



'Getting to the root causes of migration' in West Africa – whose history, framing and agency counts?

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ABSTRACT

Today's 'irregular migration' from Sub-Saharan Africa has its roots in decades of policies which have impoverished rural economies and dispossessed small-scale producers to make room for export-oriented monocultures. Under pressure from opportunistic xenophobic political configurations the EU is reacting by seeking to block the unwanted flow of African migrants in their home countries through measures denounced by European civil society organizations. Its long-term recipe for 'addressing the root causes of migration' involves using EU cooperation funds to leverage resources 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 sparked today's migration waves. An absent voice in the debate is that of the rural organizations in the territories from which the migrants originate. This paper seeks to reframe the issues from the viewpoint of these social constituencies, to recuperate their popular history of the evolutions that have transformed a portion of rural mobility into Europe-bound irregular migration, to map relevant contemporary rural transformations and the complexities of relations they engender, and to highlight initiatives underway today to build options of dignified and remunerative rural livelihoods for young people. Setting the West Africa-Europe nexus in the context of global processes of migration governance, this paper explores the opportunities for counter-hegemonic strategizing that EU internal policy contradictions open up and suggests how convergences might be promoted among actors and spaces that are currently inadequately connected with a view to defending both the right to migrate and the right to choose to stay at home.

KEYWORDS

Economic migrants; food sovereignty; peasant movements; policy incoherence; global governance; human rights

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. (Cissokho, 2018)

1. Introduction

The 'migration crisis' that is currently holding sway over European politics and relations with Africa introduces interesting variations on the theme of migration, governance and civil society. It

highlights the importance of the regional level in constructing the narratives and governance approaches that dominate international initiatives like the Global Forum on Migration and Development. It illustrates the difficulties of incorporating radical reflection on the structural root causes of migration into civil society advocacy in a situation in which the NGOs who have most voice are focused on denouncing extreme violations of migrants' human rights and where a space bringing them into dialogue with other concerned actors on both sides of the Mediterranean is not in place. At the same time, it suggests that the EU's internal contradictions of seeking to manage migration in function of European enterprises' hunger for profits while also addressing the populist xenophobic backlashes induced by globalization may open opportunities for counter-hegemonic strategizing that can be translated into concrete terms close to home more easily than in the rarified atmosphere of global negotiations.

Mobility is a human right, when it is a matter of choice. But where to draw the line between voluntary and involuntary? 'Involuntary' refugees of conflict and political persecution are accepted into the European fortress on human rights grounds whereas 'economic migrants' are expelled, presumably because they have 'freely chosen' to be mobile (Delgado Wise, SI, p. 6). 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. Much of today's 'irregular migration' from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) to Europe originates in West Africa. It is of the 'economic' variety, rooted in decades of policies which have impoverished rural economies and dispossessed small-scale producers to make room for exported-oriented monocultures. Under pressure from nationalist populist and xenophobic political configurations the EU is reacting by seeking to block the flow of unwanted African migrants in their countries of origin. Its long-term recipe for 'addressing the root causes of migration' through development follows the dominant doctrine of private sector-led modernization. It consists in using EU cooperation funds to 'crowd in' European agribusinesses 'looking for new investment opportunities in emerging markets' (EC, 2017), thereby promoting the very model of agricultural production and global value chains that has fuelled today's migration waves.

European civil society advocacy tends to concentrate on defending the value of mobility and the human rights of African migrants.¹ This is a critical platform. However, it is not 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 migrants originate and the rural organizations that are working to ensure that young people have the option of dignified and remunerative livelihoods at home. This paper seeks to reframe the issues from the viewpoint of these social constituencies, to recuperate their popular history of the evolutions that have transformed a portion of rural mobility into Europe-bound involuntary migration, to illustrate relevant contemporary rural transformations, and to highlight initiatives underway today to build alternatives for rural young people. It will also discuss the policy responses of the European Union, which seek to further what authorities interpret as 'European interests'. The paper will explore some of the contradictions and the opportunities that the West African-Europe nexus incorporates and suggest how convergences might be promoted among actors and spaces that are currently inadequately connected with a view to defending both the right to migrate and the right to choose to stay at home.

