



ERPI 2018 International Conference
Authoritarian Populism and the Rural World

Conference Paper

**'Getting to the root causes of migration' – whose history,
framing and agency counts?
(Draft - not for circulation or citation)**

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17-18 March 2018

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague, Netherlands

Organized jointly by:



Cornell CALS
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

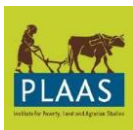


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March, 2018

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'Getting to the root causes of migration' – whose history, framing and agency counts? (Draft - not for circulation or citation)

Nora McKeon

The towns and citizens that constitute the vast majority of the troops that are candidates for emigration come from continents that have been violated, humiliated, plundered by force and now by international agreements. The resources of these states continue to be diverted towards banks and financial institutions in countries that protest against illegal immigration. Mamadou Cissokho (2018)

Introduction

Today's 'involuntary migration' from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) has its roots in decades of policies which have impoverished rural economies and dispossessed small-scale producers. Under pressure from authoritarian populist and xenophobic political configurations the EU is reacting by seeking to block the unwanted flow of African immigrants in their home countries. Its long-term recipe for 'addressing the root causes of migration' involves establishing a European External Investment Plan that will use 3.35 billion euro from EU cooperation funds to leverage an estimated 44 billion euro from private investors 'looking for new investment opportunities in emerging markets', thereby promoting the same model of agricultural production and global value chains that has fueled today's migration waves.

Mobility is a human right. It is the very foundation of some cultures and livelihoods, such as nomadic pastoralism and hunting/gathering. It is a component of societies' coping strategies, hyperbolically projected into cinematic fantasies of outer-space colonialization in this epoch in which we are destroying our own planet. Beyond issues of survival, mobility has constituted an enrichment of human experience throughout history, from collective manifestations like pilgrimages to Christian shrines and the Mecca, rooted in Medieval times and still vibrant today, to contemporary WWOOFers¹. 'Choice' is a word that qualifies the concept of mobility as a right, but in ways that are far from straightforward. In the context of today's migration 'crisis' FAO states this conditional in the following terms: 'The objective is to make migration one option considered alongside the pursuit of other viable agricultural and rural livelihood opportunities' (FAO 2016). But where to draw the line between voluntary and involuntary? 'Involuntary' refugees of conflict and political persecution are welcomed into the European fortress on human rights grounds whereas 'economic migrants' are expelled, presumably because for them it is a matter of choice. Here we encounter the distinction between political and economic and social rights that has dogged the international human rights framework from the outset, as well as the relative 'invisibility' of the cumulative effects of long-term structural violence as compared with headlines-grabbing catastrophes.

European civil society advocacy in the context of the 'immigration crisis' tends to concentrate on defending the right to mobility and the human rights of African immigrants.² This is certainly a vital platform. It is not, however, adequate to address the long-term structural causes of the agrarian malaise that underlies current forms of migration from SSA nor to reveal the discursive contortions that have veiled over a century of exploitation of African rural territories. An absent voice in the debate is that of the communities from which the immigrants originate and the rural organizations that are working to ensure that dignified and remunerative rural livelihoods are available for young people. This paper seeks

¹ World-wide organic farm volunteers

² A significant exception is the more broadly framed European Coordination Via Campesina working document on migration and wage-labour (2017).

to reframe the issues from the viewpoint of the territories and social constituencies directly concerned, to recuperate their popular history of the evolutions that have transformed a portion of rural mobility into Europe-bound involuntary migration, to map relevant contemporary rural transformations and the complexities of relations they engender, and to highlight initiatives underway today to build alternatives for rural young people and their communities.

The evolution of migration and its drivers in West Africa³

Mobility has always been an inherent component of life in West Africa. Before the colonial period population movements were largely associated with the prevailing sociopolitical and ecological conditions, particularly internecine warfare, natural disasters and the search for cultivable land or colonization. (Adepoju 1998). In the Sahel, in particular, mobility is accentuated both by the important presence of pastoralist communities in these territories and by the long dry season, which has stimulated the consolidation of common patterns of seasonal travel over hundreds of years.

The destructive impacts of colonialization on endogenous societies have been fully and dramatically described both in academic studies (see Watts 1983) and literary portrayals (see Achebe 1959). Its effects on all aspects of West African life, including migratory patterns, cannot be overestimated. Ethnic groups were divided and pastoralist seasonal movements of livestock disrupted by imposed frontiers. After the abolition of slavery the colonial administration introduced various forms of conscripted labor, often involving imposed mobility, to meet objectives such as providing manpower for cash crop plantations, constructing the railways and roads that evacuated products to ports, acting as porters for administrative officials, and beefing up the military forces. As always with the various forms of colonial exploitation, this practice was justified by the indolent character of the colonized and the civilizing mission of the colonizers. ‘The Negro does not like work and is totally unaccustomed to the idea of saving; he does not realize that idleness keeps him in a state of absolute economic inferiority. It is therefore necessary to use the institutions by which he is ruled [in this case slavery and conscripted labour] to improve his circumstances and afterwards gently lead him into an apprenticeship of freedom.’ (1901 report to the French Minister of Commerce, quoted in Fall 2002).

