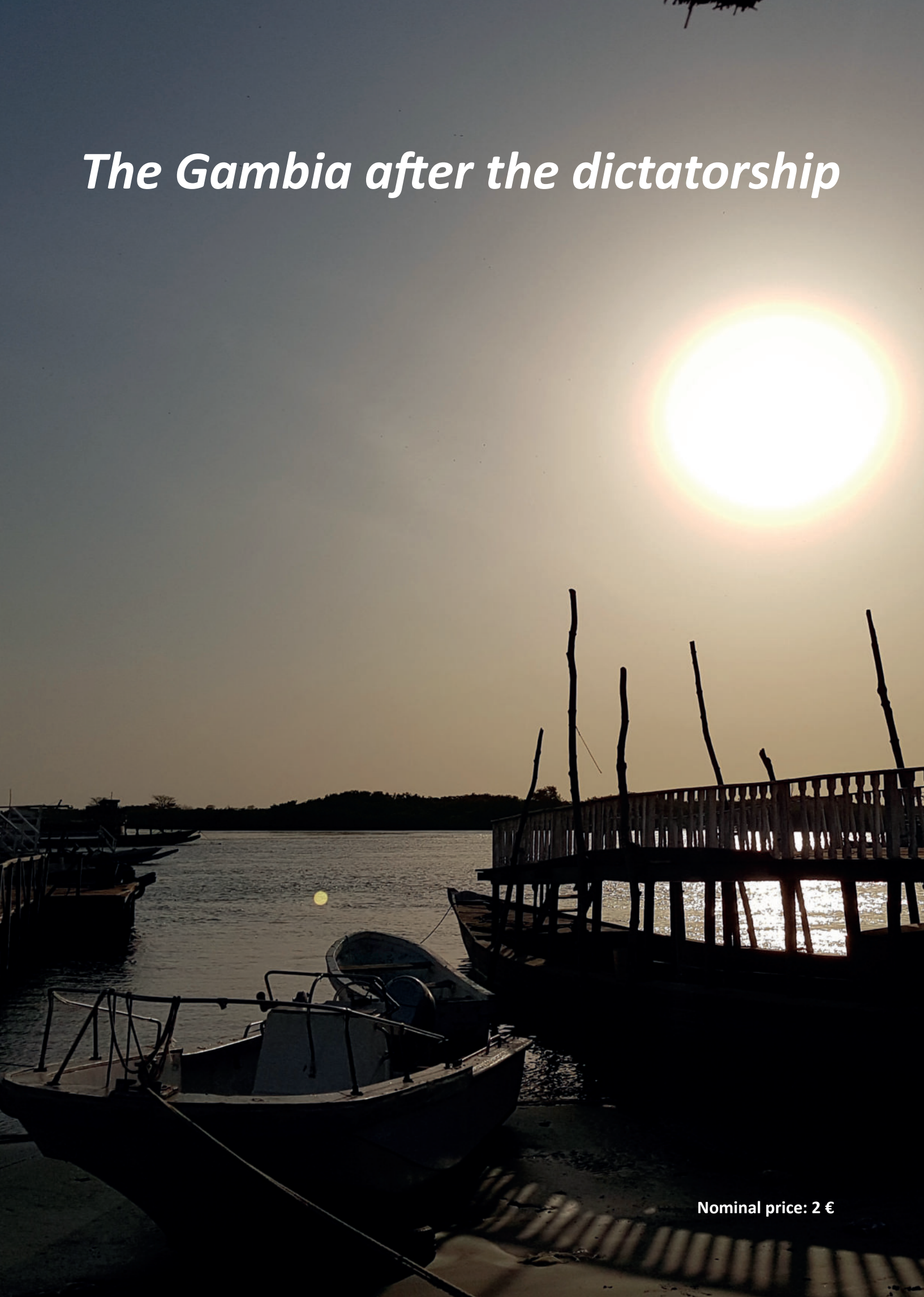


The Gambia after the dictatorship



Nominal price: 2 €

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Foreword

By Dr. Georg Bouché

Translated from German by Sarah Dreßler

In my capacity as honorary consul of the Republic of The Gambia in West Africa, it is my honor to have the opportunity to formulate a few thoughts as a foreword for this wonderful brochure. Furthermore, I would like to sincerely thank the authors, especially Julian Staiger from the Fluechtlingsrat Baden-Wuerttemberg, with whom I have been working since the beginning of my service as representative of the Republic of The Gambia in September 2016.

The Gambia is a very small country and nearly completely surrounded by the neighboring country of Senegal, except for approximately 45 km in the West which border on the Atlantic. In December 2016, the longtime President, who led this small country in West Africa as a dictatorship, was voted out, freeing the way for a new president. It still took many weeks for the tyrant to actually vacate his position.

During the 22 years of dictatorship, there were many reasons to leave this country in West Africa. In addition to a lack of jobs; a very weak infrastructure in a region, which is nonetheless open to tourism; in which a monoculture in peanut farming actually partly requires workers; Gambians suffered political persecution, a lack of freedom of opinion and the press, and the dictator's hatred of homosexuality, which he even wanted to make punishable by death.

Therefore, many male and relatively few female Gambians embarked upon the very difficult route to Germany via land and water upon themselves, which frequently ended fatally. The West Africans were primarily allocated to Baden-Wuerttemberg, where they had limited prospects.

Fortunately, the dictatorship was voted out peacefully, though many people in The Gambia adore the former dictator, as they consistently tell me when I am there. A very positive experience during my visits to The Gambia now is that the people speak more openly and critically - also regarding the new regime - which was previously impossible.

Regrettably, the transformation from a dictatorship to a democracy takes a very long time, therefore this process is far from being completed. Nevertheless, The Gambia is now regarded - from a German point of view - as being safe enough under the new president Adama Barrow that the people from the small West African country are being sent back there again. The term „return“ („Rückführung“) here is a synonym for deportation.

With this preface, I would like to especially thank the Fluechtlingsrat Baden-Wuerttemberg and the many regional associations, which advocate for Gambians day after day, for their service and commitment.

Also, I would like to thank all additional volunteers, not only in Baden-Wuerttemberg, where a particularly significant number of people from The Gambia reside, but also in the rest of the Federal Republic, who advocate for those without any kind of perspective.

It is also noteworthy to mention how many entrepreneurs in Germany advocate for exactly these people, who come from The Gambia and can only be employed under complicated conditions. In countless conversations with entrepreneurs, they describe how many positive experiences they have had with young people from The Gambia. I meet regularly with business representatives and receive a good overview of the current situation. People who come from The Gambia are especially welcomed in patient care professions and the manufacturing industry.

In comparison, it is interesting to note that young Africans in The Gambia, when they have a job, often earn just € 30 per month, which is not sufficient to support a family.

Which raises the question as to what extent Germany can utilize this potential, in order to counter both the shortage of skilled workers and demographic change. Many apprenticeship positions remain vacant, which could, in the truest sense, be filled with life by young Gambians.

Dr. Georg Bouché

Honorary Consul of the Republic of The Gambia

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Introduction

By Julian Staiger

Translated from German by Uli Henning

This booklet seeks to provide information about the current situation in The Gambia. The authors describe and analyze the political and social situation with regard specific topics. To ensure the most up-to-date analysis and quality, all articles are written by Gambian (and not foreign) experts. We make no claim to completeness, but our aim was to shed light on certain individual subjects in more detail.

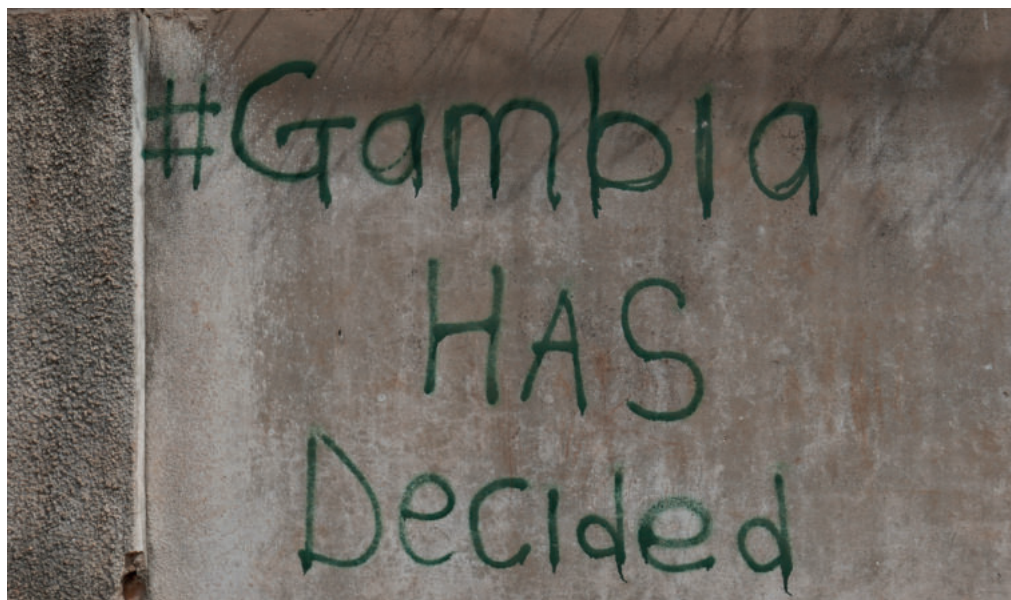
For the German readers, we would like to give some basic information about The Gambia, which are helpful in the classification of some articles: In The Gambia, family structures have a very important meaning and a life „outside“ the family is hardly possible. In addition, the size of the country should be considered. The Gambia has a little less than two million inhabitants. Thus, there is almost no possibility to stay undetected anywhere within the country.

At the end of 2016, the Gambian people achieved a „democratic miracle“ and, against all odds, voted out the despotic ruler Yahya Jammeh. He is responsible for a wide range of human rights violations. Jammeh acknowledged his electoral defeat following heavy military pressure (by the West African Union) and now lives in exile in Equatorial Guinea. Jammeh's rule and the time of change are not the focus of this booklet, but will be mentioned in many chapters as they determine the current situation. The detailed report „How to topple a dictator: the rebel plot that freed the Gambia“ in the newspaper The Guardian is recommended reading for anyone interested in this subject.

In Germany, The Gambia is treated primarily under the aspect of „refugees and migration“. It should be noted at this point that migration within The Gambia and neighboring countries is normal. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has traditionally always been a confederation of open borders.

The role of European countries is not the main focus of this brochure. However, their policy and perspective must be taken into account when analyzing the situation in the Gambia. The Federal Agency for Civic Education in Germany (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) has published an introduction to these topics under the title „(Post)kolonialismus und Globalgeschichte“ – „(Post) Colonialism and Global History“. The book „Postkoloniale Perspektiven von People of Color auf Rassismus, Kulturpolitik und Widerstand in Deutschland“ („Postcolonial perspectives of People of Color on racism, cultural politics and resistance in Germany“), edited by Kien Nghi Ha, Nicola Lauré al-Samarai and Sheila Mysorekar, explores these topics in more depth and is of particular interest for the German context.

