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Climate of Anxiety in the Sahel: Emigration in Xenophobic Times

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Crises are simply exposures of existing real relations.
—Raymond Williams, *The Year 2000*, 1983

Drought is a perfect scapegoat; all social and economic dislocation and suffering can be attributed to the drought and underlying problems can be left unacknowledged and, therefore, unconfronted.
—Jacqueline Solway, "Drought as a Revelatory Crisis," 1994

La précarité affecte profondément celui ou celle qui la subit ; en rendant tout l'avenir incertain, elle interdit toute anticipation rationnelle et, en particulier, ce minimum de croyance et d'espérance en l'avenir qu'il faut avoir pour se révolter, surtout collectivement, contre le présent, même le plus intolérable.
—Pierre Bourdieu, "La précarité est aujourd'hui partout," 1998

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Each day young men are leaving eastern Senegal—a dryland farming area just south of the Sahara. Those who can save for the journey head to Europe—across the desert, through Algeria and Libya, and across the Mediterranean to Italy. The trip takes five to twelve months. Along the way they spend their monies on transport and housing, pay guides called *passeurs*, and are robbed by scores of police at checkpoints and border crossings. Their funds are quickly exhausted, so they work for months at each stop—in Bamako, Mopti, Gao, Ouagadougou, Niamey, Agadez—for a few dollars a day to pay their way to Libya, the gateway to Europe. In Libya they work to pay their crossing to Italy.

Along the route most are robbed and assaulted by bandits. Some are intentionally abandoned by transporters to die in the desert—after having paid the trans-Saharan fare.[1] In the Maghreb, many are taken captive by Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, the Northern Tuareg Rebels, or either of two factions of the Libyan Army. They are sold by their captors as slave labor,[2] held for ransom to squeeze money from their already impoverished parents, beaten, spit on, and insulted. On the last leg, many drown at sea. The trip is traumatic whether they make it to Europe, disappear into Libyan labor markets, or are forced to return home (also see Lucht 2012). Why do they make this perilous trip? The media is calling them climate refugees (Argos Collectif 2010; Foote 2016; Friedman 2016).[3] They are not.

Our exploration of emigrant struggles began with stories from the families and friends of young men who perished on a boat that sank off Italy on April 19, 2015 (Kingsley, Bonomolo, and Kirchgaessner 2015; Pianigiani and Cumming-Bruce 2016). Of the 728 people onboard, most locked into the hull, twenty-eight survived. Many of the deceased came from dryland millet, peanut, corn, and cotton farming and pastoralist villages in the Tambacounda region of eastern Senegal where the authors have long studied rural politics. In January 2016 we went to investigate why villagers were leaving for Europe, what they knew before leaving, and whether, after this tragedy, the departures would continue. In hundreds of interviews and surveys, families of the deceased and returned migrants told us of the abuse and hardships along the route. The families of migrants do not

1. Night driving and alternative routes have increased reported deaths in the desert due to the implementation of antismuggling policies (Turner and Teague 2018).

2. Young men were taken out from their cells while held for deportation by one faction of the Libyan army and sold as unpaid labor on construction sites (interviews in Tambacounda by Faye and Ribot, 2017; also see Elbagir et al. 2017).

3. Richard W. Franke and Barbara H. Chasin (1980: 111) describe such superficial readings of drought by "experts" and the media in the 1960s and 1970s.

want them to go—most migrants sneak off at night and call to tell their parents once well on their way. The stories of hardship that befell many of them, however, did not change the minds of other young farmers. Most still plan to leave. Those repatriated planned to go again. So, in 2017 we began a study to understand what drives departure from Tambacounda. Systematic surveys and thematic interviews were conducted from January 2017 through February 2018.[4]

Climate change and environmentally related poverty narratives are damaging and misrepresent why these young people are risking their lives to leave Tambacounda for Europe. On the contrary, their precarity and poverty are not natural. They are productive at home, but the profits of their labor are skimmed off by a state-supported system of extraction that ratchets most Sahelian farmers to subsistence or below. These young men do not attribute their plight to the climate—they are used to managing high rainfall variability. Rather, they feel a stark lack of an imaginable desirable future at home; and they see no possible economic or social roles for themselves within their families or communities. At home, they see themselves as failures and feel blamed by family and community for not being able to fulfill social expectations: building a nice house, supporting their parents through the hungry season, getting married, and having financial autonomy. In short, they have no hope of a dignified life in Tambacounda.

Migrants' struggles at home in Tambacounda and en route across the Sahel and Sahara get short shrift in the Western press until they cross the Mediterranean and approach Europe—generating images of flotillas and drownings at sea. With distance from Europe, there is less coverage of the even greater numbers dying while crossing the desert (Danish Refugee Council 2016: 2). Farther afield, the media shows us only glimpses of the villages they come from, and these villages are often depicted as climate-change-induced drought disaster areas (à la Friedman 2016).

Sadly, by proclaiming these people "climate migrants" or "climate refugees," resulting from environmental conditions that are nobody's fault or the fault of fossil fuel burning, the media obscures the conditions of their departure, saying nothing of the precarity of their lives and livelihoods at home. Indeed, owing to the fog of simplified discourses, and despite emerging scholarly accounts (Lucht 2012; Vigh 2009), most depictions do not attend to the histories of policies, prac-

4. Most interviews were conducted with interpreters from Pulaar, Soninké, and Jakhanke into French. Some interviews were conducted directly in French by Ribot and Faye and others in Wolof by Faye. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English from French by the authors. Surveys and data analysis were coordinated by Papa Faye.

tices, and processes that have eroded and continue to destroy rural security across the Sahel. As a result, the multiple causes for their often ill-fated departures are rendered invisible and thus politically nonactionable. In this way, the "climate-migrant" narratives are not simply reductive and inaccurate but deepen the very conditions of abjection their adherents ostensibly intend to prevent.