John Illife’s thoroughly researched history of *The African Poor* (1987) distinguishes between the main causes of poverty in pre-colonial Africa and the new entries in the 20th century, chiefly the introduction of a monetarized economy, with attendant cash hunger and indebtedness in rural areas, and the greater integration of African economies into the world market accompanied by vulnerability to the fluctuations of trade cycles. The advent of cash cropping disrupted both the ecological and the socio-economic equilibrium of West Africa. Monoculture consumed soil fertility and provoked erosion of the fields, previously protected by traditional practices like inter-cropping and minimum tillage which European agronomists condemned as messy, lazy and primitive. The pressure of cash cropping, coupled with population increase, provoked a curtailment of fallow periods and subverted the complementary of cultivation and livestock. Peasants were induced or coerced to grow cash crops by the introduction of taxation and monetization of the economy. The monetary demand exercised on peasant producers in the form of taxes and the prices charged for manufactured goods and staples outweighed the monetary value of their agricultural produce⁴, and producer prices were subject to unpredictable fluctuations. Precariousness had previously been largely a function of natural hazards which farmers could foresee to a good degree and against which they had developed an arsenal of defence, including mobility measures. Now it depended on the interests of the mother countries and on market mechanisms which totally escaped their ability to strategize.

The unequal exchange and the advance credit system practiced by merchants and money-lenders provoked a no-exit spiral of debt in rural areas, prevented peasants from accumulating capital to invest in increasing productivity and stressed the extended family unit. The family head found it increasingly

³ This section draws on McKeon, Wolford and Watts (2004) and McKeon (2005)

⁴ See Dupriez (1980) for extremely interesting calculations in this regard.

difficult to fulfil his responsibilities towards the members of his entourage and the depleted collective grain reserves no longer sufficed to meet the collective needs. The position of women deteriorated. Their work load was intensified while the cash revenues passed into the hands of the men, introducing a dualism between “modern” cash and “invisible” domestic subsistence sectors that has persisted up to today. Colonialism and the cash nexus also generated new socio-economic inequalities which were no longer subject to control by stable norms and values. In a very pervasive way, the colonial experience discredited African people’s knowledge, skill, culture and values. As a workshop on ‘Tradition and Modernism’ which brought together some of the most prestigious West African elite shortly after independence concluded: ‘We have tried objectively to see what our traditional values, as we call them, could contribute to our economic advancement. Not much, to tell the truth. It is from Europe that we have borrowed those values which can lead to progress.’ (Rencontres internationales de Bouaké 1965)

Little changed for rural people with the attainment of political independence in the early ‘60s, so much so that a disconsolate burkinabé peasant was heard to lament ‘When will this independence come to an end?’⁵. As Illife has put it, “the eager hopes of Independence conspired with current economic theory to direct development policy towards unbalanced growth through urban industry and infrastructure, which bred unprofitable enterprises, heavy recurrent costs, unpayable debts, and exploited villagers...The steady drainage of cash from the countryside was the continent’s most pervasive cause of poverty.” (Illife, op. cit.). State interventionist policies in the Sahel did succeed in disseminating the use of animal traction, improved seed and fertilizers, resulting in gains in production and productivity. As elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the underlying goal was the extraction of financial surplus through the pricing policy of the state marketing boards. The system was directed essentially to export crops. So far as the production and marketing of food crops was concerned, fear of urban unrest led governments to fix farmgate prices at a low level, discouraging farmers from producing surpluses. Keeping the food prices low in urban areas was also behind the recourse to imported commodities (Bates 1981), putting a spin on the vicious circle whereby African producers have lost their natural markets to artificially cheap surplus production in the North.

The state-guided model that was applied in the first decades of independence was rhetorically inspired by a vision of prosperous agriculture that would ‘raise the productivity of the African peasant, liberating him from the bondage that is so out of place in the twentieth century’.⁶ Nonetheless, the model of development that it adopted marginalized peasants. Faithful to modernization theory, development was conceived as a continuum from less to more, requiring external injections of modern capital and technology. The corollary of the consecration of professional expertise was the negation of value of local knowledge and innovative capacities of rural people. Development, it was held, had to be centrally planned and guided by the State to attain predetermined objectives, which were most often not in the interests of peasants. Rural producers were organized into cooperatives to promote the production and marketing of export crops. When peasants succeeded in escaping from the logic of the State-promoted programmes and reinserting themselves in a diversified production mode rooted in the moral economy, development professionals from both capitalist and socialist schools judged such ‘traditional’ behaviour on the part of an ‘uncaptured peasantry’ to be an obstacle to development (Hydén 1980).

The former colonial powers, morphed into ‘development partners’, were supportive of this approach. Senegal's major donors in 1961—France and the European Union— declined to consider package support for the overall development plan that the newly independent country presented to them. The programmes that did receive funding were those aimed at promoting the production and marketing of single export crops – rice, groundnuts and cotton - through the establishment of specialized parastatal regional development structures that disregarded the polyvalent nature of peasant agriculture, the socioeconomic logic of the extended family unit, the knowledge and skills of the farmers, and the impact of monoculture on the environment. Whatever the crop, these structures shared an extension approach based on armies of “encadreurs” hired to convince or oblige farmers to adopt the “modern” technical

⁵ Cited in *Construire Ensemble*, the review of the Centre d’études sociales et économiques de l’Afrique de l’Ouest based in Bobo-Diassou that trained an early generation of West Africa peasant leaders.

