state actors may *own* the fight against the backway just as much as the Global North's. This means, therefore, turning current assumptions on externalisation upside down. In other words, considering Gambian non-state actors' actions and mind-frames not only as manifestations of agency within the neo-colonial structure of externalisation, making the latter a messy and disordered migration regime where everyone is more or less following their own interest, but also seeing the fight against the backway as a bottom-up choice and endeavour which the Global North superimposed its agenda on.

8.2 Re-making assisted return and sustainable reintegration: leopards that cannot change their spots

In Chapter one, I have introduced assisted return and sustainable reintegration as manifestations of migration management, a global philosophy rooted in neoliberalism and its emphasis on economic relations as well as technical resolution of complex social issues. The application of this philosophy to (return) migration has two main, related implications. One, discussions and decisions around the topic of migration are depoliticised, as one allegedly rational

approach only exists which can ensure all partners involved to enjoy beneficial effects. Two, the approaches developed in the context of migration management are standardised and universal. This does not mean, however, that they are not subjected to change, variation and evolution. Chapter three and four of this dissertation show exactly that, as much as return migration management practice and discourse wish to adapt to criticism, the results of research or specific socio-political contexts, they ultimately do not fall very far from the master narrative's tree. This is the tree whose branches of managerial calculation and migration control intersect to demarcate the space of Kalir's (2022) *Deapartheid*.

The objective behind the study of Chapter three was to unpack the black box of how care and control manifest themselves *within* and *across* assisted-return national programmes in Europe. Indeed, beyond descriptive reports on assisted-return requirements, actors and projects in different contexts, the copious critical research cited in Chapter three has brilliantly addressed how the construction of voluntariness based on migrants' illegalisation and the closeness to deportation as well as the tenuous relationship with an ensuing durable reintegration for its beneficiaries, have rendered this measure's humanitarianism contested. However, Lietaert (2022) suggested that something more could have been said about how some composing *layers* of assisted return, such as its target groups, implementing actors and counselling strategies, balance the logics of humanitarianism and securitisation within and across national programmes. Delving into this could have offered more insight as to whether the general care/control nexus characterising assisted return as one of migration management's inventions, could be qualified by putting national variations of less-researched countries and specific components of the measure under the magnifying glass.

The study has indeed shown that specific layers within particular national programmes position themselves at different levels of assisted-return's continuum of care and control. More specifically, the measure's eligibility criteria may encompass the illegalised migrant population or stop at rejected asylum seekers and other groups labelled as vulnerable. Turning to the implementing actors, governmental agencies, international organisations and NGOs may fulfil different roles, including counselling, the provision of reintegration assistance, referral, the practical organisation of the trip and training. Counselling itself may be uncoercive and open-ended or unequivocally emphasise that the alternative to the take-up of assisted return is being deported. This, taken at face value, may imply that generalised statements about assisted return encapsulating both

securitisation and humanitarianism should actually be taken with a grain of salt. However, at a closer look, it appears that factors and conditions that lie outside assisted return per se confirm its overall contested humanitarianism, even in the light of a variety of inner specificities. Therefore, a larger target group cannot arguably be considered actual care, if its composing individuals will be subjected to the fabrication of a voluntary return decision as a consequence of joining the programme. At the same time, leaving illegalised migrants out of the purview of the measure is also not caring, as their precarisation restricts the chances of them having a conducive existence in the host countries. The same reasoning applies to the remaining components of AR: keeping illegalised migrants further away from state structures, for instance involving NGOs over bureaucrats or refraining from referring counselled migrants to the police, may translate into genuine care only insofar as viable life opportunities are created for those individuals for whom return is not the preferred option.

The legitimising evolution of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration equally signals that variety and adaptation, when remaining within an epistemological framework of primacy of the principle of national sovereignty as a population-sorting factor, does not lead to any substantial departure from migration management's unrealistic standardisation of reality. In fact, it seems more of a representation of how this neoliberal project – hinging on ideas that have been made become common-sense, such as the opportunity of individual responsibility, society's subordination to economic instrumentality and the removal of complex phenomena from the purview of democratic confrontation – seeks to constantly turn its predicaments palatable and acceptable to a wider public. Chapter four has indeed shown the remarkable proliferation of formulations and variations of the policy construct of sustainable reintegration, as a virtually unique attempt to systematise the appraisal of its conceptualisations across several decades and from the point of view of diverse stakeholders. With the direct and indirect contribution of academia and the non-governmental scene as well as the endorsement of the first – yet widely critiqued in critical circles – attempt to concretise global migration governance into an international agreement, the Global Compact for Migration, sustainable reintegration has metamorphosed from a loose synonym of sustainable return and therefore the absence of returnees' re-emigration to a more multi-dimensional formulation. Yet, this formulation is still confined within a depoliticising idea of sustainability, obviating the possibility and necessity for what might be a more disruptive, fairly inclusive dialogue of values. Furthermore, while references to re-emigration have been removed from the official formulations of sustainable reintegration recently publicised within migration

management and notably by IOM, the phenomenon of reintegration is limited to socio-economic facets and the issue of the potential for returnees' further mobility hinted at in a simplification of the theoretical dilemma between force and choice in migration.

The above overview makes clear the attempts on the part of return migration management to turn more appealing and less criticisable – or, hide the contentiousness of its humanitarianism, as it were – while, on a closer look, showing its essence essentially remaining equal to itself. In the next section, I discuss how externalisation furthers this re-calibration of return migration management, with a view to attracting local actors in participating in an apparently beneficial project. However, these actors do not take long to identify its disturbing contradictions, ending up transforming it with their remonstrations.

8.3 Re-making externalisation from within: critiquing and transforming an exogenous model

While certainly minoritarian in a mainly Euro- and state-centric field of research a few years ago, studies on the ramification of externalisation away from the metropole and deep into target communities are undoubtedly multiplying. The recognition that Eurocentric models are far from monolithic and all-powerful is becoming current in critical research, with authors proving productive creativity in developing concepts and frameworks to make sense of the multifarious ways in which the standardised models of migration management are re-made in very specific contexts and circumstances. In other words, the literature continues to grapple with the reality of agency in suffocating structures of global inequality. Illegalised migrants' 'appropriation' of the assisted-return device in situations in which they are faced with a limited range of viable life choices has been recently evoked from the standpoint of the theoretical framework of the autonomy of migration (Maâ 2023). This framework helps conceptualise ever-evolving constructions of power such as externalisation as constant adaptations to the unrelenting inventiveness of migrants' defiance, rather than the other way around (Casas-Cortes et al. 2015). Several more instances of research, especially those cited across Chapter one, five and six, have pointed to the unpredictability of borderwork within a migration regime fragmented by, to lend Oliveira Martins and Strange's (2019) exact words, contestation and critique.