The next section of this essay debunks some reductionist narratives typically used to explain emigration from the Sahel toward Europe followed by a section that explores the causal structures of emigration from Tambacounda. After providing some basic data on rising departures and high death rates, we start with farmers' anxieties about staying in place. We then progressively contextualize expressed social angst and motives within a set of material and social factors that shape the decision to depart. Finally, we examine some damages that follow from focusing on climate and climate change to explain migration, followed by the essay's conclusion.

Migrants as Climate Refugees

Facing a thankless lifetime of precarity, young men are choosing to transform their situations. They are taking this dramatic alternative to overcome the hopelessness of more conventional entrepreneurial activities at home. Thus, they are spurred, often to their deaths, not by here-and-now hardships but by deeply human concerns for their own and their families' futures. The long history of outside commentary has consistently cast the Sahelian region as a tragedy produced by declensionist narratives of the commentator's choice: overpopulation, desertification, tragedy of the commons, poverty, ignorance, corruption, and climate change, to name the most prominent. These narratives present Sahelian peoples variously as villains, victims, or pawns, but what they share is the imagined Sahelian smallholder, a scratcher of the earth, whose actions are in response to here-and-now incentives and constraints (Turner 2004).

Trans-Saharan migrants today are cast as victims of climate or of poverty. The narrative that migrants from the Sahel are fleeing climate stress is currently trending in scholarly works (Ahmed 2018; Barrios, Bertinelli, and Strobl 2006; Dietz, Verahagen, and Ruben 2001; UNEP 2001; Warner et al. 2009) and even more prominent in the popular press (Foote 2016; Friedman 2016). These and other authors point to land degradation alone or in combination with climate change as drivers "pushing" migrants toward Europe or elsewhere (Afifi 2011; Dietz, Verahagen, and Ruben 2001; Grote and Warner 2010; IPCC 2014; UNEP 2001; Warner et al. 2009).

Superficially, these narratives are true. The Sahel is particularly exposed to and stressed by climate change, and the region is poor by any measure. So, we do not question the existence of these purported "causes"; we question whether they explain the dangerous emigration choices being made by young men from Tambacounda and elsewhere. In short, these narratives reflect important dimensions of the context within which these choices are made, but they alone lack causal force—or restorative insight. Given the long history of invocations of environment, drought, or poverty to explain the various perceived ills of the Sahelian condition, their invocation now to explain the expansion of labor emigration is suspect. It reiterates unsatisfying truisms and a dangerous essentialism. Such shallow thinking desiccates causal reasoning and related moral responsibility. It occludes the history of poverty making that places people at risk in the face of climate and many other stresses.

Such accounts are often made in ignorance of climate dynamics and even the seasonality of rainfall. The *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman (2016) insists, citing the United Nations (UN) International Migration Group, that "global warming has already created tens of millions of climate refugees, and could go on to drive as many as a billion people from their homes over the next 40 years." He illustrates this problem in Senegal where he visited the farming village of Ndiamaguene during the dry season, presenting its powdery bare soil as the picture of current climate crisis. Yet this village has *always* looked that way in the dry season. It is green during the annual rainy season. There is nothing new in Friedman's ostensibly alarming image with the misleading assessments of Sahelian desertification shaped by short-term, geographically circumscribed visual observation. Such misrepresentations date back to the mid-1930s when colonial powers, having observed the US Dust Bowl, feared the southward advance of the Sahara Desert (Aubréville 1973; Collier and Dundas 1937; Stebbing 1935).

These accounts of decline often confuse climate-change projections, recent weather patterns, and the timing of the upsurge of Trans-Saharan migration. Neither labor emigration nor drought-induced harvest failure is new to the region. Historically, the Sudano-Sahelian region underwent abnormally high rainfall from 1950 to 1968, followed by recurrent drought through the mid-1990s. Since then, annual rainfall, while showing high interannual variability, has returned to long-term mean levels, a significant improvement compared to the 1968 to 1995 period (Herrmann, Anyamba, and Tucker 2005; Huber, Fensholt, and Rasmussen 2011; Nicholson 2013). Coincident with these changes, various studies have pointed to the "regreening" of the Sahel caused by the combination of rainfall improvements and improved natural resource management practices by rural peoples (Dardel et

al. 2014; Herrmann, Anyamba, and Tucker 2005; Huber, Fensholt, and Rasmussen 2011; Olsson, Eklundh, and Ardö 2005; Stith et al. 2016). Thus, over the past twenty years, during which such migration has become a global concern, the region has experienced a period of improved rainfall and purported ecological recovery.

Running counter to ecoclimatic evidence and migrant accounts, the Western press continues to portray climate change as a cause of emigration.[5] During the current emigration wave, Willy Foote of *Forbes* (2016) referred to Senegalese "farmers of the Sahel" as migrants fleeing from "the front line of climate change." He called them "climate refugees," comparing them to "Dust Bowl refugees" from John Steinbeck's (1939) *The Grapes of Wrath*. This is an interesting and telling reference. What Foote fails to understand is that Steinbeck did not cast the Joad family as victims of a natural dust bowl. He depicts them as being forced from Oklahoma by large landowners and banks. He depicts their soil as having deteriorated because they were forced to monocrop cotton for the army.[6]

Climate-refugee stories, of course, have a well-intended purpose. They are presented to show the reality and urgency of global climate change. They are used to signal the projected disasters that we should all be working to avert. While climate variability and change play an important role in shaping the livelihoods in the Sahel (Franke and Chasin 1980; Gritzner 1988), they are not primary causes of farmer struggles or of the exodus toward Europe from places like Tambacounda over the past twenty years. Precarity and migration exist regardless of weather patterns in the region. In lieu of climate narratives, we must explain why Sahelian farmers, who are adept at coping with variation, are no longer coping (à la Franke and Chasin 1980). We need to also take seriously migrants' own accounts of socioeconomic factors behind their decisions to embark on dangerous journeys.

In the next section, we present some statistics on migration from Tambacounda toward Europe. We follow this with the typically expressed reasons that emigrants give for wanting to leave. We then place those experiential and affective explanations within the context of broader material and political-economic changes taking place in their rural world.