⁶ Mamadou Dia, 1957, quoted in Lecomte (2001)

packages they recommended. The system was undergirded by a national office which supervised the co-operatives, marketed the crops, and provided farmers with inputs and equipment on a credit basis, the "agricultural programme" on which Senegalese farmers came to depend. As a founding organisation of the Senegalese peasant movement put it in retrospect, 'All told, the peasant didn't even need to think anymore. The State took care of everything, convinced as it was that only a centralized state planning system could ensure the rapid development of the country' (FONGS 1991).

It took the mass deaths due to drought and famine in the mid 1970s to start to bring home the fact that African rural areas were dramatically impoverished and that, as Robert Bates demonstrated in his classic study of markets and states, this had a lot to do with poor policies (Bates 1984). African Heads of State meeting in Lagos in 1981 admitted that neglect of rural areas and producers was the primary cause of food shortages. 'Member States have not usually accorded the necessary priority to agriculture, both in the allocation of resources and in giving sufficient attention to policies for the promotion of productivity and improvement of rural life.' (OAU 1981). Yet a reversal of the tide of policies in a pro-rural, pro-agriculture direction did not follow, although some governments did experiment with measures to support production and marketing of food crops with encouraging results. Perhaps because, as Bates also pointed out, poor policies had a lot to do with politics (Bates, op.cit.) Sahelian peasant farmers had begun to wake up to these realities, but they were powerless then to do much about it. 'If it weren't for the peasant, the civil servant wouldn't eat. But our problem is that we don't have anyone to defend us. If civil servants have complaints they appeal to their union, but us – who is to defend us? They buy our produce at the conditions they fix, and we have nothing to say about it.'⁷

Whatever changes in agricultural policies the political will mustered at Lagos might have fostered were overtaken by the structural adjustment prescriptions which the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank obliged debt-ridden West African governments⁸ to apply from the early 1980s on in return for the credits they needed to keep their heads above water. As is well known, these SAPs focused on 'balancing the books' through privatization, opening up of markets (exacerbated by the advent of the WTO in 1995), and State withdrawal from its intervention in the economy through measures such as subsidies, extension services and state marketing boards. Little or no consideration was given to the impacts such policies would have on rural livelihoods. It was assumed that the private sector and peasant organizations themselves would step in to fill the void left by state withdrawal, but no accompanying measures were foreseen and peasant organizations were not invited to sit at the negotiation table.

The further disruption of rural livelihoods and the basic family unit, from independence on, could only be expected to increase recourse to migration as a coping strategy. The term 'urban drift' entered the development establishment's vocabulary in the '70s, but attention to the phenomenon of abandonment of the countryside was ambivalent since modernization theory equated urbanization with progress. Inter-country mobility was affected by the regulations governing immigration set up by the newly established nation-states. However, the period of economic boom for cash crops induced the countries concerned (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal) to encourage migration from elsewhere in the region. This dynamic was disrupted by the economic, social and political crises of the '90s in key destination countries, leading to phenomena such as the development of new migration circuits, the emergence of networks of illicit traffic of migrants, and an augmentation of clandestine departures towards Europe (Robin 2007, Ba 2007), the first signs of today's 'migration crisis' as viewed from the European perspective.

⁷ Burkinabé peasant quoted in *Construire ensemble* (1981).

⁸ In good part due to their acceptance of bank loans during the fluidity boom of the 70s to fund the 'modernisation' of their economies, according to Western development dogma of the time, by investing in industrialization and mechanization initiatives that most often turned out to be 'white elephants'.

Birth and evolution of the West African peasant movement

How did rural people themselves react to the disruption of their lives and the exploitation of their labour? Already in the late '60s and early '70s initiatives began to develop on the margins of the state-controlled rural cooperatives, particularly in those countries where the political environment was more permissive than in the military dictatorships in which the region abounded. In Burkina Faso in 1967, witnessing the disconnect between government-promoted cooperatives and rural people, a highly motivated teacher⁹ facilitated the transformation of a traditional Mossi youth group, the Komi-Naam ('power of the young'), into an autonomous association aimed at building economic and social security and solidarity in the communities concerned. In Senegal autonomous peasant associations began to spring up in various regions of the country in the early '70s, as rural people broke with a habit of fatalism to seek solutions to problems with which the all-provident state was impotent or unwilling to deal. The membership was dominantly women and young men, the "powerless" both in the traditional structures and in the 'modern' cash economy, and the associations had to negotiate their space with the village elders, on the margins of the main agricultural activities of the family units. By 1974 the associations were exchanging visits and meeting among themselves. In 1976, at the initiative of a Senegalese NGO whose President had been an official in the extension service, 12 associations formed a national federation. It obtained legal status in 1978 as the *Fédération des ONG Sénégalaises (FONGS)*, a title imposed by the government to distinguish them from the official co-operatives.¹⁰ The Federation's objectives were to reinforce solidarity among peasant associations; meet its members' training and communication needs; support their development initiatives; and serve as a facilitator between its members and the outside world. For the first decade of its existence the FONGS deliberately maintained a low profile.