Turning to a remarkable geographical context, where formal and informal remittances potentially amount to as high as half of national GDP (UNCDF 2023), on whose mechanisms of externalisation and civil-society virtually no peer-reviewed research existed at the time of this trajectory's start, the study of Chapter five has contributed to this burgeoning body of work on how the on-paper scripts and designs of migration control are made to shake by Southern facilitators. It has done so using a theoretical framework – that of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and its Sociology of Translation (SoT) – that allows to account for enrolment, entrenchment *and* transformation in socio-material networks at once. The study emphasised how enrolment relies on aligning interests which gravitate around the stigmatisation of the backway, corresponding to racialised migration objectives on the part of Europe and the need to save young lives with a view to securing the socio-economic development of a young democracy from the perspective of locally-embedded actors. The availability of funding that this alignment in interest makes available, which existing literature widely stresses as a determinant of Southern participation in externalisation, is indeed an interestment *device*, namely a tool that ties the developing network tighter together. It is at this point that cracks crystallise, because the apparently aligning agenda results in contestation around the *modalities* of its achievement, which means the approaches that are concretely followed in carrying migration management out. The respondents cited in Chapter five have complained about the relationship between migration management and mobility injustice, criticised Europe's political engagement in The Gambia more broadly and resented the quick reinstatement of returns which has followed their country's move away from autocracy. Moving from this standpoint of awareness of externalisation's design that they are enrolled to implement, Gambian non-state actors have translated some parts of these designs into something more acceptable to them and their beneficiaries. Negotiations and limited concessions in the presence of criticism, from the point of view of ANT, are necessary for the network not to dissolve. The Gambian non-state actors then obtained some improvement compared to the first days of the erection of externalisation's socio-material network in The Gambia, such as transportation fees being reimbursed to participate in certain trainings or temporary shelter for returnees being financed through dedicated resources. Chapter six gave more insight into the background of this clash in *modality*, deriving from Gambian non-state actors being enrolled in an endeavour that makes sense to them, but they cannot be in the steering wheel of. This clash is moral, which connects to perceptions of (il)legitimacy, expectations and responsibility influencing the relationship of social reproduction between IOM and the returnees involved in the Migrants as Messengers

sensitisation programme that the chapter's study approaches. To exploitative, alienating and conditional mechanisms, experienced in very concrete ways by the returnee campaigners, the latter react through the voicing of convinced criticism as well as, less often, withdrawal. Both Chapter five and seven suggest that withdrawal often leads to turning Gambian non-state actors' attention away from externalisation's leaders like IOM. This occurs when these actors engage in activities that relate to the objectives of migration management but are not funded – for example a returnee group taking up a farm offered by a local community as a way of autonomous reintegration support – or they prefer partnering up with organisations which do not have a past in migration management – for instance the returnee group enjoying the larger room for manoeuvre provided by the project with the European NGO.

Chapter six has additionally given insight into how returnees' experiences disrupt the narrative of sustainable reintegration as a policy concept. This is true both if I take seriously its nature of policy agenda to be mainly attained by means of reintegration assistance and I see it as a relatively abstract way to describe a process that returnees contextually face as a matter of course. In other words, I will now comment on sustainable reintegration as, on the one hand, a prescriptive and, on the other, a descriptive device. Starting with sustainable reintegration as a prescriptive policy device, the results of my study question the relationship between reintegration assistance and sustainable reintegration and additionally unveil that the whole industry of return migration management is detrimental for the development of a morally-viable reintegration for the returnees. I have mentioned how the locally-embedded CSOs offering reintegration assistance in The Gambia resented the relatively-sudden wave of returns spurred by the change in regime, finding the in-transition country largely unprepared for dealing with the related challenges. The financially-deficient mechanisms of support made available by European states – ranging from the lacking on-arrival reception, time-limited assistance and unsustainable training offers that bottom-up criticism was partially able to offset – additionally testify to how post-return aid is unfit to deal with returnees' immediate difficulties, let alone long-term reintegration. When looking at assisted returnees' direct experience with this aid, the picture is even worse. Almost all the assisted returnees I have encountered across the various phases of my research had not been able to pursue the undertaking they had initially received reintegration assistance for. This is because of various factors. Some returnees had sold the material attributed them for reintegration to pay migration-related debts or face the immediate needs of their families. Some others could not deal with the socio-economic shortcomings of The Gambia, that have not changed since their return

despite the 2016 modification of the governmental establishment. Some more did not have the adequate skills to make a small-scale business work, which is the most popular type of reintegration project returnees go for and reintegration providers encourage pursuing. However, reintegration assistance is conceived as a one-time chance that returnees are responsible to render effective. With the study of Chapter six, I have shown how this responsabilisation plays out in IOM's evasive paternalism. IOM does not acknowledge how the deficient nature of assisted return and reintegration contributes to producing the need for income of returnees, which is one of the factors leading them to accept the exploitative conditions of the industry of awareness-raising, including the Migrants as Messengers project implemented under IOM's leadership in The Gambia. However, when the returnees learn how to produce multimedia material through the dedicated training made available by the project, they cannot profit off of the development of their videos or market their acquired competences with IOM itself. Furthermore, when they are proactive enough to ask IOM for a partnership with their returnee group, they are told that the help they are requesting is no extra compensation for the work they have already done and thus have to produce more. If these circumstances do not make the sustainable reintegration of the official migration-management documents and the Global Compact for Migration impossible, they arguably render its attainment unnecessarily more difficult.

Sustainable reintegration can also be taken descriptively, or as an abstract device which refers to a process that returnees undergo beyond and, to some extent, independently of reintegration assistance. When reflecting on this concept from this descriptive point of view, it is hard to overstate the role played by returnees grouping in grassroots associations. For grassroots associations I do not mean the collective reintegration projects facilitated and stimulated by IOM, which I also had the chance to visit and speak to during the research. The associations which are not connected to a collective reintegration project may be more susceptible to become dependent on awareness-raising, because of not having another source of joint income, but are arguably more independent from IOM, as the episode recounted in Chapter six of a returnee group withdrawing from an attempted partnership that it judged unviable demonstrates. The study of Chapter seven has further revealed how this kind of returnee group engenders an interpersonal bond that surpasses cooperation over one particular financial undertaking. The returnee group involved in the partnership with the European NGO addressed disagreements as 'family' problems, engaged the returnees' actual families in its initiatives and conceives of its mission as reciprocal support. I have avoided redefining sustainable reintegration in this dissertation because

of the stated objective of aiming to critically appraise policy language rather than ameliorate it. However, the above overview conveys that, either departing from the institutionalised conceptualisation of sustainable reintegration or considering it a general signifier, externalisation – both in the form of reintegration assistance and the related migration industry – is not conducive for it. I do not mean that constructions of support should collapse, freeing Northern countries from the last bit of responsibility they are currently willing to take for the fate of migrants, but that the way in which these migrants are helped or involved must be made over, giving up on standardised schemes of a neoliberal flavour which cloak conventional mechanisms of capitalist exploitation and incorporating enough flexibility to embrace the returnees' potential missteps, own inventiveness and developing competences. Indeed, this section has communicated that, while certain bottom-up requests have achieved to partially alter some externalisation structures, many more are left unacknowledged or even resisted by them. This is a confirmation that the EU's externalised migration regime is certainly not monolithic and all-powerful (Deridder et al. 2020), but also that power asymmetries cannot be underestimated. The question is, then, are the alternative stances and practices tolerated and normalised by externalisation structures the only ones to consider effectively transformative or is it the mere fact that locally-embedded non-state actors in externalisation hold non-Eurocentric views that makes this endeavour something different from what the Global North wants it to be? In this section, I encapsulated my contribution to the expanding body of work on Southern perspectives on externalisation. In the next one, however, I will discuss an additional possibility: that in addition to looking at how Gambian non-state actors affect externalisation, one can consider how the Global North colonises these actors' fight against the backway as a bottom-up response to the coloniality of migration control.