5. General circulation models (GCMs) for the Sahel under climate change vary greatly in precipitation projections. They consistently show that heat stress and evaporation will increase, and a larger percentage of rain will fall in large events, increasing the possibility of negatively affecting rainfall distribution within a given year (Giannini et al. 2013; Salack et al. 2014; Thompson, Crawley, and Kingston 2017).

6. On the Dust Bowl, also see Worster 1979, Cronon 1994, and Demeritt 1994. Franke and Chasin (1980: 112–16) also point to ecological misreadings of causes of the Sahel famines of the 1960s and 1970s.

Emigration from Tambacounda—Contextualizing Experience within Structural Violence

In 2017, we returned to Tambacounda to conduct more in-depth surveys and interviews of rural families to better understand the complexity of the causes and consequences of labor emigration. We surveyed twenty villages, ten each in two of Tambacounda's forty-six districts (called communes). These twenty villages were chosen to equally represent what local government officials classified as high-, medium-, and low-emigration villages. We surveyed all the households, exactly one thousand, within the sampled villages and conducted more in-depth surveys and interviews within a sample of these households.

Some Data on Departures

National emigration data for Senegal and other countries in West Africa are sparse, showing a wide variation in the estimates for emigration rates, no matter their destination (Ba and Ndione 2006; Lessault and Flahaux 2013; Orozco, Burgess, and Massardier 2010). More geographically localized studies in Senegal have focused on the famous migration source regions along the Senegal River Valley to the north (e.g., Amin 1974; Lericoullais 1975; Quiminal 1991). Recent surveys to estimate Senegal's emigration rates have focused on urban areas (Lessault and Flahaux 2013; Tall 2009) with rural areas ignored, simply presuming low rates. As a result, we remain amazingly ignorant of the importance of labor emigration to Europe from rural hinterlands such as Tambacounda. The available data suggest that Tambacounda migration rates declined to just below the national average in 2002, with a declining importance of Europe-bound departures (Lessault and Flahaux 2013: 72–77).

Our data, some fifteen years later, present a quite different picture that reflects both our different methods and likely changes since 2002. Table 1 presents results from our exhaustive survey of the twenty study villages in Tambacounda. A full 71.5 percent of the one thousand surveyed households have been affected by Europe-bound migration (members in Europe, repatriated from Europe, en route to Europe, or died en route), and 53 percent have at least one household member in Europe. Our estimates indicate at least 7.9 percent of the population of Tambacounda is in Europe or traveling there.[7]

7. This estimate is generated by first calculating the sum of the products of an estimate of the fraction of villages in each of the three categories of migration prevalence in the study area (high, medium, low), the category-specific fraction of households with at least one migrant in Europe or en

Table 1 Experience with migration among 1000 surveyed households in Tambacounda (2017)

Affected by emigration to and toward Europe	71.5%
At least one member in Europe	53.0%
At least one forcibly repatriated emigrant from Europe	6.0%
At least one voluntarily returning migrant	6.8%
At least one member en route to Europe via Libya	8.6%
At least one member with whom the household has lost contact (unconfirmed death or failed communication)	8.1%
At least one member who has died during emigration over last 5 years	2.0%

This estimate better measures the importance of trans-Saharan migration than currently available annual migration rates (Lessault and Flahaux 2013: 72) and is close to two times higher than the ballpark estimates used by other researchers for Senegal as a whole (Orozco, Burgess, and Massardier 2010). More recent reports cite Tambacounda as a major source region in Senegal for Europe-bound emigrants (Altai Consulting 2016).

These rates of emigration cannot be attributed to climate or climate change alone, as the ecology is "regreening" while emigration is on the rise. In addition, in Senegal, maps of food insecurity show that the Casamance and Tambacounda regions have lower food security than other areas in the country despite higher rainfall (Rioux 2011; Service de l'Analyse de la Sécurité Alimentaire [VAM] 2014: 77). The migration we see is clearly not purely climate driven. Indeed, a distinct mismatch between climate-stressed zones and food insecurity is observed elsewhere in the Sahel (Giannini et al. 2017), demonstrating that we need to put the causal role of climate stress into place among other factors.

Elsewhere in the Sahel, rising rates of Europe-bound emigration have also been observed (e.g., Turner and Teague 2019). In Tambacounda, all twenty village authorities (imams and chiefs) interviewed (2017) said that emigration rose significantly in the last five years—much more than ten or twenty years ago. Of the one hundred young farmers surveyed, 89 percent say they want to emigrate and will if they can (surveys 2017). Some save enough money to go. Of these, a portion of

route, and the average number of emigrants in Europe or en route (2) within the 186 households surveyed in more detail who have at least one emigrant in Europe or en route. This estimate is divided by the size of the study population equal to an average of 14.35 members (average household size in Tambacounda, 2013 census) multiplied by 1,000. This is most likely an underestimate, given the high rates of departures and repatriations within our surveyed households.

them die along the way. Some make it to Europe. Some are sent home. Of those in Europe, only a portion sends remittances. Emigration further exacerbates conditions in Tambacounda by the savings that youth take away from Tambacounda to finance their journeys that are not invested locally, the loss to farm families of the most entrepreneurial and strongest youth and their labor, the pains of breaking families apart, the trauma of abuse experienced en route and in Europe, the anxieties people experience when their young are on the road or "lost," and the pain of mourning those who have died. So, why do they go?