The combination of the onslaught of the SAPs and another severe drought in the mid-1980s stimulated a further development of the autonomous associations. An insight into this process is provided by an initiative undertaken by African CSOs in partnership with FAO in 1986-8. The Image of Africa project documented the food security crisis seen from the point of view of the communities directly affected through case studies undertaken by national CSOs in six drought-affected countries.¹¹ The synthesis of the national studies reported that, despite the wide diversity of situations examined, rural people generally reacted in a positive and creative way to the crisis, calling on a variety of solidarity mechanisms, undertaking new activities, and building up their organizations and the beginnings of a peasant movement. The crisis seemed to have functioned as a stimulus to peasant associations to reflect on the structural causes of food shortages and to elaborate alternative development strategies more adapted to their situation and environment than the models proposed by national and foreign 'developers'. Yet, the reports demonstrated, neither national governments nor foreign donors seemed able to recognize and reward these positive, self-reliant efforts. 'In its present modalities development assistance often tends to block social transformations necessary to development, rather than providing support for peasant strategies and movements....' (McKeon 1988). A reality which has continued to be a constant throughout successive decades of 'development'.

State retrenchment, experienced by peasants as an abandonment, stimulated the Senegalese FONGS to intensify and broaden its activities from the mid-80s on. By 1991 the FONGS had identified seven challenges facing the movement in a rapidly evolving environment: mastering the economic sphere; access to land and protection of natural resources; the issue of power (both internal leadership and participation in the political life of the country); maintaining social and cultural values and developing new forms of solidarity; building partnerships with outside actors; and developing capacity to

⁹ Bernard Lédéa Ouedraogo

¹⁰ Famara's organization, *Maisons Familiales Rurales (MFR)*—the Senegalese version of a French association—was a contact point for advice to new groups and also helped direct the first European NGOs on the scene to initiatives they might support. ENDA Tiers Monde, headquartered in Dakar, was another early adviser. CESAIO, a sub-regional training centre in Burkina Faso founded by the White Fathers, provided training for a whole generation of association leaders.

¹¹ Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal and Zimbabwe.

formulate and defend proposals.(FONGS 1991) The importance of gaining access to the resources of national rural development programmes of which peasants were the intended beneficiaries was highlighted for the first time (ibid), a strategic indication since the Agricultural Structural Adjustment Program (ASAP) was then in the offing. The FONGS had expanded to include 24 regionally-based associations throughout the country totaling over 2000 village groups with an active membership of about 400,000, but the Government rejected its requests to take part in the ASAP discussions on the grounds that it was not the only national federation representing rural people. The movement's response was to organize a national forum in early 1993, dramatically entitled 'What Future for Senegal's Peasants?'. For the first time rural people, the majority of the population, presented to the government and its development partners their assessment of the impacts of structural adjustment and their proposals for the future. The Forum laid the basis for the establishment of an inclusive National Committee for Rural Peoples' Dialogue (CNCR) which the government was obliged to accept as an interlocutor.

Over the past 2 ½ decades the CNCR has been engaged in a process of building its strength and legitimacy, its alliances, and its capacity for negotiation and confrontation with the State. The first step was a vigorous campaign to re-appropriate peasant farmers' identity, pride, and sense of responsibility, deflated by decades of the treatment evoked above. The second was to build up a platform based on "agriculture familiale" (family farming). This common identity emerged only gradually because attention had been fractured between cash crops (dominated by the male head of family) and the side activities of FONGS associations (women and young people). No one, not even the peasant organizations, was focusing on the basic, integrated unit of Senegalese agriculture and society - the family farm - despite the fact that practically all Senegalese came from, one.

It was evident from the outset that organizing the peasant movement at national level would not suffice in an environment in which decision-making levels were rapidly escalating to regional and global levels. The year 2000 saw the creation of the Network of West African Peasant and Agricultural Producers' Organizations (ROPPA), which now groups 13 national platforms and some 80 million farmers. ROPPA represents West African family farmers vis-à-vis the regional authorities (ECOWAS primarily) and in continental and global forums. Its platform calls for protecting West African producers from unfair competition from abroad; directing public policies and investment toward support for sustainable family-based agriculture; enacting land reform and seed laws that protect peasant producers; investing in rural social services and infrastructure; building domestic and regional food systems in which small-scale producers and rural territories retain value added through processing and marketing; ensuing peoples' participation in determining policies. In a word...food sovereignty. Since 2000 ROPPA has made important gains in accrediting the peasant movement as a political actor and influencing national and regional policies and, like all movements, has demonstrated organizational and strategic weaknesses (McKeon et al. 2004, Gyapong 2017). All told the achievements are remarkable if you consider the movement's starting point. As leader Cissokho evoked at a CNCR Congress:

In 1993 we were menaced, discouraged, divided, awaiting miraculous solutions from outside our families and our organizations. The CNCR was our only chance, our project based on our ideas, our experiences, our strengths and our weaknesses. We had no other option: our backs were to the wall.