The TED talk „The danger of a single story“ by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is also relevant in this context. A current analysis of European politics (including) on the African continent is provided by Christian Jakob and Simone Schlindwein under the title „Diktatoren als Türsteher Europas“ („dictators as doormen of Europe“). We thank everyone involved in creating this booklet. In addition to the authors, especially the people who supported us voluntarily should be thanked: Nyima Jadama for advice and support in contacting authors and Diana Siedler, Heike Gerlach, Marlene Popp, Juliane Gräbener-Müller, Sofia Garcia Slamal, Uli Henning, Sarah Dreßler, Stephan De Maria, Marion Kolb and Annemie Schäfer for the translation of the texts. The brochure would not be possible without the financial support of the Center for Development-related education of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Württemberg, the Evangelical Church in Baden and the Department of the World Church of the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart. Also big thank you to them.



The Hashtag „Gambia has decided“ became the motto of those who called on dictator Jammeh to accept his electoral defeat.

History of The Gambia

By Hassoum Ceesay

Prologue

The independent state of The Gambia dates to 1965 when it regained independence from colonial British rule. It became a Republic within the British Commonwealth in 1970. In 1994, an army coup ended 22 years of uninterrupted multiparty democratic rule. In December 2016, Gambians voted out the 22 years old regime of Yahya Jammeh, bringing to an end one of the cruelest regimes in Africa. As we go to press, The Gambia is being led by a Coalition government which had promise to guarantee the basic human rights to Gambians, especially right to speech and assembly.

Thus in a short period of 53 years, The Gambia has undergone British colonial oppression, three decades of political freedom but poor economy and nepotism from 1965 to 1994, two decades of despotism from 1994-2016 and a new era of openness.

But for us to really appreciate these varied episodes, we must start by looking at the history of the country as far back the days of the West African empires of Ghana, Mali and Kaabu whose extend included the borders of present day Gambia.

Pre-colonial states

The old West African state of Mali waxed in the 1200s and covered much of the present day countries of West Africa from the Atlantic coast to the borders of Sudan. Mali was known for its riches in gold and for the highly written about pilgrimage of one of its famous kings, Mansa Kankan Musa Keita. Between 1323-1325, Mansa Musa took a huge caravan of camels and horses across the Sahara desert to Makkah passing through Cairo where he gave out so much gold in gifts that the worth of the precious ore dropped for many years afterwards. On his return journeys, Mansa Musa passed through Andalusia and brought along architects who helped him build mosques and palaces and libraries at Timbuktu in present day Mali.

When Mali collapsed in the middle of the 1400s, there was a large movement of its ruling class called the Mande eastwards to present day The Gambia and Senegal. They came and tried to re-establish their lost glory. This they did by creating new polities such as Niumi, Wuli, Kaabu, Tumana and Wuropana. These states were part of the globalised world through trade and exchange with the European traders such as the British, Baltic Germans (Courlanders) and the French, with who African rulers like Mansa Demba Sonko of Niumi signed trade deals and collected taxes and purchased guns from. In return, the Mansa sold slaves, gum, timber and ivory to the European traders. The Baltic Germans occupied James island, the main slave departure point in the River Gambia in 1664, the first Gambia-German link.

The picture of the country at the beginning of the 19th century therefore was of a number of chiefdoms, organized on a territorial basis, with a recognized ruling family, or 'war-lord' in each. The territory generally contained people of different ethnic groups, e.g. Wolof and Fulbe, Mandinka and Fulbe; many migrants of various ethnic origins had settled near the river as traders or religious teachers (e.g. Jaxanke and Serahuli). But in the 19th century the traditional system was disrupted by a series of religious wars in which Muslim warriors sought to conquer and convert traditional rulers, who were generally non-Muslim. These wars fought by Muslim reformers like Foday Kabba destroyed the old ruling elite in almost the entire country; the few Chiefdoms which survived, were disrupted by the advent of British rule in the 1890s.

Before the declaration of the British Protectorate in 1894, the territory now called The Gambia comprised of independent states and kingdoms such as Pakala, Baddibu, Jimara etc ruled by kings and in some cases such as Niumi, queens. The British colonial presence was confined to Bathurst, Kombo St. Mary, the Ceded Mile around Essau and Georgetown on Maccarthy Island. The British had to pay royalties to the Gambian kings to secure trade rights for their companies and commerce firms. These pre-colonial kings were of course tyrannical in substance and in form.

Slavery

In The Gambia, the trading of slaves with Europeans began in 1456, when a few slaves were handed over to the Portuguese. 400 years of slave trading then followed. The Europeans, initially concerned with finding gold, were quick to realise there was a fortune to be made in slavery and installed the inhuman and racist system of slavery. Sometimes local kings participated in this system. However, they were not always diplomatic in their approach to acquiring people for slaves. Three Spanish ships sailed up the River Gambia in 1475 and kidnapped a local king and over 100 of his subjects. On the orders of the king of Spain, Ferdinand V., the king was later released and returned to his homeland but his subjects were sold off.

It is estimated in the Slaverydatabase.com that between 150,000 and 200,000 slaves were exported from James Island slave fort in The Gambia. Today, the fort, off the village of Juffure, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In 1807, after the abolition of slavery by the British Parliament, The Gambia again became a place to enforce theban against the diabolical trade. Fort Bullen and Six Gun Battery were erected in St. Mary's Island to police the mouth of the River by the British Royal Navy. So once a bastion of the inhuman trade, Gambia now became a point of enforcing the Abolition Act of 1807.

British colonial rule

A further disruptive influence on the traditional organization was the division of the land around the river between French and British spheres of influence. By an early treaty the British had been given the right to trade in the river, but nothing was stated about possession of the land on each bank. As the French moved south and wished to extend their influence to the river itself, an agreement had to be reached. There were no natural boundaries known to the politicians, and it was conceded that the British should be allowed territory extending 10 km from the river on each bank, with a wider distance being granted on the western side. Accordingly, lines were drawn by means of a ruler and compass, and surveyors sent out to mark the boundaries. This was done by marking various trees, and fixing boundary pillars at certain points. This meant that the boundaries often divided traditional “kingdoms”, placing part under British influence and part in French territory. Ruling families which were on the British side of the frontier were recognized by the Government and the people as rightful rulers, now called chiefs. In some cases the traditional ruler preferred to stay on the French side of the frontier, and the Government had to appoint their own “chief” on the British side.

Following the annexation of the Protectorate in 1894, these states were cut into smaller administrative portions called districts, headed by chiefs. The chiefs were the most important cog in the wheel of colonial Protectorate administration. They were traditional and political leaders; they dispensed local justice, collected taxes and ensured security within their jurisdiction. Both ‘districts’ and ‘chiefs’ were colonial creations.

The British ruled through the chiefs which made sense from their point of view, because the Colonial Office did not want to spend colonial revenue on a huge bureaucracy. The chiefs soon became the willing tools of colonial rule: they collected taxes, dispensed justice according to customary law, and were under strict orders to maintain law and order. This turned them into petty tyrants as they flexed their muscles in order to please the colonial Governor in Bathurst.

Truth told the British saw The Gambia colony as quaint and harmless. In 1925, the visiting Prince of Wales declared that the Gambia was ‘our oldest and most loyal colony’. The assembled chiefs gave him a standing ovation as the interpreter explained the statement. Therefore, the Gambia was spared a much more brutal and heavier handed rule as happened in other British colonies like Kenya.

Yet, The Gambia colony remained the poorest of the British colonies. Until the 1927s, the British did not build a single school. What passed for education was provided by the Catholic or Anglican missions in the form of one class and one teacher schools which provided only 7 years of basic school. To go beyond Standard 7, one had to get the money to pay fees to a school in Sierra Leone or Ghana. So terrible were the conditions in the colony that in 1943, US President Franklin D Roosevelt who passed through Bathurst, Gambia on his way to the Allied summit in Casablanca told British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill ‘take care of you this hell hole... It is squalid diseases ridden town (Bathurst)’. Life expectancy for much of the colonial period was 32 years. Malaria, cholera and TB killed hundreds yearly during the 1920s onwards due to limited health facilities.

At independence in 1965, there was less than 10 percent literacy! The low literacy explains why The Gambia became the last country in British West Africa to gain her independence.

Independence

The Gambia’s march towards nationhood was quite uneventful. There was no Mau Mau or Maji Maji rebellion as the British and the Germans faced in East Africa. The British simply paid heed to the voices of the few educated elite such as the crusading journalist Edward Francis Small (1891-1958) who used his newspaper columns to rally urban clerks and market women against colonial rule. Besides Mr. Small’s agitations, another catalyst in the struggle for independence was the strong participation of Gambians in the Second World War. When Hitler’s Vichy stooge regime was installed in Paris, France, in 1940, Dakar, in French Se-



Slaves used to have to live in cramped conditions in small huts (left) and were sometimes chained to the walls using rings like the one shown here by a tourist guide (right).

negal, was occupied by the Nazi surrogates. The British feared that the Vichy friendly regime in Dakar only 200 miles from Gambia's colonial capital, Bathurst, might attack at any moment. Therefore, 2000 Gambians were conscripted with the help of the chiefs to fight on the Allied sides. By mid 1943, hundreds of Gambians were in Burma fighting off the Japanese, and many more stationed at home to defend the tiny British colony from Vichy attack.

A decade earlier, in 1934, Gambians have had their second first ties with Germany: the German Lufthansa had been given a lease to build an aerodrome in Jeshwang, en kilometres outside of the capital Gambians Bathurst to use as a landing sites for its landplane service connecting with the flying boat service across the south Atlantic to Brazil. The Lufthansa soon became a household name in the poor colony as it gave full time employment to dozens of locals. The last Lufthansa Condor Fw 200 aircraft to land in Jeshwang flew out of Berlin in on 29 June 1939 on its way to Natal, South Africa.

In 1951 the first nationalist party, Gambia Democratic Party, was formed by a Anglican priest, Reverend John Colley Faye (1908-1986). By 1955, there were five political parties in the colony all calling for independence from Britain. First multi party elections under universal adult suffrage were held in 1960 and the Peoples' Progressive Party (PPP) came out with the most seats in the enlarged legislature. The British, still wanting to prevent the intentions of the political elite, gave their henchmen, the chiefs, 8 seats in the new parliament of 30 members. The chiefs, eager to protect their privileges, were not keen to have the British leave.

Following a series of constitutional talks in London in 1961 and 1964, the British gave a date for full independence. The lingering issue of what relations with the neighbouring Senegal should be was in fact the only stumbling block towards independence. When Senegal's president Leopold Senghor was assured that the leaders taking Gambia into independence were not Communists, he did not raise any objection to Gambia becoming free on 18 February 1965.