Affect and Explanation

The hungry season—widespread seasonal food deficit during the period between planting and harvest—is one manifest stress that farmers cite when describing the insecurity of living in Tambacounda. This food insecurity plays a role in emigration decisions. As one repatriated emigrant said when explaining why he left:

> The period of food deficit is recurrent; I cannot remember the date we had enough food in our home. . . . You cannot imagine what it means if you do not experience a whole day without food shortages, looking at your children and the women without being able to do anything. It's worth doing anything that could help, and if you are a man with dignity, you rather take the risks associated with the Libya route than stay home stealing small animals [like chickens] and petty things. Of course food deficit is not the same in families with emigrants and families without; they have remittances. (interview by Faye and Ribot, January 2017)

But young men do not immediately talk of the hungry season and its causes when asked why they go. They explain their decision to depart via immediate experience of living at home, saying, "I can no longer stand to see my parents suffer," or "how can I concentrate in school while my mother is running left and right trying to find food." One explained, "I can't sleep at night because I don't know how I'll feed my children." Young farmers speak of a number of related problems—they are embarrassed that they do not have the resources needed to marry, and they are looked down on for not providing for their families. They feel useless in their families and communities. They feel a hopelessness about the future. It is only after expressing these frustrations that they explain their conditions in reference to a broader lack of income and the weight of debt.

From our household survey sample, Faye, in 2017, spoke with one hundred young men in eleven villages of the two communes in Tambacounda on the concerns that influence their decision to leave: 58 percent cited "inability to support

their family," 34 percent mentioned "desire to get married," 15 percent the "desire to build a family house," 13 percent "anxiety about the future," and 12 percent "inability to meet their own needs."[8] These are social roles young men feel obligated to fulfill. They told us they feel inadequate and denigrated by the ways their parents view and treat them. They feel inferior to friends and other villagers who have emigrated. Likewise, families of emigrants who have actually been successful live in a perceived and manufactured superior social stratum, which they exhibit and perpetuate by displaying their wealth in large homes and by giving alms (sugar, rice, meat) to nonemigrant families during the holidays of Ramadan, Aïd el Fitr and Aïd el Kebir.

The inability to attain recognition or have secure income to care for their families leaves young men in a pervasive hopelessness that manifests as anxiety about life in place. Given their sense of marginality, youth in Tambacounda are willing to do anything—they knowingly risk their lives—ostensibly to help their families, but more accurately to have a sense of a future and to create a dignified role for themselves at home through their gains in the world. A decade ago they began saying "*Barça walla barsaq*," meaning "Barcelona or death," as they left for Europe—reflecting their knowledge of risks and determination to go. They now leave for Europe also saying "*Itali walla yegolu gommo to*," or "Italy or food for the fish" (interview by Faye, September 13, 2017). Their desperation has palpably thickened over the years. By emigrating they know they are taking a grave risk. Yet they go (interviews by Faye and Ribot, January 2016, January 2017, and January 2018).

Europe as a destination seems to have little pull for migrants. However, Europe as a place of possible success seems to attract them. Before leaving they articulate little about their expectations of being in Europe. They rarely speak about what they might find—knowing nothing about the jobs they might have or of life in Europe. They can hardly articulate any ideas about Europe as a desirable destination beyond making money to send home. This may be that it is unacceptable to say they are leaving for selfish desires. But it may also be that life in Europe, painful for most migrants, manifests locally as miraculous remittances that give status to the sender. Further, emigrants do not come back bragging that they were scrubbing floors, cleaning toilets, or engaged in hard labor. They come back well-dressed and proud saying little about what they did or experienced, fueling intra-family and interfamily jealousy.

Departing young men state that they are going for family, yet they go against

8. Many gave multiple reasons; numbers thus add to over 100 percent.

the pleas of their parents and religious leaders. Most parents see the dangers and ask their children not to go. Some, usually in past years, pushed their children to leave. One disabled farmer told us he sent his only son to Europe. His son died in the desert. He continues to farm alone with his one arm (interview by Faye and Ribot 2018). While this man sent his son, seeing this as the only path to security, today parents in Tambacounda are more aware of the dangers and do not want their children to attempt to reach Europe by land or sea. As one father who lost his first son in an attempt to cross the Mediterranean said, "If my other son goes, he will go legally—in an airplane" (interview by Faye and Ribot 2018). Other parents preferred this same, more secure, although unlikely, scenario. But the youth save in secret and sneak off at night.

Departing youth say that they are "in the hands of God" or that what happens to them is their "destiny." Yet, the imam of one village in Tambacounda explained, "Migration via the Libya route is suicide and God has prohibited us to kill ourselves; only God has the right to kill." He continued, "Young men distort the view of destiny: if you cross the sea in an overcrowded and handcrafted boat, you know in advance what is likely to happen and you can no longer evoke the will of God" (interviews by Faye, September 2017). Yet youth, including brothers of those lost on the April 2015 boat, rationalize risking death and explain events along the road as the will of God and as luck or misfortune. But a recurring theme is that they see no meaningful option and no dignity in staying at home—they desire another, more dignified, fate.

One young man bemoaned, "If you stay here, you feel like the donkey of the family. You do all the hard work and you don't even hear the words 'thank you.' Your older brothers [who emigrated] don't help you and this becomes worse when the parents die; they will send money to their wives if they don't just bring them abroad and leave you on your own." He continued, "If there are funerals in the house, migrants are informed before us [nonmigrants] because the family does not expect financial support from us; we are just looked at as *fuxaaro* [lazy worthless slackers]" (interviews by Faye, September 2017). Despite asking them not to go, their elders give them no recognition for staying. The elders affirm those who are abroad. Staying home is indeed a more certain death, social death (à la Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006; Lucht 2012: 292–93; Vigh 2009).

Being in Europe and sending remittances bestows status. Status is no longer based on age and social position at home. This monetization and individualization of status further undermines traditional community structure and cohesion. The lure of money and the imaginary of Europe as a better future also favors migrants in marriage. The son of a village chief told us that young women (and

many girls married off in their teens) and their parents prefer migrants: "When an emigrant leaves his wife at home for ten years without visiting or sending her money, she will wait for him hoping for a better future," but for a local who leaves home for other reasons than emigration, he continued, "the wife would have left long before." The village chief affirmed, "Girls prefer migrants even if they don't have money. Just live in Europe and girls are eager to marry you; it seems like European money has the smell of a nice perfume" (interview by Faye, September 2017).