2. The evolution of migration and its drivers in West Africa²

Mobility has always been an inherent component of life in West Africa. Before the colonial period population movements were largely associated with internecine warfare, natural disasters and the search for cultivable land or colonization (Adepoju, 1998). In the Sahel mobility is accentuated both by the important presence of pastoralist communities 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 (Watts, 1983) and in literary portrayals (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 labour, often involving imposed mobility, to meet objectives such as providing manpower for cash crop plantations or constructing the railways and roads that evacuated products to ports. As always with the various forms of colonial exploitation, this practice was justified by the allegedly 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 to improve his circumstances’ (1901 report to the French Minister of Commerce, quoted in Fall, 2002).

John Illife’s history of *The African Poor* (1987) distinguishes between the main causes of poverty in pre-colonial Africa and the new entries in the twentieth century. The advent of cash cropping disrupted both the ecological and the socio-economic equilibria 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 curtailing 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 produce³, 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 colonial powers 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 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. In a very pervasive way, the colonial experience discredited African people’s knowledge, skill, culture and values.

Little changed for rural people with the attainment of political independence in the early '60s. 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. Fear of urban unrest led governments to ensure cheap food in urban areas by depressing farmgate prices and importing commodities (Bates, 1981), putting a spin on the vicious circle whereby African producers have lost their natural markets to artificially cheap surplus production from abroad.

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'.⁴ 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 and negating the value of local knowledge and innovative capacities of rural people. Rural producers were organized into cooperatives to promote the production and marketing of export crops. When they 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 Economic Community – 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. As a founding organization 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 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, 1981). 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, 1981). 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.⁵

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 governments⁶ to apply from the early 1980s on in return for the credits they needed to keep their heads above water. 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 (Tobias, SI, p. 3). 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 was ambivalent since modernization theory equated urbanization with progress. Inter-country mobility was affected by the regulations governing immigration introduced by the newly established nation-states, but the period of economic boom for cash crops induced the countries concerned⁷ 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 (Ba, 2007 Robin, 2007), the first signs of today's 'migration crisis'.

3. 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 export crop-oriented 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 teacher⁸ 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 fatality 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 President⁹ 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.

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 European NGOs and

the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (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.¹⁰ 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. 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 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 p. 19).

State retrenchment stimulated the Senegalese FONGS, one of the organizations included in the study, to intensify and broaden its activities from the mid-80s on. Among the key challenges identified at the FONGS’ General Assembly in 1991 was that of gaining access to the resources of national rural development programmes of which peasants were the intended beneficiaries, a strategic indication since the Agricultural Structural Adjustment Program (ASAP) was then in the offing (FONGS, 1991). The FONGS had expanded to include 24 regionally-based associations throughout the country totalling 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 the government with 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 a common identity and a platform based on family farming, the basic, integrated unit of Senegalese agriculture and society, overcoming the fracture between cash crops dominated by the male head of family and the activities of FONGS association members.

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. 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 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; ensuring peoples’ participation in determining policies. Since 2000 ROPPA has made important gains in accrediting the

peasant movement as a political actor and influencing national and regional policies (Gyapong, 2017; McKeon, Watts, & Wolford, 2004).

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

Intra-African mobility represents 70% of West African mobility, although there has been an increase in migration directed towards Europe over the past few years (<https://www.iom.int/west-and-central-africa>). Yet 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're 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 & De Haas, 2016)

This distorted image of reality has become an explosive issue in a political climate in which nationalist and xenophobic populism 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 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)¹¹ 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 ... what the consequences of the EU new approach are for development, human rights, governance and security in partner countries. (CONCORD, 2017a, p. 3)

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, 2014). 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 labour, as well as the 'root cause' approach's assumption that migration will diminish with economic development (De Haas, 2007).

The EU's key long-term instrument, the External Investment Plan (EIP), was instituted in the context of the Migration Partnership Framework adopted in June 2016. It is described as an instrument to '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.