After independence

At independence, the country had less than 10 university graduates which is why the British civil servants and technicians remained at their posts for another decade as the new government struggled to have qualified Gambians take up the jobs of the departing Brits. This careful disengagement is what may have saved the country from collapse soon after independence. Another thoughtful move by the leader at independence Sir Dawda Jawara was to reject the one party system which was the vogue at the time in Africa. He organized regular multi party elections from 1965 onwards and the Gambia remained the only country in West Africa to run regular multi party elections with a free press and with no political prisoners. This smooth record of respect for human rights and rule of law endeared Jawara to the West and they gave him aid which became the lifeline of the country which had no export except groundnuts. The British built schools; the French upgraded

the telephone network. The West Germans were very generous to the PPP government: they provided potable water to hundreds of villages, started the community development project in the remote Upper River Region, and helped to train forestry experts. In 1979, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) unanimously voted The Gambian capital re-named Banjul in 1973 as the capital of Human Rights in Africa. In 1980 listeners to the BBC African Service voted The Gambia as one of the most peaceful countries in the world. The few writers in the country were free enough to publish a semi-annual literary journal called Ndaanan, Wolof for champion! Musical groups like Super Eagles and Ifanbondi entertained the tourists arriving in their hundreds from Germany and Scandinavia. In fact, the country was so quiet and calm that it still did not have an army.

But what Jawara's regime won in plaudits for good governance, it failed to get the economy right and corruption remained a huge problem. The 1973 oil crises and the droughts in the Sahel in the middle 1970s destroyed the fabric of the economy which led to massive dislocation of youths from the villages to the towns in search of non-existent jobs. Many young people also emigrated to Germany, Sweden and Libya to work there, thus supporting the European economic upswing. Since today's visa requirement did not exist, this was relatively unproblematic. This was the first wave of migration. The dozens who went to Libya got embroiled in Colonel Gaddafi's revolutionary fervor and found themselves in ideological and military institutes. In 1981, some of them returned home to make a coup against the Jawara regime. It was crushed with the help of the Senegal army and British SAS.

Jawara responded by creating an army and getting closer to Senegal in the ill-fated Senegambia confederation. When Senegal left the confederation as it was costing too much to maintain, Jawara was left with an army he did not know what to do with as there were few experienced officers to run the 300 men army. He brought Nigerians Colonels to head the army who must have impressed upon their men the value in soldiers seizing power from civilians.

The onset of terror: July 22 1994

On 22 July 1994, a posse of five lieutenants seized power and brought to an end the 32 year old Jawara regime. Gambians did not celebrate the coup nor did they condemn it loudly. Already, Gambians had seen the misery of war and corruption in Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone brought about by army coups. They prayed that the new military junta would be an exception. They were to be disappointed.

As early November 1994, the first massacre of army officer suspected of opposing the new junta took place. In the following June, the Finance Minister Koro Ceesay was hacked to death by soldiers under the order of the junta who were irked when the young minister refused to give them monies loaned from China. Soon journalists were being jailed or disappeared. Newspapers, some of them in operations since 1965 were shut. Cabinet reshuffles became a daily affair. The man behind this wave of terror was

the coup leader Lt. Yahya Jammeh, who had become head of state on 22 July 1994.

In 1996, he forced his name into the ballot at the elections he was coerced to call elections by Western donors; he rigged the vote to remain in power. He changed into civilian clothes, added titles to his name and became the uncontested despot of Banjul. Through his hit squad called the 'jungullers', any perceived opponent risked death or years in jail. In 2007, he banned youths from playing summer football matches; he asked them to spend their free time to work in his over 200 farms instead. He encouraged FGM, and warn the state media which were firmly under his grip and covered his days ad infinitum not to air any message against the genital cutting of girls.

He worked hard to isolate The Gambia so that he would escape scrutiny for his harsh human rights record; he removed The Gambia from the Commonwealth in 2012; in 2013, he broke diplomatic relations with Taiwan for long the source of the few funds coming into his cash strapped government. Now bereft of funds, he resorted to looting the Central Bank and blaming everybody, especially the youth for the country's trouble. He courted Iranian and Gulf States money by unilaterally declaring The Gambia an 'Islamic Republic' in late 2015, and intended to start amputating errant youths.

In response, hundreds of youth began to leave for Europe through the Sahara and across the Mediterranean sea. They saw no future for them in their country; it was bad enough to be poor but to add oppression to such poverty was just unbearable. As he filled up his jails with civil servants and technocrats, whole extended families were thus deprived of bread winners and so more people fled the grip of the miserable despot as refugees.

This is why Gambians now stranded in refugee camps in various European countries such as Germany should be seen more as Eritreans fleeing political repression of the worst kind Africa has ever seen than as economic migrants. Even the educated elite had fled Jammeh's misrule not to speak of the semi educated rural youth. As his misrule gained momentum, the country became poorer (deprived of foreign aid) and the youth got more hopeless and left in droves towards Europe.

Conclusion: searching for solutions outside

In January 2017 when Jammeh who had refused to accept his defeat at the polls in 2016 fled under military pressure from the ECOWAS. The new government under president Adama Barrow has steered a new course regaining bit by bit some of the lost glory of the country. The country's isolation under Jammeh has ended with her return to the Commonwealth and recently high profile visitors to Banjul include the German president, the British foreign secretary and as we write, the Belgian deputy prime minister is in Banjul.

But the government faces multitude challenges. The youth need to be empowered with skills to enable them earn their living at home; civil society should be strengt-

hened to ensure that basic human rights are respected by this and subsequent governments. Tyranny should never be allowed to take root again in The Gambia.

Hassoum Ceesay is a Gambian historian and heritage manager. He currently works at The Gambia National Museum, Banjul.

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The building of the National Assembly in Banjul.

Civil and political rights

By Madi Jobarteh

Introduction

The hallmark of the 22-year dictatorship of the former dictator Yahya Jammeh's regime was the blatant abuse of human rights and disregard of the rule of law.¹ This has generated a culture of impunity where State agents particularly security personnel could arbitrarily arrest, detain and torture or cause a citizen to disappear or kill with impunity.² This situation had therefore cultivated a climate of fear in which citizens faced life and death situations every day as they decided to either obey or challenge the regime. That notwithstanding, Gambians finally voted out the dictatorship in the 1 December 2016 presidential elections but not without undergoing a stiff political impasse following the rejection of the results by Jammeh.³ For 60 days, the country was stuck in a stalemate that had triggered diplomatic intervention by the international community with a threat of military action to force Jammeh to concede to the will of the people. The impasse prompted the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to move the president-elect Adama Barrow out of The Gambia for safety reasons and to have him sworn-in in Dakar, Senegal, on 19 January 2017.⁴ A few days later on January 23 Yahya Jammeh finally left The Gambia to seek asylum in Equatorial Guinea.⁵

Background

In its 22-year misrule, The Gambia first witnessed a mass uprising on 10 and 11 April 2000⁶ when The Gambia Stu-

dents Union sought to submit a petition to the vice president, at the time Isatou Njie Saidy, to demand justice for the rape of a schoolgirl by paramilitary personnel at a sports meeting at the Independence Stadium in Bakau (10 kilometres away from Banjul) and the killing of another schoolboy, Ebrima Barry, by fire service officers in the semi-urban town of Brikama (about 40 kilometres from Banjul). As the students assembled to proceed to the office of the vice president, they were met with the full force of well-armed paramilitary contingent in Kanifing. What ensued was a direct confrontation and shooting that resulted in the death of 16 schoolchildren including a Red Cross volunteer and a three-month old baby with many more sustaining injuries.

The incident in Kanifing then generated protests across the country, which were quelled with a heavily brutal crackdown by both the police and the military. In several towns such as Essau, Barra, Farafeni, Brikama and Janjanbureh in the regions, scores of schoolchildren were shot and injured while hundreds more have been detained and tortured for weeks. Eighteen years later, tens of survivors are either wheelchair-bound or on crutches and generally experiencing various forms of pain and disability.

The second time Gambians decided to stage a peaceful protest was sixteen years later, on 14 April 2016, when Solo Sandeng, a youth leader of the largest opposition party UDP, demonstrated for electoral reforms in downtown Kanifing (the biggest city in The Gambia) at Westfield together with a dozen activists.⁷ Naturally the group was

met with a barrage of paramilitary forces that arrested all of them immediately. Within 24 hours it became known that Solo had been tortured to death and hurriedly buried in an obscure grave in the coastal village of Tanji. The rest of his colleagues were subjected to severe torture including sexual violence.⁸

The April 14 protest triggered the leadership of his party to march to the nearest police station the next day, April 15, to demand his body, dead or alive. But even before they reached the station, they were also met with severe police crackdown. The party leader Ousainou Darboe and tens of his executive members and supporters were detained at the central prisons pending charges a few weeks later.⁹ Today, two years after that protest, about five of Solo's colleagues have also died due to injuries from torture while many more are sick or in severe pain.

That mass arrest of the party leadership, supporters and citizens generally therefore gave rise to widespread demands for the opposition to coalesce for the December 2016 presidential election. After failing in many attempts in the past to form an opposition coalition, it became clear to everyone that only with a total opposition coalition could Gambians democratically remove the dictatorship. This realisation is informed by the fact that the regime was involved in electoral malpractices including interfering with the electoral commission in its favour amidst other widespread violations. In response Gambians had sought all means to remove the regime to no avail including the use of armed violence that over the past two decades the country witnessed several coup attempts as well as armed insurrections.¹⁰ Notable armed attacks to overthrow the regime came in 1996 in Farafeni¹¹, 1997 in Kartong¹² and 2014 in Banjul¹³ where attackers (comprising former sol-

diers living abroad or Gambians serving in the US Army, with support from serving Gambian soldiers) actually entered State House in Banjul as Pres. Jammeh was out of the country, but fatally repelled. Several were caught and summarily executed¹⁴ while many more were detained, tortured and then court martialled and sentenced to several years in jail.

The dictatorship did not only violently suppress civil and political rights, but as a consequence of that it also severely undermined the social and economic rights of Gambians. The blatant confiscation of private and community lands, properties and businesses by Pres. Jammeh was widespread and pervasive.¹⁵ Furthermore, the president also claimed to have a cure for HIV/AIDS¹⁶, infertility, diabetes and many other diseases or health conditions for which scores of citizens were subjected to his treatment program leading to many deaths and high morbidity. The incidence of corruption¹⁷ and political patronage were entrenched to the point that in practice there was no distinction between what belonged to the president and what belonged to the State. On many occasions, Jammeh had claimed to own the University of The Gambia, or the cameras of the national television or the vehicles that ministries use as well as claiming to be rich for many generations to come. Because of the way and manner he had personalised state institutions and resources, public institutions lacked the independence, professionalism and space to efficiently deliver public goods and services while citizens lacked the space to hold them to account, thus further aggravating the socio-economic conditions of the people. By 2016, The Gambia was one of the least developed countries of the world¹⁸ where 60% of the population live in poverty and one of the leading migrant producing nations in Africa.¹⁹



The African Commission on Human Rights meeting in The Gambia, November 2017. The African Charter of Human Rights is also known as the "Banjul Charter".