These experiences and anxieties provide a glimpse into a crisis that young men in Tambacounda are living. Without hope they emigrate. This emigration is not due to climate stress. The explanation cannot stop there. We must explain the conditions that make life in Tambacounda so difficult and precarious—the social changes and material conditions that generate poverty and exposure and undermine any hope of a secure, remunerative, and dignified future at home. We must understand the changing social and political economic conditions that can turn climate stresses into crises—such as failing social security arrangements, skewed laws and policies, limited market access, and a lack of political representation.

Inter-aid and the Breakdown of Social Contracts—Bare Life in the Sahel

The breakdown of social security relations is a major source of farmer anxiety. Mutual aid or moral-economy relations within communities was the norm just three decades ago. It became clear in our discussions with migrants and their families that individuals today do not see their extended family, community, and government as a source of help or protection. They feel there is no social security, no achievable or secure social positions, indeed, no bearable life; there is only what they can provide for themselves. They alone carry the risks of survival—they have become what Nikolas Rose (1996) called "risk subjects," believing they alone are responsible to protect themselves. The sense that these burdens fall solely on the individual is deepening.

Farmers tell us that the subsistence reciprocities that they used to rely on have deteriorated. Young and old feel insecure. They live in anxiety—about the present and future. Interfamily and intergenerational aid has declined for the poor. One emigrant who retired to his village in Tambacounda had, many years earlier, paid the airfare for twelve nephews to go to France. He intended to secure some support in old age. But, as he explained, he is now heartbroken because his brothers and their sons offer him no help. He doesn't blame "the boys," but rebukes their fathers who should have "reminded them of yesterday." He explained that the boys have

embraced European culture, becoming more individualistic. His own son, much younger than the boys he sent, failed in his attempts to make it to Europe and is angry with his cousins and uncles for "betraying" his father (interview by Faye and Ribot, January 2018).

More broadly, emigration itself, while reducing problems for some families, is leaving others more exposed. Rural Tambacounda now has two distinct classes: families with remittance-sending migrants and families without—the remittance-secured and the precariat. Of course, not all emigrants to Europe send back money; it can take years to establish an income abroad. We found that of households with an emigrant living in Europe, 50 percent still report food insufficiency, while 81 percent of households without emigrants in Europe report food insufficiency (2017 household survey). Further, families with remittances are becoming less likely to give support—beyond symbolic holiday gifts—to nonemigrant families. They support only their immediate nuclear family. This feeds into the breakdown of inter-aid. Thus farmers sense more anxiety about exclusion and feel that the actual risk of material shortfall is deepening.

In people's memory, hungry seasons came and went, but there was inter-aid among families.[9] People felt more secure in their social positions and relationships. They knew they could grow up to have respectable roles providing for their families and communities. Today they see neighbors who are secure on their children's remittances. They are convinced that nobody outside of their immediate family will help them. There is an individualizing of survival in which they cannot rely on their social networks (see Berry 1989, which observed the onset of this trend). Young farmers are fleeing neither a changing climate nor mere long-standing poverty; they are fleeing new levels of economic exposure, uncertainty, powerlessness, and declining social reciprocities. They feel unprotected and entirely on their own—which is part of why they are now willing to take terrible risks: because they have no safety nets—including those of government (discussed below)—and know that nobody will help.

Material Cause

Clearly, the crisis experienced by Tambacounda households and communities that pushes young men to emigrate extends well beyond climate change. Moreover, the diagnosis of "poverty" as cause, which is commonly invoked as an alternative, is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons (Franke and Chasin 1980: 214–16; MEFP

9. Franke and Chasin (1980: 80) describe the reciprocities as protection against droughts in Senegal's peanut basin.

2018: 13). First, the term *poverty*, as measured by standard indicators, does not adequately capture the hopelessness, precarity, and insecurity felt by emigrants and their families. As shown in the preceding sections, these conditions of affect are shaped not solely by here-and-now income and wealth levels but by evolving social relations and perspectives on the future. In short, the hopelessness and precarity felt by the citizens of Tambacounda are shaped by relational processes that are not captured by income or wealth statistics (Ribot 2014; Turner 2016). Second, when "poverty" is not explained, it risks being naturalized as inherent to the Sahelian region. Precarity and hopelessness in Tambacounda, however, are produced, and there is a moral imperative to seek to understand their production so as not to treat them as unaddressable and therefore easily ignored. This section briefly lays out the political economy of the current crisis in Tambacounda.

When we ask today's farmers why they and their children are departing, after expressing their immediate struggles, they provide a larger constellation of causal factors. They talk of some of the broader factors behind their food and economic security. They cite low and fluctuating agricultural production, which they attribute to nonmechanized and poor-quality agricultural equipment, expensive agricultural inputs, and an extractive system of agricultural industries and credit relations (interviews by Faye and Ribot, 2016–18). In cotton, for example, farmers accumulate individual or collective debt, having to pay the debts of their neighbors, who belong to their collective farmers group (as with the cotton company's "solidarity credit"—SODEFITEX, or the Société de Développement et des Fibres Textiles; interviews by Faye and Ribot, 2016–17). They point to low prices for their product as shaped by local monopsonies and regional commodity markets distorted by the dumping of subsidized agricultural products by industrialized nations (Bassett 2014; Bassett, Koné, and Pavlovic 2018; Malmström 2016; Trench, Rowley, and Diarra 2007). They point to usurious credit for seed and equipment (prevalent in the cotton sector), or loans from small lenders and store owners against their next crop to get through the hungry season, and government-regulated transport that allows a few businessmen to fix producer prices and control access to lucrative urban and international markets.