8.4 Re-making the fight against the backway: what if the lens was overturned?

As stated above, an enlarging body of research turned its gaze to the multifarious and unpredictable ways in which Southern actors disturb the linear and standardised project of externalisation. Many works going in this direction underline that cooperation with the Global North on the agenda of migration management are neither motivated by Southern actors' total alignment with nor complete subjugation to it. Gaibazzi (2023), for instance, has attributed consistent weight to the concept of extraversion in accounting for President

Barrow's government participation in externalisation. In the words of the author, this concept "takes into account the dependency of states and economies on aid and resource exports entrenched by the (neo)colonial world system, while simultaneously overcoming the limits of [dependency] theory by paying attention to African regimes' strategies to turn their dependencies into an asset of internal politics" (Gaibazzi 2023, 3). This should be true of non-state actors too. Research has indeed elaborated on how embracing the EU-drafted scripts of 'peers', 'intermediaries' and 'returnees' has enabled migrants and communities to access well-needed resources (Maâ 2021; Maâ et al. 2022; Shaidrova 2022). It is undoubtful that the Gambian government and the wider society benefit from European interests. It is also clear that the intent of the cited works and many similar others is to grant enough agency to populations nominally crushed by the colonialism of global capitalism. However, the risk of overstating how these populations instrumentalise the oppressive machinations of the West is to foreground their opportunism rather than values. The studies of the Chapters five and six of this dissertation have showcased instead that values are abundant on the Southern side, transpiring from the dismay at the loss of Gambian lives on the backway, the attachment to national development, the perception of the illegitimacy of the capitalist logics embedded in the migration industry and so on. This makes it hard to privilege the reason of opportunism to explain Southern participation in externalisation. The study of Chapter seven, revolving around a project on sensitisation against and general deterrence of the backway spearheaded by a grassroots returnee group which was virtually uncompelled, stimulates the thought that Gambian non-state actors may experience the access to opportunities as a secondary implication of their participation in externalisation. What is more, these actors may even be the actual engine of the fight against the backway, which the Global North superimposes its racialised migration objectives on. This superimposition, implying an apparent common understanding, would then spur the moral clash in implementation modalities that the several works on bottom-up agency in externalisation, including several chapters of this dissertation, end up capturing. Returning to the coloniality framework, this Southern essence to the fight against the backway could be identified as an instance of border thinking because it is not a purely local creation, but a reaction to the coloniality of mobility injustice from the standpoint of a population that, directly or indirectly, suffers from the violence of it. As stated in Chapter seven, however, it appears difficult to label border thinking a fight – that against the backway – which is, if taken at face value, identical as the Eurocentric one. Yet, it is of no surprise that a population deeply affected by the deadly backway would want to mobilise against it, as much as the socio-

economic survival of this very population is still strictly interrelated to its continuation. In a world where structures of power seem far and overwhelming, it is again plausible that this population prefers to address such an urgent problem through a viable route: embarking on a crusade against a specific mindset that associates the idea of 'making it' to going as far North as possible, at all costs. In other words, if a returnee who has experienced the trauma of the backway directly advises against going through the same route, it is because she has at heart the faith of other youngsters from her country who are ready to leave. When European or European-funded entities offer to fund and facilitate this sensitisation, but attempt to constrain, manipulate, alter or silence it because of pursuing different ultimate objectives, moral clashes arise. Embracing this analysis would push towards the option, already put forward in recent publications, that research should overall rebalance its gaze. In the words of Pastore (2023), "[r]ebalancing our understanding of externalization by fully integrating non-European [perspectives] is indeed necessary, but an ambitious decentring agenda of migration policy studies needs to go beyond that" (772). Therefore, "decentring the study of migration policymaking and politics 'beyond fortress Europe' requires a strong shift of the empirical focus on non-European political systems in all their complexity, without any overestimation of the causal role of European diplomatic pressures and migration-related conditionalities in development cooperation and foreign aid" (Pastore 2023, 772).

The unique combination of complementary theoretical frameworks mobilised in this research has been conducive to appraising several different aspects of the phenomenon of externalisation. Still, as in Pastore's wording, fully comprehending the reasons why Gambian non-state actors have not pursued paths of stronger resistance to the make-it-here of externalisation both within and outside it, would require further research being carried out beyond what this study has focused on. Further investigations could be indeed conducted without moving from the intention to assess to what extent locally-embedded actors embrace or disrupt exogenous designs. This would not mean doing away with questions that have to do with coloniality and power imbalances, but setting to explore how these have affected social dynamics at large. The resulting insights could then aid in understanding further migration-related concerns. These social dynamics may be nationalism and the transformations of the family and society due to neoliberal globalisation. The creation of African nation-states was a consequence of decolonisation (Hansen 2022). Yet, the pathos with which locally-embedded non-state actors and the wider population refer to the urge to stop the backway to save *Gambian* lives and make sure the country's young democracy goes hand in hand with adequate *national* development, commands

a serious reflection on what nationalism has come to signify for the populations of Africa and how this can in turn elucidate certain unanswered questions in migration studies. Understanding further social dynamics, in a Gambian context where neoliberal globalisation interplays with long-established cultural norms in unexpected ways (Gaibazzi 2015), would also shed more light on whether grassroots associations, enlarging to a wider population even when spearheaded by returnees, are a variation of civil society in *domoda*¹⁰ sauce or an attempt and opportunity to reconstitute fora of social interaction which have always existed in African landscapes (indeed, as a sign of the evolution of insight and understanding entailed by a paper-based PhD trajectory, mentioned in Chapter one, I used the civil-society category quite liberally in Chapter five, only to become more critical about it in Chapter seven). Delving into this could resultantly clarify whether the practice of awareness-raising is actually a technology exported by the Global North and instrumentalised by Southern implementers or a mundane facet of West African culture, where interpersonal interaction and the reception of life advice from elders is commonplace. Just like the findings of this research, this sharpening or re-positioning of research focus would be relevant to the additional (African) contexts which have so far been approached in externalisation research.

8.5 References

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¹⁰ A popular dish in Gambia, characterised by a thick sauce made by mixing tomato paste and peanut butter. It is called *mafé* in Senegal.

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English summary

The rise of people moving to the Global North without the correct documents has led policy-makers to embrace the paradigm of migration management. This paradigm advances technical solutions to depoliticised and complex social issues such as migration. Policies around return migration are a prominent component of migration management. This has brought some critical research to speak of a 'deportation turn', whereby the 'deportability' of undocumented migrants – or the constant possibility of their removal from the host territory – is instrumental for their illegalisation. Part of this return focus are the so-called assisted voluntary return measures, which aim to facilitate the uncoerced return of illegalised migrants by offering them assistance in their trip homewards as well as, in some cases, for the ensuing reintegration. In host countries, the implementation of assisted return has gradually enlarged to a plethora of different actors, including non-state ones. Furthermore, according to policy-makers' rationale, assisted return should go hand in hand with sustainable reintegration, which is a policy objective meaning, in its widest conceptualisation, the lack of returnees' re-emigration. The policy objective of sustainable reintegration has been introduced in the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), an international document approved at United Nations (UN) level underpinning the global governance of migration.