The current 'migration crisis': European framing, interests and solutions

Intra-African mobility remains by far the bulk of West African migration, although there has been an increase in migration directed towards Europe over the past few years. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) places the figure of intra-regional migration at 70% of all mobility (<https://www.iom.int/west-and-central-africa>). Despite the practically universal consensus on this point, the European perception of West African migration is appropriately expressed in the title of a recent article by West Africa peasant leader Mamadou Cissokho: 'To arms, citizens! We are being invaded....'. As a recent study notes, 'sensationalist media reportage and popular discourses give rise to an image of an 'exodus' of desperate Africans fleeing poverty at home in search of the European 'El Dorado'. Millions of Africans are believed to be waiting to cross to Europe at the first opportunity.' (Flahaux and

De Haas 2016). This distorted image of reality is based on the questionable assumptions that African migration is high and increasing and is mainly directed towards Europe. Nonetheless it has become an explosive issue in a political climate in which nationalist and xenophobic populism, in some cases allied with overtly authoritarian regime aspirations, is on the rise.

Unable to impose a collective and equitable intra-European management of the migration question, the European Union's initial response has been to seek to block the hordes of unwanted travelers through restrictive measures that have been strongly criticized by European civil society advocates. In the view of the coordination of European development NGOs, CONCORD, the European Trust Fund for Africa set in place following the 2015 Valletta Summit on migration 'diverts Official Development Assistance (ODA)¹² to reach objectives and finance actions that are no longer linked to the EU's development goals but rather to the EU's internal political goal of stemming migration flows. In addition, serious questions remain as to whether the principles of development effectiveness are upheld and what the consequences of the EU new approach are for development, human rights, governance and security in partner countries' (CONCORD 2017a).

The EU's long-term goal is expressed in terms of addressing the 'root causes' of irregular migration. This concept, widely adopted in the development world literature (see FAO 2016), has been critiqued on several grounds. It is essentially apolitical in its analysis. It facilitates states' desire to derogate their responsibilities for accepting migrants in their territories. It is also rooted in a simplistic understanding of the complex economic factors related to migration and an inadequate understanding of migration processes (Gent 2002) based, among other principles, on 'the myth of the immobile peasant' (Skeldon 2004) or the idea that migrants are 'passive pawns being pushed out of Africa by macro-level crises' (De Haas 2007). The developmentalist assumption that migration is a win-win proposition and that migrants are rational economic individuals has been discredited both by World System theory and the dependency school and from a post-colonial perspective (Sjoberg 2008). Students of migration have questioned the contradiction between Europe's intention to restrict illegal immigration and the demand within Europe for cheap labor, as well as the 'root cause' approach's assumption that migration will diminish with economic development (De Haas 2007).

These arguments do not seem to have induced the EU to question its approach. A fact sheet issued in November 2017 bills the External Investment Plan (EIP) as an instrument to 'encourage investment in our partner countries in Africa.... It will promote inclusive growth, job creation and sustainable development and so tackle some of the root causes of irregular migration.' (European Commission 2017). With a contribution of €4.1 billion from the European Commission's aid budget, the External Investment Plan is expected to leverage more than €44 billion of investments from European private sector investors by 2020, even more if Member States kick in with national programmes. The EIP provides 'guarantees' to promote investments in countries where they are 'currently difficult' and to facilitate investments by private actors 'that would otherwise invest less or not at all'. At the same time, the EIP 'policy dialogue' pillar will 'help to improve the business environment in partner countries by supporting reforms and economic governance'. These hypes are hardly encouraging, since the kind of initiative in which private actors who need encouraging are likely to invest are typically not ones that benefit small-scale producers and rural communities. As for 'improved business environment', past experience, as in the case of the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, demonstrates that it is all about tax breaks for corporations and opening up land and input markets. These and other aspects of the EIP, including its opaque governance system, have been critiqued in detail by European CSOs (Counterbalance 2017). The EIP's Investment Window for 'Sustainable Agriculture, Rural Entrepreneurs and Agribusiness' reiterates the dominant narrative regarding the need to invest capital and technology in creating job opportunities for young entrepreneurs in global value chain, ignoring the accumulating evidence that these supply chain models lock out all but the best resourced producers in the most productive areas of SSA countries. Investment in agriculture, the EIP document states, will respond to the lack of financing mechanisms adapted to smallholders in particular, but no effort was made to consult them in designing the Window and their potential access to the funds would have to be

¹² 90% of the EUTF funds come from ODA, in particular the European Development Fund.

mediated by financial institutions like the European Investment Bank and the African Development Bank which are notoriously unequipped to work with small-scale producers.

The trend towards promoting a ‘strengthened role for the private sector’ in agricultural development and food security is not limited to the EIP, but pervades the full range of relevant EU policy orientations. A recent CONCORD publication highlights the ambiguity and policy incoherence of this general tendency.