Given these conditions, farmers see few options for long-term prosperity in farming. The majority also have very limited access to off-farm jobs, government services, and political representation through which they might transform their situation. While forest products, for example, can provide lucrative alternative income opportunities, the markets for hunting, timber, and wood fuels are locked up with permits and licenses allocated by the national forest service to elite, mostly urban-based, merchants. Faye and Ribot (2017) have shown how forestry

laws, usually in the name of environmental protection, are used to continuously channel profits to a small cabal of well-connected merchants and are simultaneously used by underpaid government agents to confiscate forest products and to tax and fine producers—or to just ask for a bribe for not imposing arrest or fines. Charcoal, firewood, timber, and hunting are lucrative in Senegal—for merchants and administrators, but not for those who live in the forests and do the work of transforming nature into lucrative goods.

These problems of exclusion result not simply from the mysterious "workings of the market" but from the changing role of the Senegalese state and the nature of its social contract with rural peoples. During colonization and during the rule of socialistic governments from independence in 1960, Senegal's peasants had been benefiting from strong technical and financial support, including agricultural equipment and loans (Fall, Mbaye, and Sy 2013). Under the pressures of World Bank–imposed structural adjustments in the 1980s and via "democratic decentralization" in the 1990s (Chauveau 1998: 10; Faye 2006; Totté, Dahou, and Billaz 2003), the central government cut services and devolved responsibility, consistent with the World Bank's appeal for more efficiency in public service delivery and democratization (World Bank 1989). Following these policies, the government disengaged progressively from agriculture, promoting privatization and restructuring of public agricultural entities and industries, including the cotton and peanut sectors. This also implied what has been called in French the progressive "responsibilizing" of peasants (a patronizing term implying they are not already responsible for themselves): loading them with most of the roles of the former state agricultural service, eliminating loans and input subsidies, and liberalizing agricultural markets and prices. Despite these changes, Senegal's agricultural sector remains unproductive with a weak and declining contribution to the gross domestic product, from 10 percent in 1997 to less than 8 percent in 2011, while engaging more than 28 percent of Senegal's workforce (Fall, Mbaye, and Sy 2013).

Under decentralization, Senegal's central ministries transferred waste management, education, health, environment, sport, and youth and culture to elected local governments (République du Sénégal 1996). But they have been "insipient and incoherent" in financing these services (Fall 2010; Zaki 2013: 3–4). Further, the promise that decentralization would empower local communities is often thwarted by central ministries hanging onto resources and decision-making powers (Faye and Ribot 2017; Ribot and Larson 2012). Local governments are left to make the poor pay for services via taxes. They rebel and don't pay, so they get no services. This is what "democratic decentralization" has become: structural adjustment and the dumping of central government responsibility with a

democratic wink. It is the devolution of burdens to local representatives without corresponding fiscal transfers—with the innovative expectation of funding local services by taxing already precarious villagers (see Faye and Ribot 2017; Ribot 2004; Smucker et al. 2015).[10]

On top of the breakdown of the moral economy and social services, farmers feel alien to any political processes. They see no relation to their national government—even calling the far-off capital city of Dakar "Senegal," indicating that they do not even feel part of the nation. They remain unrepresented by elected local governments that have few resources or powers. They have no sense that anyone represents them or that they can influence the political economy or policies that shape their lives. Mayors, elected to represent them, are not consulted by higher levels of government or outside projects aiming to stem emigration or make life in Tambacounda more attractive (interviews by Faye and Ribot 2017–18). Social services and government seem inaccessible to farmers. Young farmers, however, do not say they miss representation. They simply do not have any expectations of it. Like inter-aid and social services, representation is one more broken social contract—or perhaps one never established. Rural people understandably see government, local or national, through a cynical lens as a set of institutions that extract and obstruct rather than as mediators of public interest.

In the Sahel, people are being told, by lack of any other option and through discourses of entrepreneurial development, to take care of themselves. They are told to be "entrepreneurial" and to develop their "adaptive capacities" (WRI 2008). So they are acting to take control of their lives. Rather than through private insurance, which they could not afford were it even available, or by becoming local entrepreneurs, which they have no means to do, they are trying to resolve the dilemma by emigrating. The emigration that Europeans perceive as a large problem is due to the predatory, state-supported, ostensibly free-market economic system (that is, in practice, not at all free, predatory, and extractive) that Western development agencies, in support of their national-government partners, are promoting through international development policy and antigovernment rhetoric. Nonetheless, the media and government, as well as most climate experts and so-called adaptation specialists (see for critique Ribot 2010; Tschakert et al. 2013), attribute crises to proximate periodic weather stressors like drought. They rarely recognize the multistranded social histories and political-economic relations that place these people at risk.

10. Thomas A. Smucker et al. (2015: 40) show how climate adaptation is compromised in Tanzania by giving "local government heavy responsibilities but few resources to pursue locally sensitive development."

Diversion through Climate Proofing

We have shown how the dominant view of trans-Saharan emigration as driven by climate change is misguided. Climate change discourses are also potentially damaging in how they have shaped the form of help Sahelian farmers can now expect from the international community. Increasingly, much development assistance is oriented toward "climate proofing" to shield people from climate stress and relieve climate-related damages, while diverting attention from the broader policy and political-economic causes of farmer vulnerabilities (see Watts 2015). It targets aid toward providing smallholders with climate information (Carr et al. 2017; Roncoli et al. 2009; Roudier et al. 2014), weather insurance (Greatrex et al. 2015; Skees, Goes, and Sullivan 2006; Thebaud 2015), and large-scale environmental rehabilitation projects that mirror earlier wrongheaded responses to desertification (Tschakert 2006).[11] New development policies aimed at climate security seek to protect farmers from the weather rather than from economic exploitation, exposure, and abuse (Brottem and Brooks 2018). They thus provide a technical shield rather than addressing underlying issues of market access, social protections, political rights, and representation.[12]

The focus on weather also turns attention from agriculture to alternative livelihoods. The UN's International Migration Organization program in Tambacounda that targets returned migrants is training them in professions such as tailoring and mechanics. The problem is, as youth and mayors explained, there are too many tailors and "more mechanics than cars" (interviews 2017–18). They learn and remain unemployed. Trained youth would need to emigrate to use the skills they have acquired. One dynamic rural mayor had many ideas for local investment. He wanted wells and the standard amenities, and he also wanted to develop large-scale chicken farming. But, he complained, the development agencies simply do not ask mayors for ideas. While they love to facilitate "participatory processes"—another form of unpaid labor in addition to being a circumvention of elected mayors—development programs rarely work with or through these official representatives of local communities (Ece, Murombedzi, and Ribot 2017; Faye 2015, 2017).