Reintegration assistance is provided by various actors, including locally-embedded non-state actors in the countries of return. Returnees often turn into agents of migration management themselves, especially implementing Western-funded awareness-raising campaigns against irregular migration. These phenomena fall under the scope of the externalisation of the border of Northern countries, namely their outsourcing of migration- and border-related activities to the Global South. The literature on externalisation has mostly concerned itself with the European Union (EU) and, even if looking southwards, state actors. Yet a burgeoning body of works has been turning its gaze to grassroots participation in externalisation. Notions such as borderwork and migration regime – which capture the messiness engendered by different interests being at stake in externalisation as well as the (re-)(un-)making of borders through mundane actions and thoughts – underly this literature turn. This dissertation clarifies further the dynamics of externalised return migration management, by a) shedding more light on the latter's practice and discourse and b) focusing on the impact of the incorporation of non-state actors and returnees in it. The geographical context of this study is an under-researched one from the point of view of bottom-up participation in externalisation, namely the West African

country of The Gambia. This country experienced a shift to a democratic regime after two decades of autocracy. Given The Gambia's remarkably high emigration rate, Northern countries, and in particular the (Member States of the) EU, have mobilised to fund (return) migration management activities in that context, which several Gambian returnees and non-state actors are involved in. This all leads to this dissertation's main research question:

How do Gambian returnees and non-state actors affect externalised return migration management's practice and discourse?

This is in turn articulated into five sub-questions, addressed in the chapters going from the second to the seventh:

1. How do care and control interact in the configuration of assisted return across six European countries?
2. How has the meaning of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration evolved since its emergence?
3. What are the implications of Gambian non-state actors' enrolment in externalised return migration management?
4. How do the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the returnees morally cast their clashing over certain capitalist logics of the industry of awareness-raising?
5. How do coloniality and border thinking manifest themselves in a partnership between a returnee group and a European non-governmental organisation (NGO)?

The methodology with which these five research questions were addressed is a qualitative one. The specific methods employed for approaching each of the five questions are summarised in the table below: the first two research questions on the practice and discourse of return migration management are based on document analysis and stakeholder interviews, whereas an ethnography, based on a combination of on-site and remote research phases, underpinned the study of the latter three questions.

Table 1. Overview of data collection and analysis across the studies

| Study and chapter | Research question | Type of data | Method of data collection | Access to respondents (if applicable) | Time-frame of data collection | Method of data analysis |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Study one (Chapter three). | How do care and control interact in the configuration of assisted return across six European countries? | Law and policy documents; interview transcripts. | Desk-based research; in-depth, semi-structured, remote interviews (n=18) and written correspondence (n=10) carried out by two UNU-CRIS research interns and a UGent Master's student in Social Work. | Direct approaching of potential respondents (mainly through email and phone call) based on the relevant profiles identified during the desk-based phase. | July-December 2020. | Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |
| Study two (Chapter four). | How has the meaning of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration evolved since its emergence? | Texts (n=99) coming from policy, law and different types of organisations. | Desk-based research. | / | October-March 2019. | Summative content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |
| Study three, four and five (Chapter five, six and seven). | What are the implications of Gambian non-state actors' enrolment in externalised return migration management? How do IOM and the returnees morally cast their clashing over certain capitalist logics of the industry of awareness-raising? How do coloniality and border thinking manifest themselves in a partnership between a returnee group and a European non-governmental organisation (NGO)? | Policy, research and report documents. Digital audio-visual material. Interview transcripts and field notes. | Ethnography, including desk-based research; semi-structured, formal and informal, remote and in-person interviews (out of which, both off- and on-record, n=42 formal interviews); and participant observation. | I started from approaching the relevant stakeholders emerging from the desk-based research. I was aided in this by two UGent Master's students in Social Work who were carrying out an internship at Caritas The Gambia before my first fieldwork stay. I then enlarged my circle based on these first contacts. | In-person: March 2020, Remotely, from March 2020 to September 2021. In-person: between September 2021 and October 2021. Remotely, between October 2021 and March 2022. In-person, between March 2022 and July 2022. | Directed content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |

Moving on to the overview of the analytical chapters, Chapter three deals with the process of legitimisation of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration. Global migration governance underwent significant formalisation with the adoption of the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) by the large majority of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. The Global Compact is a non-binding set of guidelines for signatory nation states to implement which should direct cooperative international migration management. The politically sensitive issue of return migration was expediently included among the Global Compact's composing goals. Objective 21 refers to the act of return per se, which has to be safe and dignified as well as to the subsequent phase of returnees' reintegration in their communities of origin. According to the Global Compact, such reintegration should be 'sustainable' meaning psychosocially and economically viable. This policy objective consistently informs the reintegration assistance programmes of IOM and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In spite of the wide utilisation of this policy objective and the Global Compact's endorsement, the literature has not responded to the question of what it actually means for different actors and how this meaning has evolved over time. Scrutinising almost 100 relevant texts, we delve into the initial normalisation of sustainable reintegration as essentially meaning the absence of returnees' re-emigration and then the fragmentation of it, whereby actors beyond the circle of normalisation challenge the initial connotation attached to the term. These two processes are followed by an assimilation phase, in which the originators of the policy construct incorporate available criticism and make it align with their rationale with the aim to (re-)boost sustainable reintegration's legitimacy. We finally posit that the enhanced policy construct undergoes an extra phase of normalisation, whereby the updated definition is publicised in different fora. We end the chapter by reflecting on how a more inclusive debate on what the process of reintegration may and should mean would be more productive than a rationalised insistence on the concept of sustainability, which, as highlighted in the field of development or environmental protection, carries a depoliticising potential.

Chapter four addresses the balance of care and control across the configuration of assisted return by five European countries. Assisted return (AR) is a widespread policy tool offering financial support and counselling to returning migrants. Policymakers present it as a durable solution vis-à-vis undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers. However, AR has been proven to display the concurrence of care and control typical of contested humanitarianism. This concurrence of care and control takes different shapes across nation states. This chapter looks at how Sweden, Finland, the UK, Italy, Spain and Portugal

concretely configure care and control in their AR programmes. The analyses focus particularly on accessibility criteria, the landscape of the actors implementing the measure and their main implementation strategies. We find that the care and control balance of a particular layer within the AR national system can hardly be appreciated without considering the (lack of) life opportunities available to the potential beneficiaries of the measure, both within the confines and outside of it. Therefore, our comparative research ultimately conveys that what we call the intrinsic humanitarianism of AR—or its internal care-control balance—can give insight into the durability of the measure only when associated with what we term the extrinsic humanitarianism of AR—namely its broader relationship with forced return. In other words, AR ultimately appears migration control in disguise if it is not coupled with the enlargement of dignified life chances for migrants.

Chapter five approaches the effects of the incorporation of locally-embedded non-state actors in the externalisation of return migration management by the EU and its Member States to The Gambia. The end of a long-standing autocratic regime in The Gambia renewed Europe's geopolitical interest in the externalisation of (return) migration management to the West African country. Since 2017, Europe has financed several programmes implemented by a combination of international and local actors. Analysing original qualitative data through the lens of the sociology of translation (SoT) offered by actor-network theory (ANT), this chapter explores the incorporation of locally owned civil society organisations (CSOs) within the socio-material network of externalisation. As such, it engages with the understudied perspective of Southern implementers in the context of migration management. In our analysis, we put central two notions of SoT: interestment and enrolment. With the first, we show how the development and migrant-protection interests of locally owned CSOs are brought in alignment with the European objective of curtailing irregular migration. This process of interestment is never complete, but leaves room for excess positions, which here correspond to the locally owned CSOs' criticism of Europe's appropriation of Gambian natural resources, practical organisation of migration management and excessive immobilisation of Gambians. The notion of enrolment refers to the processes of negotiation addressing part of these excess positions. Even with enrolment being successful, locally owned CSOs keep imagining, and to some extent, performing alternative ways of dealing with migration. Such alternative thinking and practicing will overtake the European only if multiple and stable connections arise around it. Our ANT-driven analysis demonstrates that local implementers endorse European migration management because they broadly see it as beneficial; yet, with their criticism,

requests and imagination, manage to limitedly alter it, and may, potentially, transform it.