The category of ‘private sector’ should be understood as a continuum of various actors, ranging from small-scale producers operating on family farms through micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) up to large transnational corporations. These different actors have significantly different interests and objectives. The diversity and the imbalances in power are not adequately recognised when governments and donors facilitate private sector engagement in agriculture, for example through public-private partnerships and private finance blending. Small-scale producers are often considered as beneficiaries or targets of agriculture development policy and programmes rather than as agents of change in their own right. It is important to be clear about what approaches are actually supportive of them, and to listen carefully to what they have to say about their own priorities. CONCORD (2017b)

And through the eyes of West African rural communities

Instead, there is a remarkable failure to draw on the reflections of West African rural peoples’ movements and communities in the literature analyzing the drivers of migrations and proposing policy responses. This despite the existence of rich repositories of individual and collective deliberations and the steadily increasing visibility and advocacy capacity of organizations like ROPPA and the CNCR. When one does consult these sources the image that emerges, not surprisingly, is quite different from the ‘made in Europe’ versions concocted by the media or constructed by EU authorities. To begin with, the framing of the current situation of migration as a ‘crisis’ is questioned, just as it was in the Image of Africa project referred to above. As at the time of the 1984-85 drought, rural people didn’t consider the situation an unexpected “crisis”, but the result of an evolution that they had seen unfolding over the long term. The use of the term “crisis” obviously affects the responses proposed, privileging short-term solutions to conjunctural problems over long-term responses to structural problems.

A series of reflections undertaken by Senegalese associations during the mid-80s drought testify to how rural people framed and considered the situation they were experiencing (ENDA 1985). To begin with, the forward-oriented question posed by the French NGO which funded the exercise – ‘what development would you like to see in your village?’ – was reframed by the associations to be preceded by the questions ‘what changes have taken place in our lives and our environment’ and ‘how did our grand-parents live?’ Rather than adopting a typically Western tendency to plunge forward towards a vaguely imagined ‘development’ the villagers preferred to build strategies for the future on a solid basis of understanding where they were and how they had gotten there. This desire to maintain control of a project for one’s own society has been expressed by Mamadou Cissokho in the following terms:

Africa has resisted considerable shocks: the slave trade, colonial exploitation, natural calamities. A hundred times over our societies could have, should have – if one reasons in the manner of the director of a capitalist enterprise – disappeared. What is the secret of this resistance? Our values. If we want to build a sustainable development we have to start with what we are, we peasants as human beings living in our territories, sharing moral, religious, cultural and social values that have allowed us to address the difficulties that life presents. Cissokho (2009)

West African rural communities – which have continued to feed their countries despite almost total lack of support from national and global policies and programmes – continuously re-embed the realities they confront in their social and territorial contexts. Developmental thinking and the attainment of corporate interests, on the contrary, require an opposed operation of disembodiment. What the development world referred to with pudor as an incorporeal tendency towards ‘urban drift’ was registered in the mid-80s as

a ‘mutilation of the villages’ by those directly concerned (ENDA 1985). That some of the causes were political was clearly recognized: ‘Problems have multiplied: the government has withdrawn its support, yields are dropping and this leads to an increase in the cultivated surfaces. Young people no longer have access to land.’ (ibid).

But there were also issues that the villages and associations themselves could try to address. Part of the strategic thinking exercise that the mid-‘80s drought stimulated led in the direction of developing activities that could provide work during the off-season. ‘Many of the young people who go to the cities are unemployed and that cuts them off from their parents and the territory. It’s the young people who are the future of the village. We need to develop activities like vegetable production that they can undertake.’ (p. 120). In some cases the drought and the State’s withdrawal was promoting collaboration between young people and the elders. ‘Before the elders told young people what they had to do. Now, there is collaboration between the elders and the young people. When we started our groups the elders didn’t agree. Now that they see our results they approve of them’ (p. 26). In the same period in Burkina Faso associations that had been founded by young people who were now growing older recounted their deliberate efforts to encourage the ‘new’ youth to take over. ‘Our big worry is whether the group will continue after us. That’s why we are encouraging the young people to enter by age group. We have just disbanded the bureau and established a new one with space for young people’. (GRAAP 1982). In another village a newly-born youth group was constructing a center, using funds from their own groundnut cultivation, where they intended to carry out activities for the entire village such as alphabetisation in the local language. (GRAAP 1988).

Mali, under military dictatorship at the time, was the unlikely theatre of an initiative of return migration motivated by a combination of respect for traditional values and a strong political education as workers in France, two ingredients that tend to be missing in the recipes served up by European national and regional authorities today for members of the Diaspora. Faced with a choice between integration into French society or returning home to devote themselves to agriculture and fight against the effects of the drought, a group of workers decided in favour of the latter option. Their story, recounted in a narrative by one of their leaders includes this account of their reception in their home villages: ‘To tell the truth, I received a cool welcome from my family and the village. They had never seen or heard that people abandoned all the happiness and facilities of France to come back and work the land in Africa. For an entire week I was the object of suspicions and jokes qualifying me as a good-for-nothing’. (Soumaré 2001). The experiment took root, and the cooperatives founded by the returnees are now key reference points for the economic, political and social structuring of the Kayes region in which they are implanted. (Région de Kayes 2009)

Over the following years the pressure on the basic unit of West African agricultural production continued unabated, while a new phenomenon, the security-threatening ‘youth crisis’, was being discovered and framed - as always - outside of its social context. In the words of Cissokho:

‘We attach a good deal of importance to the family farms, since it’s at the level of peasant families that the small decisions are taken, year after year, which - when added up - allow us to discretely adapt and transform our agricultures. Instead, when the State turns specifically to young people urging them to cultivate cash crops it doesn’t seem to realize that the young people live and are nourished in the family. We have come close to an implosion of the family without having a substitute on hand.’ (op.cit. 203.)