Enter the New Dispensation

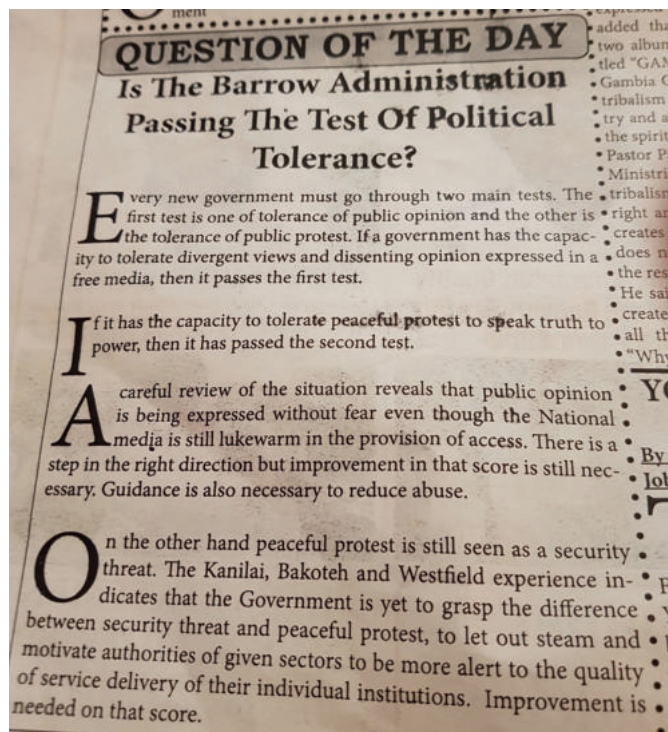
The government of President Adama Barrow came on the heels of a longstanding culture of abuse with scores of victims cutting across all strata of the society. Consequently, the expectations and hope with which the people received the new dispensation was immensely huge and high. Even before he took office, Candidate Barrow had said in his manifesto and campaigns that within six months of taking office he would repeal or reform all laws that infringe on fundamental rights and freedoms, undermine democracy and limit popular participation.²⁰

Since January 2017, there has been a more open space in The Gambia where citizens actively enjoy their civil and political rights.²¹ Citizens have been able to speak out openly. Many more citizens continue to be bluntly critical, especially on social media, against the decisions and actions of the government in many ways.

However, while there continues to be a more open and free space for the exercise of civil and political rights, various decisions and actions by the new government have raised concern for the protection of human rights. For example, since taking office Barrow has not yet repealed or reformed any of the draconian laws he had promised to change during his campaign. Rather, in November 2017, the Supreme Court of The Gambia went ahead to certify that the Public Order Act (POA) was in line with the constitution.²² Since 2009, the POA has been challenged for being unconstitutional because it contains provisions that give power to the Inspector General of Police to either grant or deny permit for protest. Observers and human rights activists had condemned the POA because it gives immense powers to the police that override the limits imposed by the constitution guaranteeing the right to peaceful assembly and demonstration. In fact, the Public Order Act was one of the laws targeted in Barrow's manifestation for reform.

The Public Order Act was one piece of legislation that the former regime had consistently used to clamp down on citizens for merely exercising their civil liberties including engaging in political activity. It was because of the POA that in 2010 the opposition UDP's campaign manager Femi Peters (late) was jailed for one year for organizing a political rally in Banjul without a police permit to use a public address system.²³ The arrests and murders by paramilitary forces described above were also justified by the POA. In May 2017, Kartong and Gunjur²⁴ residents protested against the Chinese fishmeal company accusing it of polluting the environment with bad odour and dumping dead fish on the beach and liquid waste into the ocean. In Kololi²⁵ (a neighbourhood in the Kanifing Municipality) the youths there also staged a peaceful demonstration against estate developers who allocated community lands during the dictatorship. Since March 2017 residents in Bakoteh²⁶ in the Kanifing Municipality have also been protesting at various times and in front of the mayor's office against the longstanding dumpsite that releases hazardous fumes into the surrounding communities.²⁷

Following violent riots in May 2017 by the youths in the

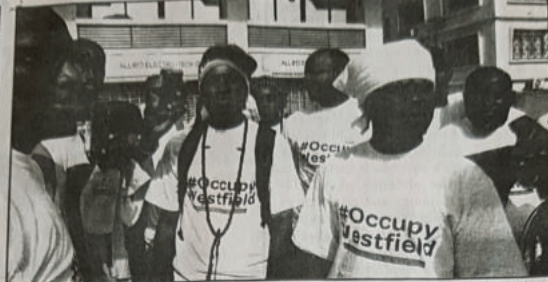


Unlike during the time of Jammeh's rule, newspapers can comment on the government's work in a more critical manner.

communities of Farato²⁸ (about 30km from Banjul) against the demolition of homes and in June 2017 in Kanilai²⁹ (home village of the former dictator Jammeh) against the presence of ECOWAS military intervention forces in the community, it has now been noticed that the government appears to deny any form of protests. This came first in November 2017 when a youth movement, #OccupyWestfield, sought a permit to protest against the poor electricity supply in the country. The police initially gave the permit only to withdraw it within 24 hours.³⁰ Similarly in January 2018, a political science lecturer at the University of The Gambia, Dr. Ismaila Ceesay, was 'invited' to the police headquarters for questioning for comments he had made in a newspaper interview.³¹ It turned out that when Dr. Ceesay arrived at the station, he ended up being detained overnight and then charged for 'incitement to violence'. Following a public outcry mainly by students and The Gambian civil society³², the police were forced to release him and drop the charges. If these incidents are anything to go by clearly show that the open and free space for human rights in The Gambia at the moment may not last long.

Even if the government had passed other laws that broadly speak to the promotion and protection of human rights there have been instances of inconsistencies that give cause for concern. For example, in December 2017 the government passed new laws setting up the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission, the Constitutional Review Commission and the National Human Rights Commission.³³ These moves have been welcomed by activists, human rights organizations, development partners and citizens generally. However, there have been concerns that the government has been selective in dealing with major human rights issues of the past. While the government was commended for opening investigations and

Building The New Gambia Protest is What Gives Birth to Independence, Democracy and Development



By: Madi Jobarteh

What the history of the world has taught us is that there has never been freedom and progress in any society without protest. Protest is a tool of empowerment in the hands of ordinary citizens to participate, influence and determine the kind of society they want. It is protest that enables citizens to check public

imaginary body of citizens". These petitions were followed with various strikes in Banjul until the man had to be exiled eventually to Senegal.

It was those protests that forced the colonialists to open up and allow the inclusion of Gambians in the Banjul Legislative Council in the 1940s with EF Small being the first elected public officer. It was these gains in the Gambia coupled with protests in Ghana, Sierra

protect the right to protest.

The right to protest is a means through which many other rights are manifested. When citizens assemble in one place to express themselves in whatever form it means they are protesting. When citizens petition or go to court or occupy public spaces they are protesting. When citizens come together to form associations to demand, advocate or criticize or campaign for or against issues,

today. Democracy is not achieved just in one day once and for all. Democracy is not a straight, smooth quiet path. Democracy is a process and a vehicle through which citizens participate effectively in the governance of their country to better their lives. Governance is not only about the government. Rather governance

A newspaper article by the author expressing sympathy for the #occupywestfield movement.

prosecution into the murder of Solo Sandeng, many are concerned why similar action was not taken in the case of the April 10 and 11 students massacre or the murder of Deyda Hydara among others?

What is even more concerning to many has been the fact the new government has failed to repeal the Indemnity Act which was enacted in 2001 to exonerate public officials and security officers for their decisions and actions in the student massacre. The April 10 and 11 Commission of Inquiry held between May and August 2000 identified several officials and officers by name and rank for being responsible for the shooting of the students. Instead of prosecuting or disciplining those responsible as recommended by the Commission, the government rather went ahead to indemnify their actions by describing the incidents as a state of emergency. Thus, when the new government came to power, it was generally expected that one of the first laws to undergo repeal would be the Indemnity Act to allow for the prosecution of perpetrators and compensation of victims. This has not happened yet.

In addition to the April 10 and 11 incident, there were also other incidents that many were of the opinion that the new government would open investigations into them in order to ensure justice. Some of these incidents include the mass killing of soldiers in November 1994 in the wake of an attempted coup³⁴, or the burning to death of the former finance minister Koro Ceesay³⁵ in June 1995, as well as the shooting to death of veteran journalist Deyda Hydara³⁶ in December 2004 including many cases of enforced disappearances and summary executions such as in August 2012 when nine inmates in the country's major prison were killed.³⁷

President Adama Barrow continues to speak positively about the protection of human rights. He has expressed his desire on many occasions that civil liberties will remain

respected by his government. Marking his first anniversary in office, he said his government had removed the phenomenon of 'management by fear'³⁸ by creating the enabling environment for the exercises of civil and political rights.

Conclusion

The civil and political rights situation in The Gambia today is certainly better than what it was during the dictatorship. But as long as the draconian laws that infringe on civil and political rights remain in the statutes and the necessary constitutional and institutional reforms are not conducted, especially among security institutions, there remains the possibility that Gambians may encounter an erosion of their human rights. So far, the government is not demonstrating the necessary urgency and commitment to these reforms. While the right political statements continue to be made by the leadership, commensurate practical steps have not yet been taken to not only refrain from infringing on rights but to also expand rights. Apart from the Supreme Court ruling on the POA and the denial of permits to protesters, there is now a growing number of police checkpoints around the country reminiscent of the dictatorship.

Some analysts have contended that political expediency or lack of experience or poor leadership or the combination of all seem to have engulfed or preoccupied the new government, while others have noted that, after all for many politicians at the end of the day it is all about seeking and maintaining power by any means. Time will tell.

Madi Jobarteh is a civil society activist, political analyst and currently works for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy as the Country Representative for The Gambia.

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Delivering justice and healing a nation through truth telling

The Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission

by Sait Matty Jaw

Since assuming office in January 2017 with the backing of the ECOWAS Military Intervention in The Gambia (ECOMIG), President Adama Barrow has initiated a number of transitional justice processes posed to deliver justice, heal and reconcile the divided nation, address impunity and put in mechanisms to prevent recurrence. A key component of this broad transitional justice program is the establishment of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC). The TRRC was established in December 2017 and launched in October 2018, to “investigate and establish an impartial historical record of the nature, causes and extent of violations and abuses of human rights committed during the period July 1994 to January 2017 and to consider the granting of reparations to victims and for connected matters” in order to “promote healing and reconciliation, respond to the needs of the victims, address impunity and prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered by making recommendations for the establishment of appropriate preventive mechanisms including institutional and legal reforms.”³⁹

Truth Commissions have been established in many post-conflict countries in Africa. The most notable Truth Commission is the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was established, in the post apartheid democratic setting. Other countries that have had Truth Commissions include Liberia, Rwanda, Uganda and Sierra Leone, amongst others. However, unlike The Gambia where the establishment of the Truth Commission was a campaign promise, the establishment of a Truth Commission in most of these other countries came out of a political agreement or peace accord.

Although recently launched in The Gambia, the establishment of the TRRC has been met with varying opinions from the citizenry. A recent Afrobarometer survey (2018)

suggests that the TRRC is suffering from weak public trust. The push back by Jammeh's loyalists also poses a challenge for the Commission as they regard the process as a “witch-hunt against Jammeh”. This article therefore, seeks to examine the current state of The Gambia's TRRC with a view to look at the opportunities and challenges to its successful implementation. The article suggests that if the TRRC is to succeed, it must be seen to be independent, fair and transparent in the delivery of justice and must be victim-centred.