11. See absurd projects like the Great Green Wall in the Sahel now being justified as "climate-proofing" (Wikipedia n.d.). Watts (2015: 10) also argues that climate as cause narrows attention on "drought proofing," and Smucker et al. (2015: 40) evoke a climate orientation's ability to silence complex causes of vulnerability.

12. Indeed, nonclimate-related business-as-usual assistance is not much better: the "political focus and funding are still largely centered on symptoms rather than causes, through inconsistent and what might be called 'surface mitigation' and emergency management" (Oliver-Smith 2013: 2).

In 2001 the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change created the Adaptation Fund for the industrialized countries to assist people in the developing world to "adapt" to climate change stresses. It aims to help people to avoid the "additional" stress that climate change is projected to produce. This fund, and its concept of "additionality" that addresses only the "additional" stress, implicitly acknowledges the developed world's responsibility for climate change (UNFCCC n.d.). Yet its logic of additionality implies nonresponsibility for the preexisting vulnerabilities of the people who are at risk. Those at risk from added climate stress were already living on the edge. The fund is proposing to return them to the state of misery that they occupied before climate began to change. Additionality lays down an implicit cutoff for vulnerability redress. It only acknowledges the increment of suffering associated with added climate stress—even though people's overarching precarity is attributable to the preexisting vulnerabilities that turn climate stress, anthropogenic or not, into crises (Ribot 2014).[13]

In these ways, the climate focus, rather than the climate itself, becomes part of the causal chain of precarity, anxiety, and departure.

Conclusion: Multiple Causes of Social Death

There is a widespread failure to interrogate and identify root causes of emigration. The attribution of causality to climate or to some notion of a naturalized poverty—without explaining the underlying forces that produce poverty or make climate events into crises—obscures the causes so important for guiding response. Such shallow or mis-explanation delinks events from their causes and thus obscures possible solutions as well as moral and legal responsibility. Causality is always a contentious category of mind. It is contentious because cause is linked to blame, liability, responsibility, and potential repair or reparations (Ribot 2014). While shrouded in various ideologies, it is for reasons of responsibility and liability that many actors avoid the analysis of causality. So we end up with anodyne, inappropriate, or damaging responses. For young farmers who find the problems and their causes obvious, programs that do not help are exasperating. They breed cynicism and resignation.

There is a growing literature on departures. Hans Lucht (2012) shows the global forces that have gutted the Ghanaian fishing industry and describes economic and existential struggles of fishers of Ghana that are reflected in the expe-

13. The animation *Climate Refugees?* (ICLD 2018) illustrates this climate-related diversion of attention from political-economic conditions.

rience of Tambacounda farmers. Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas, and Henrik Vigh (2006; see also Vigh 2009) describe social death—a similar hopelessness—experienced by youth in the city of Bissau. Emigration is a pathway out. This literature, combined with the many studies of the slow and silent state and market violences that leave people vulnerable, illustrates the viability of departure or of joining Boko Haram, and helps explain dire poverty and hopelessness (Nixon 2011; Ribot 1998; Watts 2013). It paints a picture of the region's extractive economy that taxes people to the margins, exposes them to relentless market forces, creates precarious excess labor, and leaves them constantly struggling to maintain subsistence. The resulting precarity leaves people knowing that no matter how hard they work, no matter what they harvest or how much they produce, they will always be ratcheted down to near or below subsistence—maintained in precarity—without end. Farmers live with threat of hunger and are in a constant struggle to simply survive.

Understanding the multiple, multiscale causes of migration matters for humanitarian efforts and for migration policy. What are we to think when the European Union (EU) claims that it is stopping migration "at the source," by training the Libyan Coast Guard "to intercept and rescue migrant boats near the Libyan coast before they reach international waters" (Pianigiani and Walsh 2017)? The EU wants to turn migrants back to Libya (Pianigiani and Walsh 2017; McCormick et al. 2017; Tinti 2017b).[14] What kind of root cause does this represent? What kind of rescue is this—returning migrants to Libya to be imprisoned, ransomed, enslaved, beaten, and killed (UNHCR 2017)—against all human rights commitments. Blocking migrants from crossing some magic line into international waters gets nowhere near the source or causes of migration.

Migrants come from difficult situations at home via Libya to Europe to seek basic sustenance and security and to gain recognition in their communities of origin (Tinti 2017a). Blocking them at sea, ironically in the name of humanitarian rescue, delivers them to assured abuse—with no attention to the root causes of their crisis. Unfortunately, while there are also funds that are now being spent to fight migration through employment and poverty reduction in the Sahel, as usual, these funds are imposing indignities by funding foreigners, foreign companies, and foreign NGOs on the typical claim that Africans lack "capacity" (Franke and Chasin 1980: 72; McCormick et al. 2017; Ribot 2004). Sahelians are pushed aside while international "adaptation" or "carbon forestry" consultants are given high

14. Most recently, ostensibly getting closer to the root, Italy is establishing "reception centers" on Libya's southern border (Wintour 2018).

salaries—reinforcing farmers' sense of continued colonial-style subordination and hopelessness (Nuesiri 2018).[15]

Projects now aimed to fix "Europe's" immigration crisis by keeping Africans "in their place" at home seem like a continuation of patronizing subordinations of the past. We need to get past this sedentarization bias. Indeed, as Hannah Arendt (1968: 9) said, "Being able to depart from where we will is the prototypical gesture of being free, as limitation of freedom of movement has from time immemorial been the precondition for enslavement." Thus justice must also involve greater integration of Africans as mobile global citizens—and the mobility of labor that economists call for. Lucht (2012: 259–60) and other scholars cite the near impossibility, as well as undesirability, of stopping people from emigrating to wealthier regions—at least not, as he quotes Hein de Haas (2007: 826), "without drastically curtailing civil and human rights, which would be at odds with enlightenment values and the open nature of modern capitalist economies." Italy's 2009 "friendship pact" with Libya is an instance of such abuse, which has prevented people from reaching Italy's shores. "As a consequence," Lucht states, "rather than assuming that European nation-states cannot stop people from moving, one should perhaps be asking how far they are prepared to go . . . in clear violation of conventions and international human rights law."