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’ (1981). These hypes are hardly encouraging, since the kind of initiative in which private actors who need incitement 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 chains, ignoring the accumulating evidence that these supply chain models lock out all but the best resourced (male) 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 (European Commission, 2018). However, no effort was made to consult them in designing the Window, and their potential access to the funds would have to be 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 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, p. 11)

5. 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, 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 as a migration ‘crisis’ is questioned. Rural people do not consider it to be an unexpected emergency, but rather 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 situations 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 challenges they were experiencing already three decades ago (ENDA, 1985). To begin with, the question posed by the French NGO which funded the exercise – ‘what development would you like to see in your village?’ – was recast 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?’ 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 peasant leader 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 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, p. 250)

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 and homogenization. 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’ (ENDA, 1985). But there were also issues that the villages and associations themselves could try to address. 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. (ENDA, 1985, p. 120)

Other areas of innovation included experimenting with technics like compost and anti-salt dams, cisterns to trap rain water, animal traction, saving and credit schemes, literacy classes and rural radio. Beyond single measures, communities reflected collectively on changes to make within the villages, men and women working together, and elders and young people.

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. (ENDA, 1985, p. 26)

Over the following years the pressure on the basic unit of West African agricultural production continued unabated. 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. (Cissokho, 2009, p. 203)

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 empower rural communities as a whole, including the youth, to address the structural issues that affect them all. From a collection of interviews conducted between 2009 and 2013 the vision that emerges is one of young people ‘between two worlds’. Many 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 (GRAD/ROPPA, 2014). 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. 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).

The hypothesis that irregular migration to Europe represents a rational strategy on the part of those who undertake it which can be folded seamlessly into the win-win-win circular migration touted by pro-business migration managers (Brboric, SI, p. 19) is not substantiated by West African 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 a variety of strategies. Others, feeling that nothing will change the situation, decide to leave, comforted by images suggesting that things are better in Europe. So they don’t worry about how to get there and what to do. The problem is just to get there.¹²

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 migrants to sensitize other young people to the down side of migration (GRAD/ROPPA, 2014).

The strategies and policies advanced by West African rural people and their organizations are dramatically different from those proposed from outside. The Senegalese leader referred to above reported that he had turned down a proposal from a European cooperation programme that offered to pay his village organization a certain sum for each returned migrant whom they agreed to welcome into the community accompanied by his/her individual installation 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.’

For organizations like the FONGS, the CNCR and ROPPA the way forward is family farming, not agribusiness and agricultural corridors, but family farming that finally receives the support it merits.

Their positions are backed up by action. 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. 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 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. 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 behaviour necessary to become good leaders (CNCR, 2015).

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 and 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 based on 'a new paradigm, considering youth employment as a motor for transforming family farming while respecting its multifunctionality and the values on which it is based' (ROPPA, 2018, p. 12). ROPPA's strategy addresses the need for changes in public policies and investments to make agriculture a more remunerative proposition and rural territories more attractive places in which to live. But it also acknowledges the necessity of enhancing the status and perception of young people and their participation in decision-making in their families and organizations, and foresees measures to bring this about.

6. Conclusion

The evidence is on the side of West Africa's family farms and territorial food systems, 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. One source of this evidence is the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), reformed in 2009 to become 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). ROPPA is a key actor in the autonomous Civil Society Mechanism that interfaces with the CFS. Policy recommendations on investing in smallholder agriculture and enhancing small-scale producers' access to markets adopted by the CFS from 2011 to 2016 have officialized the reality that these producers are responsible for meeting 70% of the world's food needs and making 90% of all investment in agriculture. What's more, 80% of the food consumed world-wide 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, and which enable a greater share of the wealth created to be retained and redistributed within the territorial economies (CSM, 2016).

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 remarkable capacity of West African 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 obtuseness of excising the economic dimension of human activity from the social and cultural is increasingly evident in societies in which combined economic and 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. With fourteen of the fifteen ECOWAS countries estimated to be off-track to reach SDG1 by 2030 the dominant paradigm is clearly on shaky ground (<https://worldpoverty.io/>).

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 eminently susceptible to being co-opted by the blandishments of corporate-concocted investment programmes such as Grow Africa or the New Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, and giving in to pressure to accept trade and investment agreements 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-honoured 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, and normally overcome, 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 what might be termed ‘policy ambivalence’. This awkward condition could be described as a situation where two different policy packages with diametrically opposed impacts are being promoted by two different ‘stakeholder’ groups – in this case the usual powerful economic interests, on the one hand, and strident and politically opportunistic defenders of European security on the other – 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 in Europe today.