Chapter six focuses on the moral implications of the involvement of Gambian returnees in the IOM-led industry of awareness-raising. The ‘politics of voice’ of awareness-raising bends returnees’ stories towards moral tropes against illegalised migration. Their stories are commodified, bringing awareness-raising within the migration industries. We address this commodification using data from an ethnographic study of the Migrants as Messengers (MaM) project run by the IOM in The Gambia since 2019 and through the concept that we call ‘moral economy of voice’. The constituting dimensions of the moral economy of voice are outlined in our analysis of vignettes, which describe situations where clashes between IOM and the returnees over awareness-raising industry’s capitalist logics are cast in moral terms. We show that the returnees orally complained at IOM’s mis-categorisation, mis-compensation and appropriation of their products. When acting as members of an independent group, however, they rejected IOM’s conditional support for their communication projects altogether. This all engenders an evasive paternalism whereby returnees’ survival partly depends on IOM, but the latter affords them neither full vulnerability nor maturity status. As such, returnee stories’ commodification mechanisms are as contentious as their discursive bending. We therefore hint at returnee groups’ potential for withstanding exploitative dynamics as well as advocate for a fairer engagement of returnees in awareness-raising.

In Chapter seven, I look at a partnership between a Gambian returnee-led group and a European NGO to generate reflections on where the boundaries of migration management and civil society lie as well as to what extent locally-embedded non-state actors own the fight against illegalised migration. The Gambian group constituted in a Libyan prison, before the members would be assisted to return. Since then, its exposure in the industry of awareness-raising led it to meet a European NGO active in the field of sports. The two actors obtained funding for a project that would both sensitise against irregular migration – or the backway, as is known to Gambians – and expand the geographical scope and professionalisation of the group. The design and implementation of this project is analysed in the light of the coloniality stream of literature, engaged in theorising around the exportation of Eurocentric frameworks, the application of these to subaltern knowledges and the resulting border thinking. The latter refers to the unique position occupied by actors at the intersection between local histories and global designs. The challenge of disentangling coloniality, subaltern knowledge and border thinking through the

ethnographic examples constituting the empirical material of the chapter continues in the discussion section. In it, I ask whether the fact that the returnees themselves proposed to give an anti-backway spin to the project within the framework of a partnership whose contours were not delimited in advance by the European NGO, can be considered an instance of border thinking. Indeed, what should be the original or unique position of subalternised actors seems to essentially align with the global design of migration management. This doubt applies to the civil-society aspect of the partnership too. The European consortium funding the project buttresses civil-society in development and the returnee group embraced some tropes of this rationalistic design during the implementation. However, the returnees equally maintained approaches which appear unorthodox in the light of the development and civil-society rationale.

Chapter eight contains the general discussion of this dissertation. This discussion is essentially composed of three main parts. First, a reflection on the evolution and state-of-the-art of the practice and discourse of return migration management. Despite attempting to recast this practice and discourse in a more favourable light – by, for instance, assimilating critiques and advancing a contested form of humanitarianism – policy-makers maintain the same racialised, immobilisation objectives, undermining any concrete prospect of reform. A return migration management cast in development and humanitarian terms is better posed to enrol locally-embedded non-state actors in its externalisation. However, I have shown how, once the enrolment is complete, these actors promptly notice and react to a difference in the morals and values animating the fight against the backway form the point of view of the donors and the big international organisations related to them. In the last section, I suggest that research could add to the burgeoning literature on the bottom-up instrumentalisation of and criticism to externalised return migration management by raising the question of whether Northern countries also re-make the fight against the backway of the grassroots by super-imposing their objectives and schemes over it.

Nederlandstalige samenvatting

De stijging van het aantal mensen dat migreert naar het Noorden zonder de juiste documenten, heeft ertoe geleid dat beleidsmakers het idee van 'migratie management' omarmen. Binnen dit paradigma worden technische oplossingen aangedragen voor gedepolitiseerde and complexe sociale problemen zoals migratie. Beleid inzake terugkeermigratie is een prominent onderdeel van migratie management. Dit heeft ertoe geleid dat sommige kritische onderzoekers spreken van een 'deportation turn', waarbij de 'deportabiliteit' van migranten zonder wettige verblijfsvergunning - of de constante mogelijkheid van hun verwijdering uit het gastland - instrumenteel is voor hun illegalisering. De zogenaamde 'begeleide vrijwillige terugkeer' maatregelen vormen deel van deze focus op terugkeer. Deze maatregelen hebben tot doel een niet-gedwongen terugkeer van migranten zonder wettige verblijfsvergunning te vergemakkelijken, door hen hulp te bieden bij hun terugreis en, in sommige gevallen, bij de daaropvolgende re-integratie. In de gastlanden is de implementatie van begeleide terugkeer geleidelijk aan uitgebreid tot een groot aantal verschillende actoren, waaronder niet-gouvernementele actoren. Bovendien moet begeleide terugkeer volgens beleidsmakers hand in hand gaan met duurzame re-integratie, een beleidsdoelstelling die in de ruimste zin van het woord betekent dat de teruggekeerde personen niet opnieuw hoeven te emigreren. De beleidsdoelstelling 'duurzame re-integratie' is opgenomen in de Internationale Overeenkomst voor Veilige, Ordelijke en Reguliere Migratie (het VN-migratiepact), een internationaal document dat op het niveau van de Verenigde Naties (VN) is goedgekeurd en het wereldwijde migratiebeleid ondersteunt.

Re-integratie steun wordt verleend door verschillende actoren, waaronder ook lokale niet-gouvernementele actoren in de landen van terugkeer. Ook terugkeerders worden vaak zelf actoren binnen migratie management, met name door het uitvoeren van door het Westen gefinancierde sensibiliseringscampagnes tegen irreguliere migratie. Deze praktijken vallen onder de externalisatie van de grens van landen uit het Globale Noorden, wat verwijst naar het uitbesteden van migratie- en grens-gerelateerde activiteiten aan actoren in het Globale Zuiden. De literatuur over externalisatie heeft zich tot nog toe voornamelijk beziggehouden met het perspectief van de Europese Unie (EU). Zelfs wanneer naar het Globale Zuiden gekeken werd, was dit voornamelijk naar overheidsactoren. Sinds kort richt een groeiend aantal onderzoekers de blik op de deelname van 'grassroots' actoren (burger- of zogenoemde bottom-up initiatieven) aan externalisatie. Begrippen als 'grenswerk' en 'migratie regime' - die de rommeligheid weergeven die ontstaat door de

verschillende belangen die op het spel staan bij externalisatie en bij het opnieuw maken of ongedaan maken van grenzen door middel van alledaagse handelingen en gedachten - liggen aan de grondslag van deze literaire wending. Dit doctoraat verduidelijkt de dynamiek van geëxternaliseerd terugkeermigratie beleid door a) meer licht te werpen op de praktijk en het discours van dit beleid en b) zich te richten op de impact van de deelname van niet-gouvernementele actoren en teruggekeerde migranten. De geografische context van deze studie, namelijk het West-Afrikaanse land Gambia, is vanuit het oogpunt van bottom-up deelname aan externalisatie nog onvoldoende onderzocht. Dit land maakte een overgang naar een democratisch regime door na twee decennia van autocratie. Door het opmerkelijk hoog emigratiecijfer van Gambia hebben landen uit het Globale Noorden, in het bijzonder de (lidstaten van de) EU, zich gemobiliseerd om (terugkeer)migratie management in deze context te financieren. Hierbij zijn verschillende Gambiaanse terugkeerders en niet-gouvernementele actoren betrokken. Dit alles leidt tot de onderzoeksvraag van dit doctoraat:

Hoe beïnvloeden Gambiaanse niet-gouvernementele actoren en terugkeerders de praktijk en het discours van geëxternaliseerd terugkeermigratie management?