The recent EU-funded collaboration between Italy and the Libyan Coast Guard confirms they will go far beyond the acceptable—if they have popular support, and, unfortunately, they do (viz Italy's Five Star Movement). Italy towed migrants back to Libya in apparent violation of international law (Giuffrida 2018), while continuing to support a Libyan coast guard that shows blatant disregard for the lives of drowning migrants (Heller et al. 2018). Indeed, Italy and France just demonstrated that they are willing to ignore human rights—as they test how breaking international law by turning boats away from their shores plays with their base. If the base likes it, politicians will do it—they do not hesitate to be unlawful and immoral. At least Spain has welcomed those turned away (Kirchgaessner, Tondo, and Jones 2018). More recently, the EU is asking Algeria to block migrants—very little is being said as the Algerian military is marching thousands of Africans into the desert at gunpoint—and many are dying (Hinnant 2018). Human rights no longer matter—the more the right wing abuses human rights, the more popular they become. Each abuse seems to be one more test of how far they can go in denying the human rights of "others" while increasing their political base (see also Toute l'Europe 2008).

15. Carbon forestry is largely implemented through the World Bank and the UN program titled Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD).

Migrant flotillas are only the most internationally visible outcome of many far-off crises. These crises are, in turn, the result of place-based histories—not separable from the West's past and present roles in Africa. They are a product of colonialism and of postcolonial national and international policies and practices. Yet this emigration is reduced to a two-dimensional Trumpian-wall-like border problem or one of poverty and capacity—not a symptom of deeper practices and histories. A magic line at sea and an "additionality" cutoff are the only responsibilities that Europe and the UN can see—there is a death here of history, of the social, of the political-economic, and of responsibility (Ribot 2010, 2014; Rose 1996). There is an erasure of cause and therefore blame. An erasure of all responsibility before that line—a line that separates Europe from Eric Wolf's ([1982] 2010) "people without history." The West is protecting its *Brave New World* of modernity from Aldous Huxley's ([1932] 2000: 88) "savage reservations." Climate is now clouding the West's responsibility for recent and centuries-long relations of extraction—through colonial violence or "free market" benevolence—that built the industrial world and that make "*Barça walla barsaq*" the only viable option for Sahelian youth.

We all want narratives that make climate change look bad. It is bad, and we need all the help we can to convince the industrial world that it must be stopped. European and American protectionists and racists fear emigrants; so climate advocates can now blame emigration on climate change to convince them that climate change needs attention. But at what moral cost are we mobilizing this xenophobia? At what expenses to farmers in the Sahel? We want convincing climate change narratives—and there are many—but we do not want them at the cost of failing to redress deep humanitarian crises that are also, like climate change, the responsibility of those who have benefited from fossil fuels, from colonialism, and from the widespread inequalities that allow unmitigated exploitation of both nature and people.[16] What we know now, and have for a long time, is that reducing vulnerability and building well-being today will go a long way toward enabling people to cope with and even flourish in a changing world (Blaikie et al. 1994; Hesse et al. 2013; Ribot 1995; Watts 2015). We need to understand the causes of in-place vulnerabilities and address them.

Indeed, we need to put climate in its place among other causes. We need to

16. Attributing the 2018 caravan of migrants across Mexico to climate plays the same xenophobia card with the same dangers. It heightens the fear of masses of "others," affirming the right-wing desire to close borders—despite their denial of climate change (see Milman, Holden, and Agren 2018).

then bring place into the picture as the starting point for a progressively contextualized analysis of risk and vulnerability. That analysis is the systematic tracing out from the decision to emigrate through the affective translations of material conditions that place youth in grave danger of risking their lives. The anxiety we see is multicausal. The full range of those causes needs to be the object of our research so that we can understand why people in the Sahel are living in precarity and so we can identify the many factors that make them vulnerable when the climate wiggles, and that can be treated so as to make their lives more secure. Vulnerability reduction comes well before any need for climate proofing—despite the fact that the climate is changing and presents real hazard. Hazards without vulnerability cannot be called hazards—they are reduced to mere nuisances. Hazards must find vulnerability in place to generate crises (Blaikie et al. 1994). In our assessment, despite changing climate stress and a historically challenging climate, migrants' long-standing vulnerabilities—and their reasons for leaving—are due to low incomes, lack of assets, blocked access to resources and markets, and inadequate representation (Faye, Haller, and Ribot 2018). These must be explained and targeted for development and change.

Climate change is the pièce de résistance, the icing on the anxiety cake. Some Sahelian youth are starting to be told that climate change is worsening their weather and is the cause of their problems—that they will now live under a climate of disaster. Effectively, they are told that if they think things are bad now, the future will be even worse. When the climate change discourse spreads across the region, which it is only beginning to do, there will be even less hope of a desirable or even viable future. *Barça walla barsaq!* They might as well be fish food. Of course, they have the alternative of joining a jihadist movement for a well-paid job or remaining home as the family donkey.[17]

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17. Jihadist movements in the Sahel involve reactions to local and national grievances rather than the mere ideological persuasion of totalizing global "Islamic" terrorism narratives (Benjaminsen and Ba 2019; Dowd and Raleigh 2013; Ibrahim 2017; Watts 2013).

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Raku ceramic sculpture and installation, 2017,
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Sculpture Gallery.
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