Background to the TRRC

The outcome of the December 1st presidential election ended the two decades “iron rule” of Yahya Jammeh and ushered in a new political dispensation led by the less known and inexperienced businessman, Adama Barrow. During Jammeh's two-decades rule, many human rights violations ranging from enforced disappearances, unlawful arrests (abductions), unlawful killings, torture, sexual and gender based violence, persecution of real or perceived political opponents, and detention without trial etc. were reported to have characterized The Gambia. In a recent Afrobarometer survey, one in four (28%) Gambians say they or a member of their family suffered one form of human rights violations under the past regime.⁴⁰ Journalists and human rights activists were constantly arrested and political opponents jailed for their divergent opinions. Such a system eroded the ability of the state to deliver justice as the judicial system as well as all other arms of the government was under the control of Jammeh. The repressive nature of Jammeh's rule forced many Gambians into exile forcing some to take the deadly illegal route to Europe commonly known as the “back way”.



Many victims of the Jammeh regime would like to see the former dictator and his associates put on trial.

In the more than five decades of Gambia's political history there have never been an electoral turnover through the ballot box except in December 2016, when Adama Barrow backed by a coalition of seven political parties and one independent candidate shockingly defeated the incumbent dictator Yahya Jammeh. The period leading to the December 1st election was characterized by popular protest demanding for electoral reforms. In April 2016, Solo Sandeng, the Youth Mobilizer of the United Democratic Party (UDP) (leading opposition party at the time and member of the current coalition government), led other youth from his party to demand for electoral reforms. He was arrested and tortured to death by Jammeh's notorious National Intelligence Agency (NIA) accused (along with the "junglars")⁴¹ of enforcing the police state under Jammeh. The news of Solo's death in the hands of Jammeh's thugs sparked a new wave of protest led by Ousainou Darboe, leader of the UDP and later Vice President of The Gambia. Subsequently, Darboe and fifty other party members including senior executive members were arrested and arranged before the courts and sentenced to three years in prison. Although these events as well as Jammeh's massive crack down on dissent created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, they also gave impetus to opposition political parties to rally around a single candidate, if they were ever to defeat Jammeh.

In October 2016, seven opposition political parties⁴² and one independent candidate (Dr. Isatou Touray) with the financial backing of The Gambian diaspora agreed to form a coalition and Adama Barrow was elected as the independent presidential candidate following a convention. In a tri-legged race, Barrow was elected with more than 43% of the votes to Jammeh's 39% and Mama Kandeh the third candidate secured 17%. A week after conceding defeat, Jammeh made a "u-turn" rejecting the results of the election citing some alleged irregularities and creating a two-month political impasse. Consequently, with the joint support of ECOWAS, AU and UN, Jammeh was sent to exile in Equatorial Guinea. Barrow who was first sworn in at The Gambian Embassy in Dakar, Senegal, on January 19, 2017 returned from exile on January 26, 2017 to assume his presidency following Jammeh's departure on January 21, 2017.

Mandate

Part of the campaign promises of President Barrow and the coalition government was to usher in a transitional justice program that addresses past human rights abuses and reform state institutions to avoid recurrence. Hence, in December 2017, following public consultations, The Gambia government established the TRRC through the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission Act. The 11-member Commission is tasked to establish the true records of past human rights abuses under Jammeh from July 1994 to January 2017.

The TRRC as an independent body under the direction of eleven Commissioners selected through a participatory and inclusive process is mandated to uncover The Gam-

bia's recent past through a comprehensive and impartial process of public consultations, statement taking, and investigation. Within the initial two years operational mandate, the Commission is expected to provide victims and witnesses with an opportunity to narrate incidences of violations and abuses suffered. Such relations by the victims will be complimented by investigations and research so as to create an impartial historical record of the abuses under Jammeh's rule. Primarily, The Gambia's TRRC is mandated to do the following:

- to investigate human rights violations and abuses committed during the past 22 years of former president Jammeh's authoritarian rule;
- to foster social cohesion and encourage national reconciliation among Gambians;
- to address impunity;
- to recognize the rights and dignity of victims through the provision of appropriate reparations; and
- above all, to learn appropriate lessons in order to put in place effective mechanisms to prevent recurrence.

Although hearings are yet to commence, one can strongly argue that the TRRC has been fully constituted. All the Commissioners have been appointed and have all taken oaths in the recent launching. There is an established secretariat headed by Dr. Baba Galleh Jallow who is leading a dynamic team of mostly young people (more than 90%).

The TRRC will have to grapple with weak public institutions, presence of draconian laws as well as ethnic and other differences that have taken root within Gambian political discourse. Although their continues to be an more open and free space for the exercise of civil and political rights since the defeat of Jammeh, the new government has failed to repeal some of the draconian laws that were used by Jammeh to abuse human rights. For instance, the Public Order Act, which was constantly used by the Jammeh regime to clamp down on citizens exercising their rights, is still in existence. This was the same law the Jam-



„We will never introduce dictatorship in this country“, was the promise of the army officer Yahya Jammeh after taking power in a coup in 1994 – a promise which was not kept.

meh regime used against the UDP leadership who were subsequently sentenced to three years jail term. In fact, the same law has been used by the current regime to deny #OccupyWestfield (a youth movement protesting against poor electricity supply) permit to protest citing “security risks”. Nevertheless, there have been efforts since 2009 to challenge the constitutionality of the Act as it contains provisions that allow the Inspector General of Police to grant and deny permit for protest. However, a recent Supreme Court ruling declared the Act constitutional amidst human rights activists and observer condemnation of the ruling, maintaining the inconsistency of the Act with the Constitution.

Equally, the new government has failed to repeal the Indemnity Act (2001) enacted to exonerate security officers involved in the shooting of student demonstrators in 2000 that killed 14 students and wounded several. Instead of acting according to the inquiry report, of the Commission established after the demonstrations, the Jammeh regime enacted the Indemnity Act to protect those security officers indicted by the Commission’s report.

The existence of these two draconian laws amidst the implementation of the TRRC can be very problematic. On one hand, the presence of these laws is already creating mixed feelings within some quarters of The Gambian society about the “Never again” campaign of the TRRC. Within the new dispensation, protesters have been denied the right to protest thus curtailing their civil and political rights. Secondly, the presence of the Indemnity Act may derail justice of the Victims of April 10 and 11-student protest, who are already threatening to boycott the TRRC if the government fails to address their ailing health condition. There is an urgent need for government to repeal these draconian laws as it has the potential to invade citizen’s civil and political rights but more so impede on the TRRC’s work.

The TRRC is also grappling with other challenges such as weak public trust and lack of support by opposition political parties as well as ethnic and other differences that have characterized The Gambia in the post Jammeh era. The recent Afrobarometer survey suggests that the TRRC must pay attention to public trust. Less than half of Gambians say they trust the commission “somewhat” (12%) or “a lot” (34%). Twelve per cent of Gambians say they trust the TRRC “not at all” or just a little (13%) while almost three in every Gambia say they don’t know or refuse to answer”. The Afrobarometer (2018) survey also shows that even though trust is weak, Gambians have expressed high and diverse expectations from the TRRC with 34% of the population expecting an outcome of national peace, reconciliation, forgiveness and healing, accurate record of human rights abuses of the past regime (30%); prosecution and punishment of persons found guilty of crimes against humanity (28%); help victims and their families to overcome long-held pain (16%); return seized property to victims or immediate families (12%) and offer token monetary compensation to victims whose rights were abused by agents of the state (8%); Offer non-monetary compensation such as free education or medical treatment for victims

or immediate families (5%); and organise proper burial for victims, including the disappeared (2%) (Afro Barometer Survey, 2018).

The TRRC also lacks the support of opposition political parties. For instance, the APRC party insists that it is a “witch-hunt against Jammeh”, while the GDC has no clear position on the TRRC. The GDC National Youth Mobilizer, MC Cham, thinks that the TRRC is a good initiative provided it delivers justice to the victims. The TRRC is also suffering from silent views from the coalition members as some favour reconciliation, whilst others are silent on the process. Hence, there is a need to have all political parties on board if the TRRC wants to reconcile Gambians and build a cohesive society based on democratic principles and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Although Gambian ethnic groups have lived harmoniously, the level of discontent and uncertainty in transitions are widely felt as a result of the legacy of poor governance and weak institutions. The high levels of inter-ethnic tensions, and weak state-society relations particularly on the security sector may serve as major hindrance to achieving national peace and security, which is a key pillar of Gambia’s Truth Commission. Also the presence of perceived perpetrators in government has a potential to weaken the TRRC’s efforts. Victims particularly those that were sexually abused may not find the courage to come forward. Equally, the culture of silence within Gambian society can be another barrier for successful process of ascertaining the truth about past violations.

Notwithstanding, the TRRC with its promise of justice and “never again” hopes to holistically deal with the legacy of the past regime. There is strong political will on the side of government to see the TRRC and the international community’s response particularly the UN to support the process. The failure or success of many Truth Commissions comes as a result of implementing recommendations. President Barrow has reiterated and committed to prosecuting individuals found guilty of gross human rights violations. These commitments on the side of government suggest that one primary outcome of the TRRC will be prosecution. Six out of ten Gambians agree that perpetrators of human rights violation under Jammeh should be prosecuted irrespective of the outcome of the TRRC.

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⁴² UDP, PDOIS, NCP, PPP, NRP, GMC, GPDP

Money transfers from family members living abroad are an important source of income for many Gambians.



The migration dilemma

By Mustapha K. Darboe

The Gambia's young democracy has brought hope for the future but prosperity is still a distant dream for many of her young people.

With an unsustainable public debt at 130% to GDP ratio, close to half of the population below poverty line and 38% youth unemployment rate, frustration and impatience is crippling in among its young people.

"We have come back because of democracy. We were thinking things will change but the only change here is more freedom of speech," said Mustapha Sallah, a boy in his late twenties. Sallah was among the young people who voluntarily returned from Libya by International Organisation for Migration in early 2017. With his colleagues, Sallah formed an association of returnees that goes around sensitizing people on the dangers of the Mediterranean Route. "Young people are frustrated," he said.

Irregular migration of youths to Europe has been the most popular subject for Gambia's toughest policy debates for the past decade. And Sallah's story is one too many. Meanwhile, the 2006 risky boat journey on the Atlantic Ocean from The Gambia to Spain has reemerged in 2018 after a whole year of inactivity. Irregular migration has stalled in 2017.

"There is a huge risk that 'back-way' (irregular migration) can pick up again fast and possibly it could be very deadly," said Lamin Darboe, the executive director of National Youth Council (NYC) of The Gambia. The NYC is the institution under The Gambia's youth ministry responsible for the development of young people.

Economic Sources of frustration

Aside from the struggling economy, The Gambia's agriculture that used to feed the rural poor has declined significantly in the past decade. The sector slumped from employing 70% of the population to 31% in a decade, according to Multi-dimensional Poverty and Inclusive Growth Report, a joint study by United Nations and Gambia government. Gambia has the highest level of rural-urban migration in Africa, with 58% of the population living in urban centres.

Meanwhile, from January 2017 to March 2018, 8, 681 Gambians were recorded as arriving in Europe by sea. They were the eighth largest nationality of the arrivals and comprised 4.7% of the total. In 2016, 12, 792 Gambians arrived in Italy and Spain by sea. Thus over 20, 000 Gambians have left their country for Europe since January 2016.