Deze vraag wordt vervolgens opgesplitst in vijf deelvragen, die in de hoofdstukken van het tweede tot en met het zevende worden behandeld:

1. Hoe interageren zorg en controle door de vormgeving van begeleide terugkeer in zes Europese landen?
2. Hoe is de betekenis van de beleidsdoelstelling van duurzame re-integratie geëvolueerd sinds het ontstaan ervan?
3. Wat zijn de gevolgen van de betrokkenheid van Gambiaanse niet-gouvernementele actoren bij de externalisatie van terugkeerbeleid?
4. Wat zijn de morele interpretaties van de Internationale Organisatie voor Migratie (IOM) en terugkeerders over hun botsing rond bepaalde kapitalistische logica's van de sensibiliseringsindustrie?
5. Hoe manifesteren kolonialiteit en grens-denken zich in een partnerschap tussen een groep terugkeerders en een Europese niet-gouvernementele organisatie (NGO)?

Deze vijf onderzoeksvragen worden bestudeerd aan de hand van een kwalitatieve methodologie. De specifieke methoden die zijn gebruikt om elk van de vijf vragen te benaderen zijn samengevat in onderstaande tabel. De eerste twee onderzoeksvragen over de praktijk en het discours van terugkeerbeleid zijn gebaseerd zijn op documentanalyse en interviews met stakeholders, terwijl een etnografie, gebaseerd op een combinatie van onderzoeksfasen ter plaatse en op afstand, ten grondslag lag aan de studie van de laatste drie vragen

Tabel 1. Overzicht van dataverzameling en data-analyse toegepast in de studies.

| Studie en hoofdstuk | Onderzoeksvraag | Data type | Methode van dataverzameling | Toegang tot respondenten (inclien van toepassing) | Timing van dataverzameling | Methode van data-analyse |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Studie een (hoofdstuk 3) | Hoe interageren zorg en controle door de vormgeving van begeleidde terugkeer in zes Europese landen? | Wet- en beleidsteksten; interviewtranscripten. | Desk research, semi-gestructureerd, online, diepte-interviews (n=18) en geschreven correspondentie (n=10) uitgevoerd door twee UNU-CRIS stagiairs en een UGent Master student Sociaal Werk. | Direct contact met potentiële respondenten (via e-mail en telefoon), geselecteerd op relevantie tijdens desk research | juli – december 2020 | Gerichte content analyse (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |
| Studie twee (hoofdstuk 4) | Hoe is de betekenis van de beleidsdoelstelling van duurzame re-integratie geëvolueerd sinds het ontstaan ervan? | Wetteksten en beleidsteksten van verschillende organisaties (n=99). | Desk research. | / | oktober – maart 2019 | Summatieve context analyse (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |
| Studie drie, vier en vijf (hoofdstuk 5, 6 en 7). | Wat zijn de gevolgen van de betrokkenheid van Gambiaanse niet-gouvernementele actoren bij de externalisatie van terugkeerbeleid? Wat zijn de morele interpretaties van de Internationale Organisatie voor Migratie (IOM) en terugkeerders over hun botsing rond bepaalde kapitalistische logica's van de sensibiliseringsindustrie? Hoe manifesteren kolonialiteit en grens-denken zich in een partnerschap tussen een groep terugkeerders en een Europese niet-gouvernementele organisatie (NGO)? | Beleidsdocumenten, onderzoek en rapporten van verschillende organisaties. Digitaal audio-visueel materiaal. Interviewtranscripten en veldwerk-nota's | Einografie, bestaande uit desk research, semi-gestructureerde formele en informele, in-person en online interviews (waarvan n=42 formele interviews, zowel off-and on-record) en participerende observaties. | Relevante stakeholder naar voor gebracht door het desk-research werden benaderd. Ik werd daarbij geholpen door twee UGent masterstudenten Sociaal Werk die vóór mijn eerste veldwerkverbijf stage liepen bij Caritas Gambia. De respondenten werden verder uitgebreid aan de hand van de eerste contacten. | In-person: Maart 2020. Van op afstand: van maart 2020 tot september 2021. In-person: tussen september 2021 en oktober 2021. Van op afstand: tussen oktober 2021 en maart 2022. In-person: tussen maart 2022 en juli 2022. | Gerichte content analyse (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). |

Vervolgens ga ik over tot een overzicht van de analytische hoofdstukken. Hoofdstuk 3 gaat over het proces van legitimering van de beleidsdoelstelling 'duurzame re-integratie'. Het wereldwijde migratiebeleid werd aanzienlijk geformaliseerd met de goedkeuring van het VN-migratiepact door de grote meerderheid van de Algemene Vergadering van de Verenigde Naties. Het migratiepact is een niet-bindende reeks richtlijnen die de ondertekenende landen moeten uitvoeren en die richting moeten geven aan een coöperatief internationaal migratiebeleid. De politiek gevoelige kwestie van terugkeermigratie werd vlot opgenomen in de doelstellingen van het pact. Doelstelling 21 heeft betrekking op de terugkeer zelf, die veilig en waardig moet zijn, en op de daaropvolgende fase van re-integratie van terugkeerders in hun gemeenschap van herkomst. Volgens het migratiepact moet die re-integratie "duurzaam" zijn, wat wil zeggen psychosociaal en economisch leefbaar. Deze beleidsdoelstelling ligt aan de grondslag van de re-integratie programma's van de IOM en de VN vluchtelingenorganisatie (UNHCR). Ondanks het brede gebruik van deze beleidsdoelstelling en de bekrachtiging ervan door het migratiepact, heeft de literatuur geen antwoord gegeven op de vraag wat deze doelstelling nu eigenlijk betekent voor de verschillende actoren en hoe deze betekenis in de loop der tijd is geëvolueerd. Aan de hand van de analyse van bijna 100 relevante teksten wordt in dit hoofdstuk ingegaan op de aanvankelijke normalisering van duurzame re-integratie als zijnde in essentie de afwezigheid van remigratie van terugkeerders, en vervolgens op de fragmentatie ervan, waarbij actoren buiten de kring van normalisering de aanvankelijke connotatie die aan de term was verbonden, betwisten. Deze twee processen worden gevolgd door een assimilatiefase, waarin de initiatiefnemers van het beleidsconcept de beschikbare kritiek opnemen en deze in overeenstemming brengen met hun rationale wat als doel heeft de legitimiteit van duurzame re-integratie (opnieuw) te vergroten. Ten slotte tonen we aan dat het verbeterde beleidsconstruct een extra fase van normalisering doormaakt, waarbij de geactualiseerde definitie in verschillende fora wordt gepubliceerd. We eindigen het hoofdstuk met het argument dat een meer inclusief debat over wat het proces van re-integratie kan en moet betekenen, productiever zou zijn dan een gerationaliseerd vasthouden aan het concept duurzaamheid, dat, zoals op het gebied van ontwikkelingssamenwerking of milieubescherming is benadrukt, een depolitiserend tendens met zich meebrengt.