West African peasant organizations are well aware of the problem. A self-evaluation conducted by the FONGS already in 1997 identified a serious problem of ‘aging’ of the members of the associations. (FONGS 1997). In one of its most active federations aging population topped the list of problems identified by the associations (FAPAL 2002). Most official diagnostics of the ‘youth crisis’ treat young people as individual economic decision-makers, ignoring the ways in which they are deeply embedded in networks of family and social relations that both enable and constrain them (IDS 2016). The reflections undertaken in the world of the peasant movement, on the contrary, are firmly sited in the context of the family. They seek to develop responses that increase their capacity to empower rural

communities as a whole, including the youth, to address the structural issues that affect them all. An exemplary collection of interviews conducted between 2009 and 2013 lets the interviewees speak for themselves without external interpretation (GRAD and ROPPA 2014). The vision that emerges is one of young people 'between two worlds', many of them whom leave the villages as soon as the season's work on the family plots is finished, living most of the year in the cities but remaining attached to their families. The difficulties they encounter in obtaining access to credit and land — aggravated by agricultural development orientations that stimulate land grabbing - are among the most important structural problems they encounter. Support for the kind of productive and value-adding activities that they could carry out in their own rural territories is lacking. Government programmes tend, on the contrary, to target them as individual candidate entrepreneurs to be incorporated in agribusiness value chains. The lack of amenities and infrastructure in rural areas — the result of decades of neglect by public policies and investment — intensifies the attraction of the urban areas.

Relations within the family are also evolving, in different and sometimes apparently contradictory ways (GRAD-S 2013). While in some cases young people feel that their families and fathers do not accept the evolution of their roles within the family farm, in others the heads of family understand that they can't control everything and are playing the role of mediators while acknowledging that the young people are the pillars of the family farm ((GRAD/ROPPA 2014). The weakening of the authority of the fathers, leaving young people without a strong reference point in the eternally difficult navigation of adolescence, has led one attentive observer of West African rural realities to wonder whether the 'problem' might not be one of the fathers rather than of the young people (Barbadette 2016). In some cases, it is opined, family pressure may even be an element pushing young people to migrate, and fear of displeasing the family may be an obstacle to return.

The hypothesis that irregular migration to Europe represents a rational strategy on the part of those who undertake it that some students of migration patterns uphold is not substantiated by West Africa testimony. A Senegalese peasant leader has described the process in these terms:

'The accentuation of poverty and inequalities is key. People react differently. Many accept to fight poverty adopting different strategies. Others, feeling that nothing will change the situation, decide to leave, comforted by images suggesting that things are better in Europe. So the issue of how to get there and what to do isn't the problem. The problem is just to get there'. (Interview, 4 February 2018).

Other interviews testify to the sense of fear and danger that accompany the trip, the difficulties encountered, as well as the efforts made by returned immigrants to sensitize other young people (GRAD/ROPPA 2014). The president of CNCR's Youth Council was himself a migrant in Italy and Portugal for three years. He left Senegal when his poultry raising activity failed due to the dumping of frozen European chicken pieces. He returned, having realized that Europe was no Eldorado, when the government took a policy decision to halt the importation of chicken thighs. (Interview, 7 December 2017).

The strategies and policies advanced by West African rural people and their organizations are dramatically different than those proposed from outside. The Senegalese leader referred to above reported that he had turned down a European project that offered his organization a certain sum for each returned immigrant who they agreed to welcome into the community with his/her funded development project. 'You can imagine what kind of conflicts an approach like this would create!' he stated. 'Instead, the cooperation programme should support my organization directly to transform agriculture in the territory. When people see there is an economy that works they will return on their own initiative.'

The recipe of organizations like the FONGS, the CNCR and ROPPA is to 'build on what we have and improve it, step by step'. Family farming, not agribusiness and agricultural corridors, is the way forward, but family farming that finally receives the support it merits. The peasant organizations themselves are doing their share. Building on the experience of the FONGS and the CNCR, ROPPA is now extending to countries throughout the region a network of Observatories of Family Farms adopting a participatory methodology that enables farmers themselves to collect, analyse and use data that allows them to strengthen their operations. In Senegal family assemblies are held with support from peasant animators

to negotiate collective strategies that take into account the interests of all members, including the women and young people. Using the data collected for advocacy purposes, the CNCR has been able to demonstrate that family farms are responsible for feeding the majority of the population of the country (CNCR/FONGS 2010). Subsequent monitoring exercises have looked specifically at the question of facilitating the installation of young farmers (CNCR 2017). In 2012 the CNCR, like other national peasant platforms in West Africa, established a Youth Council to strengthen young peoples' participation in the governance of the organization. Among its innovative initiatives is a programme of 'mentoring' which seeks to ensure intergenerational continuity by pairing young people with leaders who dedicate time to sensitizing them to the history of the peasant movement, the challenges of agriculture, and the attitudes and behavior necessary to become good leaders.(CNCR 2015)

At regional level, ROPPA's monitoring work has identified promising sectors for young people and women (vegetable production, poultry production, sheep fattening and processing of agricultural products) and key conditions for retaining them in the family farms: access to natural and material resources, possibility of achieving adequate revenues through access to remunerative markets, access to appropriate credit, technical support and training, recognition and valorization of the status of 'peasant', and amelioration of living conditions in rural areas (ROPPA 2016). A regional workshop organized by the CNCR with ROPPA in Dakar in September 2017 assessed the weaknesses of official programmes targeting young people, which most often adopt inappropriate models, fail to involve local communities and producers' organizations, and do not address issues of access to land and credit (CNCR 2017). A major advocacy effort is now being directed towards ECOWAS and its member states to establish strategies and funds for the installation of young people in agriculture.