Policy ambivalence 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 migrants 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, migrants, 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 would 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. This kind of exercise has been carried out in the past, notably around the neoliberal Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that the EU began to negotiate with the regional economic organizations of 'ACP countries'¹³ in 2000. Eighteen years later ECOWAS has still declined to sign a regional EPA thanks in no small part to effective advocacy and participation in the negotiations by ROPPA and other West African civil society networks. In this process a space bringing West African peasant organizations together with European CSOs was crafted based on long-standing relations of partnership and trust, and a common advocacy platform was formulated privileging the West Africans' perceptions and claims (McKeon & Maes, 2008).

Applying this kind of strategy in the case of migration would require more effort for a number of reasons. The European CSO advocacy scene is dominated by NGOs privileging attention to defending Africans' right to mobility and NGOs' right to save lives. As with the civil society actors involved in the High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, they lack a common understanding of just what the 'root causes' of migration are (Toksoz, SI). As we have seen, ROPPA prefers to frame its claims in terms of promoting employment opportunities for young people in the context of family farming rather than those of contrasting migration. ROPPA has participated in some meetings organized by the Pan African Network in Defense of Migrants' Rights, a Mali-based member of the Global Coalition on Migration. However, it has refrained from following the global processes not out of lack of solidarity with migrants' rights but simply because the amount of time, energy and resources required for a social movement to engage meaningfully at global level is so extensive as to require careful prioritization. It is not surprising that most small-scale producer members of the food sovereignty movement have privileged engagement with spaces like the Committee on World Food Security, whose reform they helped to shape and where they participate fully in intergovernmental negotiations in an autonomous and self-organized mode, and the UN Human Rights Council where a declaration on the rights of peasants and a treaty regulating transnational corporations are under negotiation. The absence of these actors may help to explain why there has been relatively little discussion of 'root causes' in the Global Forum on Migration and Development Civil Society Days (Toksoz, SI, p. 13). ROPPA has also participated in World Social Forum processes, with a particular presence at the 2011 edition in Dakar where migration was a key theme. The enduring Latin American imprint on the World Social Forum on Migrations, however, could militate against their sustained engagement (Delgado Wise, SI, p. 12).

In spaces at all levels around the world social actors are fighting against the manifold forms of violence practiced by neoliberal globalization, corporate concentration and financialized capitalism. They are constructing more equitable and inclusive alternatives and challenging dominant narratives with evidence culled from lived experience. Under the pressure of the current wave of authoritarian nationalistic populism that is, itself, a reaction to globalization, there is an increasingly strong call for both horizontal and vertical convergence among movements and struggles that adopt different entry points but are conducting the same struggle. Efforts to reform the World Social Forum on Migrations point in that direction (Delgado Wise, SI, p. 12). So do the Civil Society Mechanism's determination to introduce the issue of migration into the agenda of the Committee on World Food Security, an autonomous process to deepen strategic analysis of the current phases of capitalism and democracy currently promoted by activists from different movements and engaged academics, and countless

other connecting processes. The point is not to bring everyone under the same tent, but to build increasingly broad and deep strategic networking among different social actors who come to recognize themselves as allies in whatever space they may be mobilizing and whatever the diverse terms they may use to frame their objectives and project their visions.

Notes

1. A significant exception is the more broadly framed European Coordination Via Campesina working document on migration and wage-labour (2017).
2. This section draws on McKeon et al. (2004) and McKeon (2005).
3. See Dupriez (1980) for extremely interesting calculations in this regard.
4. Mamadou Dia, 1957, quoted in Lecomte (2001).
5. Burkinabé peasant quoted in *Construire ensemble* (1981).
6. In good part due to their acceptance of bank loans during the fluidity boom of the 70s to fund the ‘modernization’ 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’.
7. Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal.
8. Bernard Lédéa Ouedraogo.
9. Famara Diedhiou.
10. Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Niger, Senegal and Zimbabwe.
11. 90% of the EUTF funds come from ODA, in particular the European Development Fund.
12. Personal communication, 4 February 2018.
13. Africa-Caribbean-Pacific, the former colonies of EU members.

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