To assess the gravity of damage irregular migration did to Gambia, Action Aid, an international NGO, did a study on the phenomenon to help authorities design a policy to address it.

The findings of the study, which assessed two villages from both the south and the north bank of the Gambia river, was disturbing. The study found out that the populations of the two communities shrunk by hundreds in few years. In Njaba Kunda on the North Bank of the Gambia river, a village of 3, 600 people, 700 have left for Europe. And in the past three years, 23 people have died, many in the Mediterranean Sea. And in Bwiam on the South Bank 300 has left and 20 died while crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

EU support

Since the 2016 December both donor agencies and various countries felt the need to help the country's struggling economy.

The European Union announced it was going to release €11 million to support some youth empowerment programmes. The EU have also released €3.5 million to help International Organisation for Migration reintegrate Gambians that they have returned from Libya and other African countries.

"It was also because of lack of hope in this country under dictatorship we left and that was why we also came when there was a change," said Mustapha.

In 2017, IOM budgeted for 1,500 youths in their reintegration programme but ended up returning over 3,651.

"This is a three-year project and we were expecting 1500 returnees but in less than six months, we have had twice

that number," Pierre Jatta, reintegration assistance at the IOM said.

Frustration and sluggish growth

Gambia's economic growth figures have improved from 2.7 % in 2017 to 3.5% in 2018 but youths' despair hasn't move an inch.

Government and donor interventions have proven inadequate. The study by Action Aid said while the new government is committed to addressing challenges, not all of its policies, nor those of the donors, are positive. The report said some policies needed to reduce poverty are currently missing.

"The government needs to focus overwhelmingly on agriculture – where some 70% of Gambians earn their livelihoods – while donors – who have caused climate change – should be doing much more to address it in The Gambia and taking steps to fight the climate change," the report stated.

Darboe of NYC said the projects that the country has targeting the young people are very inadequate. "The youth unemployment rate in The Gambia is about 38%... Basically, that should be 400, 000 people or more and we are talking about projects that are targeting 5000 or even far less," Darboe said. "So there is a huge resource gap. And of course that will continue to be a huge pressure and even source of frustration for our youths."

Funding gaps

Currently, Gambia has two EU-funded projects that are directed at helping young people. One of them, the €11 million Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) being implemented



The Immigration Department is, among other things, responsible for issuing passports.

€3.9M migrant reintegration project signed

By Momodou Jawo

The European Union, the International Organisation for Migration and the Ministry of the Interior over the weekend signed the agreement to implement the project, "EU trust Fund-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration."

The three-year project is funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF). The project according to official sources is aimed at supporting 1,500 migrants to The Gambia to reintegrate into their communities of origin and to contribute to the strengthening of the government of The Gambia's capacity to provide sustainable reintegration support, including specialised assistance for vulnerable migrants.

Speaking at the signing ceremony the Interior Minister Mai Fatty assured the continued commitment of the government of The Gambia and his ministry in making sure that the project works as designed.

"The political will is there and that is why we as government take this very serious. We have thousands of our citizens in Europe whose future is not promising," he noted.

Minister Fatty added: "These people belong to this country and we must work hard and grow our economy and build a society that will encourage our young people to stay, by providing infrastructure, education and job opportunities for them".

The government, he went on, will work within the current draft that is being validated, adding that they want to see the number decline and to see opportunities up again.

Developments in migration policy in Europe are closely monitored in The Gambia.

by International Trade Center, aims to support 4000 youths in skills development and 4000 youths in entrepreneurship and access to finance. And YEP's €11 million is the entire project money including its administrative cost with some staff who are expatriates.

YEP has already trained 1531 in various skill areas such as construction, mobile repairs, tech and others, said Momodou Touray, the project's technical advisor and monitoring and evaluation specialist.

But like IOM, YEP is struggling to meet quarter of the demands for their trainings. "The need out there and the resources available is a huge gap... YEP is just €11 million. If you have to train every youth at a cost of \$250 to \$300, you cannot train up to 10, 000 people," said Touray.

Baboucarr Sallah, the project operations and finance officer, said sometimes they could only select 10% of the people who apply for their trainings because of limited resources.

Aside from the YEP and the IOM reintegration programmes, The Gambia's government have very limited resources to invest in youth empowerment policies. President Adama Barrow has announced on September 14 that his Government will dedicate D1.3 billion towards poverty eradication. It remains to be seen how youths related projects will benefit from this fund.

Shortfalls

Despite the good intentions, the projects that are currently being implemented by the ITC and the IOM are not without criticisms. According to the Action Aid study, criticism against the YEP is the fact that the country's key migration aid project is outsourced to an international NGO "coordinated by an expatriate" YEP is also criticized for disregarding the democratic education and political reconstruction of the country. Similar criticisms are leveled against the EU €3.5 million which is being managed by IOM.

But despite the inadequate funding and control by outside agencies of key migrant aid funds, some project areas

have failed. The IOM officials in The Gambia said they monitor their reintegration projects for returnees but their project in Salikenni which started last year has failed.

One of the benefactors of a poultry farm supported by the project, Demba Njie, said they were not given the adequate training and capital for the survival of the project. In a year, their poultry died. "We cannot afford the feed," Njie said.

The Gambian government and society are currently overwhelmed to integrate a higher number of deported people into society, as it has to solve a multitude of challenges. There is therefore a high risk that an increasing number of deportations could destabilize the country and thus prevent democratic reconstruction.



A poster advertises HIV counselling and testing.

Problems of The Gambia's health system

By Dr. Momodou A. I. Tekanyi

Introduction

The Gambia, like many other countries of the global south, is confronted with enormous health issues which include the infrastructural, management and clinical related issues. Non-communicable diseases like mental health, diabetes and hypertension are fast becoming front runners making it a burden on the country's health system which is further challenged with rampant corruption and mismanagement in the public offices.

Problems in the health system

Moreover, it's sad and unfortunate to say that the health service has been in a crawling state since independence with only limited improvements in the primary and secondary health care systems making the tertiary health service a continuous burden to the health ministry due to lack of medications and diagnostic facilities in the specialist hospitals. There is a big lack of readily available specialist doctors and facilities to manage cases that demand the need for specialist care which includes mental health as one of the most challenged departments of the country's health sector. This therefore often leads to the referral of most of the cases unmanageable in The Gambia to the neighboring Senegal, Europe and America which is only affordable to the afflu-

ent, meaning the poor end up dying on treatable diseases due to lack of means of pursuing overseas' treatment. This all leads to the higher frequency of hospital visits and increasing morbidity and mortality.

Financial obstacles of the health system

Additionally, this poor status of the country's health system, is being enabled by and continues to thrive on the heels of rampant corruption which is being championed by corrupt public officials that dwell daily on mismanaging and misusing the limited public funds provided for the advancement of the health system: The endemic corruption in the crippled health system faced with a lack of basic medical needs like drugs at the government health facilities thus leaving behind the burden of an increasing doctor-patient ratio. The consequence of this poor healthcare delivery service is the increasing incidence of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.

This thus makes proper and adequate healthcare service hardly available at the public hospitals for the poor and less-privileged while the services at the private facilities continue to be very expensive. And this is further challenged with the absence of a national healthcare insurance for the general citizenry and a concentration of doctors and services almost entirely in the urban parts of The Gambia.

Mental illness and Brain-Drain

Mental illness is a huge burden on the country's health system. It is confronted with numerous problems like the lack of adequate trained nursing and medical staffs and proper facilities like laboratory and other diagnostic services thus making the management of cases at the country's only mental hospital a mountain to climb. Moreover, this poor staffing issue is as a result of the absence of motivation and better incentives for the trained doctors and nurses willing to work in the area of mental health and as well the lack of opportunities for professional development for those already working there making an exodus of staffs a regular and an unbearable experience for the administration of the mental hospital. This "brain-drain" exists in the whole health-care sector in The Gambia as in other countries of the global south. Some of her home trained doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers travel abroad in search of professional training and/or greener pastures due to absence of an enabling environment

In addition to the issue of inadequate staffing like the unavailability of the services of psychiatrists and psychotherapists, there also exist the problems of lack of medications and limited counseling and sensitization services. The reluctance of patients, especially those who have been deported, to undergo psychological and psychiatric counseling is also based on deep-rooted cultural beliefs, which also contributes to the poor function of the country's only psychiatric hospital.

Risks of deportation

Another problem for the health system started with the forceful deportations, that could result to a huge blow on the country's health system. Enforced deportation itself as a process is often accompanied with enormous psychological trauma and emotional instability making it a need for the availability of proper and regular psychological and psychiatric services in the receiving countries in order to enable them attend to unforeseen emergencies. It is unfortunate to say that these services are highly lacking in The Gambia.

However, if the deportation is carried out as currently without taking due consideration of the lack of adequate and proper health measures to address these high psychological and psychiatric risks, the results will be very consequential with huge burden on the shoulders of these returnees, their families, the general population and the government at large. Those with psychological and psychiatric conditions will remain struggling with the disease burden due to lack of treatment means thus making it a potential for an increase in disease and poverty rates. Additionally, it is as well certain that some of these deportees will as a means of fetching for survival, take advantage of the poor security conditions to venture into criminal activities as a substitute to the lack of jobs. There is a serious risk of civil disobedience that will pose the country to possible internal insecurity.

Dr. Momodou A. I. Tekanyi is a Graduate Student in Public Health and Former Senior Medical Officer.



The King Fahad Mosque in Banjul.

More than five generations of peaceful coexistence

Islam and Christianity: The most common religions in The Gambia

By Talibeh Hydara

Prior to the advent of religion in The Gambia, there was a strong Old Order—a traditional rule of kings, which rumbled on for centuries.

This so-called Order would later be crumbled down by two new religions, Christianity in the 1400s and Islam in the 1900s, with the Arab traders and Christian missionaries spreading it across the Sahara.

Tracing back the advent of religion in The Gambia—chiefly Islam and Christianity—Hassoum Ceesay, a famous Gambian historian and director at the National Centre for Arts and Culture, said religion has been in The Gambia since time immemorial.

“Islam dates back to the 10th century brought through trade across the Sahara; later spread by Jihad in 1850 to 1900, which destabilised the Old Order of Kings, while Christianity dates to 1450s brought by Portuguese voyagers. “The first Christian burial was done on James Island [now Banjul, the capital] in 1456. Animism was common before Islam and Christianity and many Gambians remain eclectic as far as religion is concerned,” Mr. Ceesay said.

That is more than five hundred years ago and according to Mr. Ceesay, Muslims and Christians have since peacefully coexisted in The Gambia with barely any friction.

“There has been no hostility. Religious dialogue and to-

lerance have remained throughout the past four centuries. The relationship between Muslims and Christians has been excellent; intermarriages have ensured this. Also, the role of Christian schools where the first Gambian elite were educated, including Muslims, was fundamental. Christian schools remain popular until today,” Ceesay noted.

Mutual compromise

For those who follow strict preaching of Sharia (Islamic law), it is not acceptable for a Muslim woman to get married to a non-Muslim man. But, owing to the remarkable mutual understanding between the two religions, many Gambian Muslims have overlooked that religious injunction and freely intermarried. There are hundreds of households where the father is Christian and the mother is Muslim or vice versa, something unheard of in other predominantly Muslim countries around the world. Similarly, in strictly Islamic settings like Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Middle East, it is forbidden for a Muslim to convert to any other religion, with a punishment of death attached if the person refuses to revert after three days. The opposite is true in The Gambia, where Christians convert to Islam and vice versa without any severe punishment.