ROPPA is also a key actor in the Civil Society Mechanism that interfaces with the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), the only global food policy forum in which organizations representing those directly affected by the policies under discussion participate on the same footing as governments (McKeon 2015). Policy recommendations on enhancing small-scale producers' access to markets adopted by the CFS in 2016 unveiled the reality that these producers, world-wide, are responsible for meeting 70% of the food needs and making 90% of all investment in agriculture. What's more, 80% of the food consumed in the world does not transit through the global value chains of 'modern' supply systems. On the contrary, it is traded in territorially-embedded markets which are directly linked to local, national or regional food systems, more inclusive of young people and women, more remunerative for small-scale food producers in general, and contribute to the territorial economy since they enable a greater share of the wealth created to be retained, redistributed, and returned to farm level and local economies. Little is known about these markets since they are ignored in official data collection, which impacts negatively on public policies (CSM 2016). FAO is partnering with small-scale producers' organizations to develop participatory methodologies for filling this data gap, based on experiences like that of ROPPA's Family Farm Observatory.

Conclusion

The evidence is on the side of West Africa's family farms accompanied by employment creation and value addition retention in rural territories, not the EU's mirage of 'modern' agrifood value chains led by European investors transforming rural young people into entrepreneurs as fast as African societies can engender them. In the name of modernization and development the corporate food regime has taken possession of terms such as 'change', 'evolution', 'innovation', cloaking African small-scale producers in a mantle of archaic, immobile subsistence. This is belied by the evidence accumulated by the West African peasant organizations and by the remarkable capacity of family farms to recompose the multiple fractures to which they have been subjected since the advent of colonialism and continue to feed their societies despite almost total lack of support from public policies and ODA. The stupidity of excising the economic dimension of human activity from the social and cultural is increasingly evident in societies in which social malaise is destituting traditional political parties, now void of values and visions, and generating cultures of xenophobia in a globalized world. The bankruptcy of the corporate food provisioning mode is hard to deny, with food insecurity, malnutrition and food-related health issues

on the rise along with environmental damage and climate change – despite the efforts of corporate spin doctors to serve up climate-smart agriculture and digitalized diets.

What are still solidly in place are the power relations that link capital and governing elites in Europe and Africa, but even here there are signs of ambiguity. African authorities are depressingly susceptible to being co-opted by the blandishments of corporate concocted investment programmes such as Grow Africa, the New Alliance for Food Security in Africa and the Millennium Challenge Account, and giving in to pressure to accept trade agreements such as the EPAs which are clearly detrimental to African economies and regional integration. At the same time, they are able to research and publish policy documents for the transformation of African agriculture which are largely in line with the peasants' analyses and proposals (NEPAD 2013).

On the European side it could be argued that the EU and its member states are drifting dangerously from their time-honored positions of policy incoherence to something even more uncomfortable. Policy incoherence can be defined as a situation where one policy – usually 'soft', morally irreprehensible, human rights-based, easily relegated to the status of pious declaration – is contrasted by 'hard', 'serious' policies promoted by powerful economic interests whose support is considered to be essential by the governing authorities. What seems to be emerging now is a shift to policy involution, which can be defined as a situation where two different policy packages with diametrically opposed impacts are being promoted by two different 'stakeholders' – powerful economic interests and strident and politically opportunistic defenders of European security - both of whose consensus is considered to be essential by the governing authorities. So the EU finds itself pushing forward with policies oriented towards using public funds to subsidize investments by European enterprises promoting approaches to agricultural development and food provisioning that will further penalize African rural economies, disrupt the family units that guarantee social stability, and fuel the flow of young people to Europe. The very outcome that is stimulating xenophobic populist reactions and creating serious political difficulties at both national and regional levels.

Policy involution is a headache for the authorities. But it could open up opportunities for civil society and social movement activists to defend both the rights of those who immigrate and the kinds of policies and investments that are needed to give rural people choices in their countries of origin. This would require building convergences among organizations of different kinds in Africa and in Europe: small-scale producers and their communities, young people, immigrants, agricultural workers, consumers, the diaspora. It would require mobilizing support from engaged academics to help analyse a complex situation and develop cogent critiques and proposals. Alliances need to be built with civil society, parliamentarians, media and others who can help to take advantage of a moment of political opportunity for advocacy with both European and African governments. The very exercise of confronting the different perspectives of the different social movement actors concerned could help build common understanding and strategies. Could this be an opportunity to seize?

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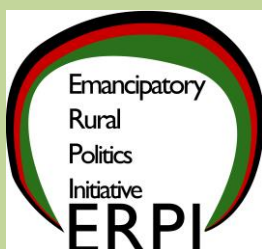
ERPI 2018 International Conference
Authoritarian Populism and the
Rural World

17-18 March 2018

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)
The Hague, Netherlands

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