Hoofdstuk 4 behandelt het evenwicht tussen zorg en controle door de vormgeving aan begeleide terugkeer door vijf Europese landen. Begeleide terugkeer (ook 'Assisted Return' of 'AR') is een wijdverbreid beleidsinstrument dat financiële steun en begeleiding biedt aan terugkeerders. Beleidsmakers

presenteren het als een duurzame oplossing voor migranten zonder wettige verblijfsvergunning en voor afgewezen asielzoekers. Het is echter gebleken dat ook AR het samengaan van zorg en controle vertoont die kenmerkend is voor, en bekritiseerd wordt bij, humanitaire hulpverlening. Deze gelijktijdigheid van zorg en controle neemt van land tot land verschillende vormen aan. Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt hoe Zweden, Finland, het Verenigd Koninkrijk, Italië, Spanje en Portugal zorg en controle concreet vormgeven in hun programma's voor begeleide terugkeer. In de analyses wordt aandacht besteed aan de toegankelijkheidscriteria, het landschap van de actoren die de maatregel uitvoeren en hun belangrijkste uitvoeringsstrategieën. We stellen vast dat de zorg- en controlebalans van een bepaalde laag van een nationale AR systeem nauwelijks kan worden beoordeeld zonder rekening te houden met de (gebrekkige) levenskansen van de potentiële begunstigden van de maatregel, zowel binnen als buiten de grenzen ervan. Uit ons vergelijkend onderzoek blijft uiteindelijk dat wat wij het intrinsieke humanitarisme van AR noemen - of het interne evenwicht tussen zorg en controle - alleen inzicht kan geven in de duurzaamheid van de maatregel als het in verband wordt gebracht met wat wij het extrinsieke humanitarisme van AR noemen - namelijk de bredere relatie met gedwongen terugkeer. Met andere woorden, AR lijkt een verkapt migratie controle als het niet gepaard gaat met de uitbreiding van waardige levenskansen voor migranten.

Hoofdstuk 5 behandelt de effecten van de integratie van lokaal verankerde niet-gouvernementele actoren in de externalisatie van terugkeermigratie management door de EU en haar lidstaten naar Gambia. Het einde van een langdurig autocratisch regime in Gambia hernieuwde de geopolitieke belangstelling van EUropa voor de externalisatie van hun (terugkeer)migratie beleid naar het West-Afrikaanse land. Sinds 2017 heeft EUropa verschillende programma's gefinancierd die worden uitgevoerd door een combinatie van internationale en lokale actoren. Dit hoofdstuk analyseert nieuwe kwalitatieve data door de lens van 'the sociology of translation' (SoT), wat een onderdeel vormt van de actor-network theory (ANT). Via deze weg onderzoekt het de integratie van lokale middenveldorganisaties binnen het sociaal-materiële netwerk van de externalisatie. Op deze manier wordt ingegaan op het onderbelichte perspectief van actoren uit het Globale Zuiden als uitvoerders binnen het EU migratiebeleid. In onze analyse stellen we twee begrippen van SoT centraal: interessement en enrolment. Met het eerste laten we zien hoe de belangen van lokale middenveldorganisaties rond ontwikkeling en het beschermen van migranten op één lijn worden gebracht met de Europese doelstelling om irreguliere migratie in te perken. Dit proces van 'interessement'

is nooit compleet, maar laat ruimte voor afwijkende posities, die hier overeenkomen met de kritiek van de lokale middenveldorganisaties op de toe-eigening van de Gambiaanse natuurlijke hulpbronnen door Europa, de praktische organisatie van het migratiebeleid en de buitensporige immobilisatie van Gambianen. Het begrip 'enrolment' verwijst naar de onderhandelingsprocessen ten aanzien van een deel van deze afwijkende posities. Zelfs als de 'enrolment' succesvol is, blijven lokale middenveldorganisaties zich alternatieve manieren voorstellen om met migratie om te gaan, en deze tot op zekere hoogte ook uitvoeren. Dergelijk alternatief denken en uitvoeren zal de Europese visie alleen overstemmen als er meerdere en stabiele verbanden omheen ontstaan. Onze ANT-gestuurde analyse toont aan dat lokale uitvoerders het Europese migratie beleid ondersteunen omdat ze het over het algemeen als gunstig beschouwen; toch slagen ze er in om met hun kritiek, verzoeken en verbeelding het beleid in beperkte mate te veranderen en mogelijks te transformeren.

Hoofdstuk 6 richt zich op de morele implicaties van de betrokkenheid van Gambiaanse terugkeerders bij de door IOM gestuurde sensibiliseringsindustrie. De 'politics of voice' van sensibilisering buigt de verhalen van terugkeerders om naar morele stellingen tegen irreguliere migratie. Hun verhalen worden gecommodificeerd, waardoor sensibilisering een onderdeel wordt van de migratie industrie. We behandelen deze commodificatie aan de hand van etnografische data over de implementatie van het Migrants as Messengers project (MaM) dat sinds 2019 in Gambia wordt uitgevoerd door IOM en via het concept 'moral economy of voice'. De bepalende dimensies van de 'moral economy of voice' werden geschetst via empirische vignettes die situaties beschrijven waarin IOM en de terugkeerders botsen over het moreel begrip van de kapitalistische logica van de sensibiliseringscampagnes. We laten zien dat de terugkeerders klaagden over de onjuiste categorisering, over onvoldoende compensatie en de toe-eigening van hun producten door IOM. Als leden van een onafhankelijke groep terugkeerders verwierpen ze de voorwaardelijke steun van IOM voor hun communicatieprojecten. Dit alles toont IOM's ontwijkend paternalisme waarbij de overleving van terugkeerders gedeeltelijk afhangt van IOM, maar deze laatste hen noch als kwetsbaar noch als volledig competent beschouwd. Als zodanig zijn de commodificatiemechanismen van de verhalen van terugkeerders even omstreden als hun discursieve ombuiging. Wij wijzen daarom op het potentieel van groepen teruggekeerden om de uitbuitingsdynamiek te weerstaan en pleiten voor een eerlijker betrokkenheid van terugkeerders bij de sensibilisering.