There are ordinarily Christian names like Anthony, Hen-



Inside a church in Banjul.

ry etc., who are Muslims after converting, while typical Muslim names like Musa are a bit common in the Christian community. All these are symbolic of social cohesion and religious tolerance in the tiny West African country with a population of just 1.9 million people.

Patience Forster, 27, grew up in a family mixed with both Muslims and Christians. "I come from a home with a Muslim mother and a Christian father with both Muslim and Christian relatives. These were the first people I got to know and lived in peace with, even before I knew what religion meant. The coexistence between my Muslim relatives and me is the same that I have extended to the Muslims around me including my friends. I have a cordial relationship with all my Muslim friends and religion has never been an issue," she said.

Hassanatou A Jallow, 23, relishes her friendship with Christians, claiming her faith actually strengthens whenever she's with them.

"I have two close friends who are Christians. One of them is actually very concerned about his Muslim friends. He would advise you to pray when the time comes. He even has a praying mat and beads in his house and whenever you visit him, he would show you even the direction (Qibla) when it is time to pray. To me, there is no difference. He wears Kaftan (a Muslim dress) on Fridays and you wouldn't know that he is Christian by just looking," she said.

However, Favour Odiong, a Christian, 20, despite having a seemingly enjoyable life with her Muslim friends, thinks more tolerance and understanding is needed.

She put it: "Everything is going well but I think we need to learn that people of different religions have a different

way of life." According to Muhammed Sowe, a lawyer, there is a law that protects the religious freedom of individuals and prosecutes those who use their religion against others.

According to Muhammed Sowe, a lawyer, there is a law that protects the religious freedom of individuals and prosecutes those who use their religion against others.

He said: "It is stated in the Criminal Code that anyone who, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of a person, utters or writes any word, or makes any sound in the hearing of that person, or makes any gesture in the sight of that person, or places any object in the sight of that person, commits a misdemeanor, and is liable on conviction to imprisonment for a term of one year."

Superintendent David Kujabi, the police Public Relations Officer, said The Gambia Police Force records all crimes but he has not even for once stumbled on any case that relates to religious incitement.

Even though there is no record at the police of anyone put on trial for spreading religious violence, thousands of Gambians had earlier signed an online petition to have Imam Abdoulie Fatty arrested for constantly preaching against the Ahmadis and spearheading the fight against anti-FGM campaigners.

Fatty, a one-time Imam at the State House and an unapologetic supporter of FGM, has for the past two decades used the pulpit to urge parents to circumcise their daughters, saying it is a recommended practice in Islam. The outspoken Imam has also been a nemesis for the minority Ahmadi Muslims.

Religion in the daily lives of Gambians

The Gambia is a secular state built on religious freedom and tolerance. Article 25 of The Gambian Constitution protects the rights of citizens to practise any religion that they choose.

The peaceful coexistence of these faiths, despite Islam having an unmatched numerical advantage, remains an enviable characteristic of The Gambia.

This tolerance is demonstrable with meetings and events in The Gambia typically commencing with two prayers, one Islamic and one Christian. Furthermore, the president, himself a Muslim has declared major christian and muslim feast days public holidays.

However, the former quixotic dictator, Yahya Jammeh, tactically employed religion— in this case Islam— as a Trojan horse to strengthen his grip on power, by declaring the country an Islamic state and frequently preaching the religion to appeal to the Muslim majority. This caused a bit of momentary confusion in the Christian community, especially after Jammeh ordered female civil servants to cover their heads when going to work.

After the declaration that seemed to have shaken the entire country, a Catholic organisation called The Knights of Saint Peter and Paul released a statement describing it as “disappointment” for the Christian community.

“We knew that the declaration would bring no benefit to us as Christians; but also in our ignorance wondered what special benefits it would bring to our Muslim brothers and sisters or the country at large. With the current rising trend of fanaticism in all religions worldwide, we became concerned about possible unintended negative consequences of this statement,” the statement said.

The Christian Council also visited State House during the political impasse in December 2016 to express concern over the unfortunate chaos that ensued. Even though the meeting was closed-door, a leaked audio of the meeting went viral on which the female Bishop of the Methodist Church, Hannah Caroline Faal-Heim, bravely told Jammeh how she defied the odds by speaking her mind about the uncertain state of Gambians under Jammeh knowing the possible consequences.

Reverend Bishop Hannah was recorded saying: “I want to ask your permission to speak truthfully and plainly to you because I see you as a brother because we are all

Gambians. I have not come here as the Chair of The Gambia Christian Council. In fact, many people told me not to come here today, and all of us not to come because people are so angry with you. We have come because you are our President, no matter what. And we feel that we have to come and hear you speak. And we thank you that you have done that. And we hear you and the reconciliation that you have talked about Sir, there are people who are deeply hurt. They say that it is you who is causing the conflict among the people and in the country. They say you are dividing us. Please, you know, I know this is painful, it is painful for me to sit here and tell you and that’s why I asked your permission. But they say that you have the gun and you are determined, whatever will come, you will use it as you will be against your own people.”

With all the hurdles during Jammeh’s tenure, religious tolerance continues to be a fundamental pillar of the existing peace in the country. When it is Christmas, Muslims and Christians join in the celebrations as one; the same happens when it is Eid (the Muslim feasts). In fact, it is a common sight to see Muslims storm a Christian burial or wedding in a Church while Christians hardly let Muslim burials or marriages pass without attending.

Islamic Council and Ahmadis

Just like Christianity has many denominations, Islam also has many sects, with dozens of them in The Gambia. The friction that rarely happens between the two main religions is however a common occurrence among the sects.

Perhaps the standout example of this phenomenon is the longstanding tension between the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama’at and the Supreme Islamic Council, the umbrella body that somewhat regulates Islam in the country.

A group of young Muslims in the cosmopolitan settlement of Talinding in the Kanifing Municipality had a confrontation with Ahmadis after the youths refused to allow the Ahmadis to bury their corpse at the community cemetery.

The scuffle had resulted in a barrage of verbal attacks from Muslim leaders who consider them to be outside the pale of Islam. The standoff initially had all the markings of a sectarian dispute until the Islamic council stepped in and declared the Ahmadis as non-Muslims, telling them to find a place different from the communal graveyard to bury their dead.

Since then, the quiet friction permeates in the country and it has been brought back to life recently when the Ahmadis applied for a licence to operate a television station. The Islamic council abruptly petitioned the request, calling on the government to not grant the Ahmadis licence as they would use the TV to “corrupt the minds of young Muslims”. The government granted the Ahmadis the licence anyway, but it is one of the instances in which the secularity of the country has been tested.

Musa Bah, an Ahmadi Muslim and teacher at one of the country’s leading senior schools, said he feels safe but sometimes feels that safety could change, however: “Most



Christmas – just like the islamic feast of the sacrifice (Eid) – is celebrated by people of all religions in The Gambia.

of the time I feel safe in the country. However, at certain times, I have this nagging feeling that I could be attacked any time. In short, more should be done to promote harmony between and among religions and religious sects,” he noted.

Religion and LGBTQ

The two main religions, Islam and Christianity, have both openly frowned at any other sexual orientation apart from straight. This has made life insurmountably difficult for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people who, until today, remain in the closet due to the hostile environment.

The former Gambian President Yahya Jammeh, a quixotic sit-tight tyrant infamous for his streams of homophobic proclamations, has once vowed to “cut off the heads of gay men” describing them as “vermin”.

“Homosexuality is anti-god, anti-human, and anti-civilization. Homosexuals are not welcome in The Gambia. If we catch you, you will regret why you are born. I have buf-faloes from South Africa and Brazil and they never date each other. We are ready to eat grass, but we will not compromise on this. Allowing homosexuality means allowing satanic rights. We will not allow gays here. As far as I am concerned, LGBT can only stand for Leprosy, Gonorrhea, Bacteria and Tuberculosis; all of which are detrimental to human existence,” the animated orator, Jammeh who is

now in exile in Equatorial Guinea, had said on national television in 2015.

Jammeh didn’t slow down in his hatred for homosexuals. The Gambian national assembly later passed a bill considered one of the most brutal anti-gay laws in Africa, that would see someone guilty of ‘aggravated homosexuality’ spend life in prison.

This law had doubled the number of people that left the ‘homophobic country’ to seek asylum in Europe and America because of their sexual orientation, which the society, the president in particular, had considered a threat to human existence. Until now, the LGBTQ people can’t profess their sexual orientation in the open also because the laws haven’t been changed yet.

Conclusion

The Gambia is not a country which has many religions; apart from Islam and Christianity, only a few follow the Bahá’í Faith and other migrating Hindus from Asia. The country has enjoyed a smooth religious coherence for generations and the general feeling is that the peaceful co-existence of different faiths will remain a cardinal hallmark of The Gambia for eternity.

Talibeh Hydara is editor of The Standard Newspaper, the leading national daily of The Gambia. A focus of his essays in the past few years is religion.

The Gambia in transition

Security and Justice delay leave many hopeless

By **Kebba Jeffang**

The Gambia, one of the smallest countries in West Africa with a population of about 2 million people, has emerged from 22 year old dictatorship on December 2nd 2016. The country was under Yahya Jammeh, an iron-fist ruler, who took the leadership through a military coup in 1994. During his reign, many Gambians were disappeared without trace; some were tortured and became permanently disabled while many others were killed extra-judicially.

Almost two years since President Adama Barrow came to power, Gambians are becoming impatient with excess security lapses in the new set-up despite the supplementary ECOMIG's presence while victims are becoming hopeless in their quest to realizing justice after heavy crimes perpetrated on them under the former regime.

Increase in Security failures

The Gambia since January, 2017 saw a significant increase in crime rate and other safety lapses which endangered state security at the highest level. This includes the arrivals of the two former army generals Umpa Mendy and Ansumana Tamba from Equatorial Guinea passing through the country's only airport unnoticed. The duo travelled along with Jammeh when he departed for exile. Their presence was only noticed after they had already spent at least 48 hours in the country. This has created heavy alarm that the country could be struck from outside easily while members of the guards do nothing.

"We have acknowledged this lapse at the National Security Council and took full responsibility as a council for the lack of knowledge about the return of these high persons of security interest and the way and manner which were processed on arrival," admitted Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant General Masaneh Kinteh.

Abdoulie Corr, a businessman, said he still feels insecure in the country. He recalled the unnoticed arrivals of the generals who could have destroyed this country due to negligence of security personnel. Corr believes that The Gambia could still be struck from outside while ECOWAS troops and Gambian security officers are fast asleep.

"It is possible. And this is why I said the country is insecure. Remember that these two people were never trusted and have highly been accused of taking part in killings of people for Jammeh. To know that they are coming from Jammeh exile camp in itself is a fear that we are not safe," Corr, with no confidence in the security said.

Well before the arrivals of the two generals, there were reports in the international media that some Jammeh's loyalists were mobilizing themselves at the Cassamance border, in Southern Senegal to attack the country. However, the army spokesperson denied this report.