In hoofdstuk 7 kijk ik naar een partnerschap tussen een Gambiaanse groep van terugkeerders en een Europese NGO, om na te denken over waar de grens ligt tussen migratiebeheer en het maatschappelijke middenveld en in welke mate lokale niet-gouvernementele actoren eigenaarschap hebben in strijd tegen geïlegaliseerde migratie. De Gambiaanse groep werd opgericht in een Libische gevangenis, voordat de leden begeleid werden om terug te keren. Door hun betrokkenheid en zichtbaarheid in de sensibiliseringsindustrie, kwam de groep nadien in aanraking met een Europese NGO actief op het gebied van sport. De twee actoren verkregen financiering voor een project dat zowel hun sensibilisering tegen irreguliere migratie - of de backway zoals dit in Gambia heet - zou versterken, als ook de geografische reikwijdte en de professionalisering van de groep. Het ontwerp en de uitvoering van dit project worden geanalyseerd in het licht van de literatuur over kolonialiteit. Deze literatuur houdt zich bezig met theorievorming rond de export van eurocentrische kaders, de toepassing daarvan op subalterne kennis en het daaruit voortvloeiende grens-denken (border thinking). Dat laatste verwijst naar de unieke positie die actoren innemen op het kruispunt tussen lokale geschiedenissen (local histories) en globale designs. De reflectie over de uitdaging om kolonialiteit, subalterne kennis en grens-denken te ontwarren aan de hand van de etnografische voorbeelden uit dit hoofdstuk, wordt voortgezet in het discussiegedeelte. Daarin stel ik de vraag of het feit dat de terugkeerders zelf voorstelden om het project een anti-backway draai te geven, binnen een partnerschap waarvan de contouren niet op voorhand waren afgebakend, kan worden beschouwd als een voorbeeld van grens-denken. Wat de oorspronkelijke of unieke positie van subalterne actoren zou moeten zijn, lijkt immers in wezen overeen te stemmen met EU's globale design van migratie controle. Deze twijfel geldt ook voor het maatschappelijk middenveld aspect van het partnerschap. Het Europese consortium dat het project financiert, steunt de ontwikkeling van het maatschappelijke middenveld en de groep terugkeerders omarmde tijdens de uitvoering een aantal troeven van dit rationalistische ontwerp. De terugkeerders hielden echter ook vast aan een aantal benaderingen die onorthodox lijken in het licht van het idee van ontwikkeling en het maatschappelijke middenveld.

Hoofdstuk acht bevat de algemene discussie van dit doctoraat. Deze discussie bestaat in wezen uit drie hoofdonderdelen. Ten eerste een reflectie op de evolutie en de stand van zaken van de praktijk en het discours van terugkeermigratie management. Vanuit het beleid wordt getracht om deze praktijk in een gunstiger daglicht te plaatsen, bijvoorbeeld door gehoor te geven aan kritiek en humanitaire elementen op te nemen. Deze poging is echter in tegenspraak met dezelfde raciale, immobiliserende doelstellingen van de

beleidsmakers, waardoor elk concreet perspectief voor hervorming wordt ondermijnd. Een terugkeerbeleid dat geframed wordt in ontwikkelings- of humanitaire termen slaagt er beter in om lokaal verankerde niet-gouvernementele actoren bij de externalisatie ervan te betrekken. Ik heb echter laten zien hoe deze actoren, zodra de 'enrolment' is voltooid, onmiddellijk reageren op een verschil in de moraal en de waarden die de strijd tegen de backway onderschrijven, vanuit het standpunt van de donoren en de grote internationale organisaties die met hen verbonden zijn. In de laatste paragraaf bespreek ik hoe dit onderzoek kan bijdragen aan het groeiende onderzoek naar de instrumentalisering van en kritiek op de externalisatie van terugkeermigratie beleid door de vraag te stellen of landen in het Globale Noorden de strijd tegen de backway van de grassroots actoren ook her-(op)bouwen door hun doelstellingen en regelingen op te leggen.

Data storage fact sheets

% Data Storage Fact Sheet 1

% Name/identifier study: Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia

% Author: Rossella Marino

% Date: 12 May 2023

1. Contact details

=====

1a. Main researcher

-- name: Rossella Marino

- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent

- e-mail: rossella.marino@ugent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

-- name: Prof. dr. Ine Lietaert

- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent

- e-mail: ine.lietaert@ugent.be

If a response is not received when using the above contact details, please send an email to data.pp@ugent.be or contact Data Management, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.

2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

=====

* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Marino, R. (2023). Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia (Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University, Belgium). Marino, R., A. Mannersuo, I. Francisco, and I. Lietaert. 2022. At the Crossroads between Care and Control: A Cross-Country Comparison of Assisted Return. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feac059>.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: This sheet applies to the data used for Chapter three in the first publication and for the whole article in the second publication.

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Specify: Word files transcribing the recorded interviews.
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- [X] file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word files containing qualitative analyses.
- [X] files(s) containing information about informed consent
- [] a file specifying legal and ethical provisions
- [] file(s) that describe the content of the stored files and how this content should be interpreted. Specify:
...
- [] other files. Specify: ...

* On which platform are these other files stored?

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% Data Storage Fact Sheet 2

% Name/identifier study: Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia

% Author: Rossella Marino

% Date: 12 May 2023

1. Contact details

=====

1a. Main researcher

- name: Rossella Marino
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
- e-mail: rossella.marino@ugent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Ine Lietaert
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
- e-mail: ine.lietaert@ugent.be

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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Marino, R. (2023). Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia (Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University, Belgium). The legitimisation of the policy objective of sustainable reintegration. In Handbook of return migration, ed. R. King and K. Kuschminder, 167-184. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: This sheet applies to the data used for Chapter four in the first publication and for the whole of the chapter in the second publication.

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 - file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word files containing qualitative analyses.
- files(s) containing information about informed consent
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* On which platform are these other files stored?

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% Data Storage Fact Sheet 3

% Name/identifier study: Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia

% Author: Rossella Marino

% Date: 12 May 2023

1. Contact details

=====

1a. Main researcher

- name: Rossella Marino
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
- e-mail: rossella.marino@ugent.be

1b. Responsible Staff Member (ZAP)

- name: Prof. dr. Ine Lietaert
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
- e-mail: ine.lietaert@ugent.be

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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Marino, R. (2023). Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia (Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University, Belgium). Marino, R., J. Schapendonk, and I. Lietaert. 2022. Translating Europe's Return Migration Regime to The Gambia: The Incorporation of Local CSOs. *Geopolitics* 28 (3):1033-1056. Marino, R., J. Schapendonk, and I. Lietaert. 2023. The moral economy of voice within IOM's awareness-raising industry: Gambian returnees and Migrants as Messengers. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2023.2206001.

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: This sheet applies to the data used for Chapter five, six and seven in the first publication and for the whole articles in the second and third publications.

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3b. Other files

* Which other files have been stored?

- file(s) transcribing the recorded interviews.
Specify: Word files transcribing the recorded interviews.
- file(s) containing processed data. Specify:

- file(s) containing analyses. Specify: Word files containing qualitative analyses.
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% Data Storage Fact Sheet

% Name/identifier study: Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia

% Author: Rossella Marino

% Date: 12 May 2023

1. Contact details

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1a. Main researcher

- name: Rossella Marino
- address: Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent
- e-mail: rossella.marino@ugent.be

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- name: prof. dr. Ine Lietaert
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2. Information about the datasets to which this sheet applies

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* Reference of the publication in which the datasets are reported: Marino, R. (2023). Re-making it here: Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management to The Gambia (Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University, Belgium).

* Which datasets in that publication does this sheet apply to?: This sheet applies to all data used in this publication.

3. Information about the files that have been stored

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3a. Raw data

Data storage fact sheets | 290

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* On which platform are the raw data stored?

- researcher PC
- research group file server
- other (specify):

* Who has direct access to the raw data (i.e., without intervention of another person)?

- main researcher
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- all members of the research group
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- other (specify): ...

3b. Other files

* Which other files have been stored?

- file(s) transcribing recorded interviews. Specify: Word documents containing interview transcriptions.
- file(s) containing analyses. Specify: NVivo files containing qualitative analyses.
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* On which platform are these other files stored?

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