"We have made our investigations but we don't have any intelligence pointing to that for now. We have not heard anything that is concrete relating to that, but what we can guarantee is that we know what we are putting in place in defending this country," Major Malick Sanyang said.

Sanitizing Gambia's security: An uphill task

In efforts to instill fear in The Gambian populace especially within the army set up, Jammeh was succeeded in his divide and rule tactics. He adopted a system that empowered certain members of the army who became more powerful than others.

"The army was vividly used as a political tool to force members in buying their loyalty for the former military ruler. The Gambia Armed Forces (GAF) consequently became highly unprofessional, brutal, fearful and was seriously engaged in open political business," Amadou Ceesay, a political student said.

The new authorities admitted that they are finding it tough to clean the system but efforts are underway. In fact, this led to the extension of ECOMIG mandate as the president openly said he doesn't trust his army.

"With regards to Jammeh's loyalists in the armed forces and how we are going about cleansing up the entire set-up, when the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) was appointed in 2017, he went on a country-wide tour to all military installations in order to do an assessment so that he knows who to put where, what to do and to also know our state of affairs," the spokesperson of Gambian army said in an exclusive interview.

He said the army command has prioritized professionalism in the army.

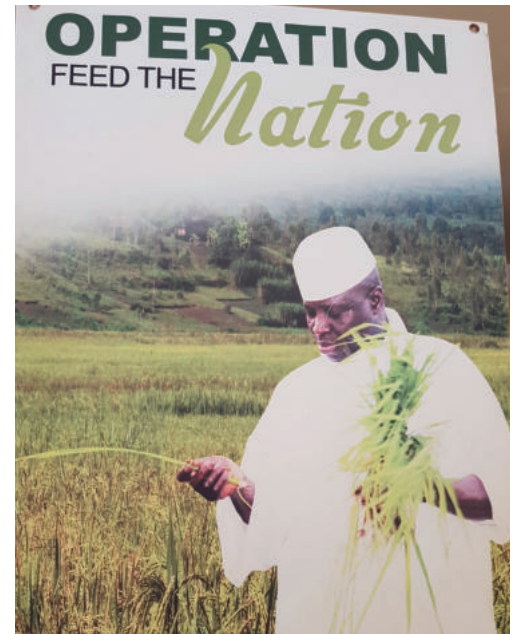
"The new vision talks about the Armed Forces to be non-political, not tribally inclined and also to be a professional body that is equipped to carry out its constitutional mandate," he said.

Major Sanyang however admitted that political and tribal inclinations have been concerns to them for the past 22 years under Jammeh administration.

"We are not denying the fact that during Jammeh's times the armed forces was politicized. Jammeh has seen the army as his personal property and members of the army were openly manifesting their inclination," he admitted.

Lamin Kandeh, a youth worker, said he supports the president's decision of requesting for extension of ECOMIG forces in the country.

"Due to the nature of the army composition, the current leader lacked confidence in them after he took over. He sought for the extension of mandate of the regional troop,



Former dictator Jammeh promoted a personality cult around himself, claiming miraculous abilities to heal asthma, infertility and HIV / AIDS and taking personal responsibility for feeding the nation.

ECOMIG, in numerous occasions until such a time that he has trust in the army. And I agree with his decision," he said.

However, a renowned human rights activist, Madi Jobarteh, is of the view that President Barrow needs a whole new team of professionals to handle strategic positions in the security sector if he wishes to achieve his vision of a 'New Democratic Gambia.'

"Only a new set of leaders will pave the way to bringing about system change and ensure efficiency. Retaining former security officers of the Jammeh regime in strategic positions will only delay at best and derail at worst the drive towards a system change and the building of a new Gambia," he said.

Jobarteh said whether it's the army, police, NIA or the Prisons departments, the country needs new leaders who are committed to system change: "Otherwise Barrow will only succeed in stifling his own leadership hence crown himself as a spectacular failure for which Gambians must never forgive him. Barrow knows where The Gambia came from and what happened and who were responsible. Hence to deliberately maintain those enablers for any reason would be tantamount to dashing the hopes of fellow Gambians; a betrayal of the martyrs and the entire population. There are enough competent and well meaning Gambian professionals who can capably serve in every sector of our security sector and deliver the expected results," he pointed out.

He is of the view that the president should provide the necessary leadership and responsibility by identifying and appointing the right people to do the job right.

Does Gambian army appreciate ECOMIG?

"Well, ECOMIG has a mandate and that mandate as I understand is coming to expire. By all indications, probably it

may be extended," Major Sanyang said in May, this year.

The mandate has been extended to three years recently as ECOWAS accepted Barrow's request.

Sanyang denies the claim on the internet space that the two forces are not in agreement: "There is synchronization in our activities like the joint patrols. So far so good we have not had any friction with them," he said.

Gun crimes on the rise

There have been few incidences involving armed men in the country attacking business entities like the banks and filling stations to rob their monies. Gambians were sent into fear that the armed men could be deserted Gambian military officers who remain loyal to Jammeh.

"I am a business woman and I am afraid in this country now. We have seen armed robbers attacking business owners threatening them to surrender their monies or be killed. This is really not alright for us. Sometimes I thought of closing my business because I could be the next victim," decried Mariatou Fatty, who was found selling at the country's biggest market in Serekunda.

Binta Manneh also finds it hard to be convinced that gun men are not army deserters because such guns are not in the possession of ordinary citizens. "It could be Jammeh's loyalist in the army or who left after Jammeh lost power. I can't understand all these security failures in recent times. We didn't know these things before. Why now?" she asked out of frustration.

However, a spokesperson for the Armed Forces sought to allay the fear that they were deserters: "You know, we have gone through 22 years of dictatorship and with this new democracy; there is this tendency of people abusing the new-found freedom they have," he said.

Meanwhile, the police spokesperson, Superintendent David Kujabi, admitted the rise of criminal activities in the



The ECOMIG forces from various West African countries maintain a visible presence in The Gambia.

country. However, he also denied that they are Jammeh enablers. “There is no proof whatsoever that these armed criminals are Jammeh’s loyalists. There is no indication as slight as it may be that could point to that fact,” he said.

He blamed the lack of employment for many Gambian youths as the cause of the crime increase in recent times.

Jammeh supporters accuse police of bias

From 2017 to 2018, there have been numerous clashes between the supporters of former president and the new leadership. One had occurred in Barrow’s home village that resulted to serious injuries to some Jammeh’s APRC supporters who were passing through the village on their campaign trip. Another happened in Busumbala , about 25 kilometers from Banjul and also ended up in injuries as it witnessed stone throws from either side.

“We don’t feel that we are treated justly. We have received several attacks and it is mostly our supporters who are mainly injured, but yet nothing has been done about it. I don’t believe that there is equality for us in this country anymore,” APRC’s Ebrima Tamba lamented.

He accused the police of unfair treatment in their vari-

ous cases for not conducting investigations into the matters. The police denied the allegation.

However, the police spokesperson has denied this allegation. “Investigation was actually done but I am not quite sure what it actually revealed. I guess there has not been any prosecution because the whole problem couldn’t be pinpointed to just one or two people unless if you want to have the whole village arrested and prosecuted,” PRO Kujabie reacted.

Victims ‘hopeless’ amid slow start towards justice

Several victims of human rights violations under the Jammeh’s 22 year old rule have converged in the capital city, Banjul, to express frustration over slow start by government in establishing justice mechanism to address their problems.

The protesters said their occupation of the city was intended as a strong reminder to the new government that they will not waver in their quest for justice over alleged killings, torture and enforced disappearances during the 22 years of Jammeh’s rule.

“We simply want justice. This is why we gathered at the highest citadel of The Gambian judiciary to make our voices heard” one Isatou Marong told journalists in April this year.

However, the executive secretary of Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, Baba Galleh Jallow, calls for patience as they work out the process.

The TRRC was finally launched in early October on the objective of investigating human rights violations that were perpetrated over the past 22 years and make recommendations to the president on the mode of reparations and reconciliation among divided Gambians.

Kebba Jeffang is a Gambian journalist serving as presidential correspondent and senior political reporter for Foroyaa Newspaper. Jeffang also freelances for international news agencies. He is the current President of Young Journalists’ Association of The Gambia (YJAG) as well as an executive member of The Gambia Press Union (GPU).

In search of voice and liberty

The situation of women in The Gambia

The Gambia, with a population of 1.8 million, is a highly patriarchal society in which male dominance and superiority is rooted in the historical and cultural background of The Gambian society. This has mostly resulted to the high rate of gender-based violence, women trafficking for domestic services, female genital mutilation and child marriage in particular. Girls who are subjected to such practices are vulnerable to many life threatening issues especially in the areas of health and general well-being.

Although The Gambia is a party to many international and regional treaties that prohibit the practices of both FGM and child marriage, it was not until recently that these harmful traditional practices were banned in our country. The presidential pronouncement on the ban on FGM in 2015 came as a surprise to many, as well as a moment of celebration for activists that have been campaigning against the practice for over three decades now. These harmful practices on Gambian women are still going on, as many girls and women face the consequences of abuse, trafficking and circumcising the girl child resulting to at least 20% of women fleeing the country to Europe and elsewhere looking for what they describe as “Voice and Liberty”.

Child marriage and female genital mutilation

According to a study by the Thomas Reuters foundation 54.8% of women aged 15–49 in The Gambia were cut before the age of five; 28.1% between the ages of five and nine. ‘Cut, flesh removed / Clitoris’ is the most common type of FGM practiced. 95.7% of FGM is carried out by ‘traditional circumcision’s’. 65% of women who have heard of FGM think the practice should continue.

Fatou Keita, a victim of forced and child marriage and as well circumcised at the age of two, left The Gambia two years ago undertaking the perilous journey across the Mediterranean sea before arriving in Germany. Today she is an asylum seeker in one of the regions of Baden-Württemberg, Fatou fled The Gambia after a successful forced marriage at the age of 15. “I was forced to marry my 50 year old uncle with two other wives at the age of 15, distracting me from completing my education. As a teenager and a woman for that matter, I have no right to insist or go against the decision of my parents.”

Fatou, whose name has been changed to protect her, said she suffered in a polygamous family of 20, before escaping her hurdles. “My right as a woman and a child was seized the moment I became a bride, I became a full time housewife and a market vendor instead of a normal child and student. I was forced against my will to get married to a man I never loved and went through hell during my three years of marriage.” According to the 20 year old self exiled woman, she had to escape through the help of a friend to travel out of the country.

“I never knew about the road to Europe through Libya until I started my journey two years ago. I spent over 2000 Euros to reach Germany, and spent months suffering under the conditions on the Libyan coast. I was raped, tortured, abused and imprisoned before I boarded the boat to Italy”, said Fatou from her tiny container room of four who could not at the time of this interview hold her tears reflecting on her memories of back home.

“This culture of silencing our women in decision making should be abolished or punishable by law. Otherwise, she added, more of our young women and teenagers will be subjected to this ungodly act by their own parents and family”. Fatou, who describes her journey while she recovers from being abused and traumatized, said she is still encountering some health issues since the removal of her clitoris at the age of two: “I was circumcised at the age of two and still left with pain and health issues, I have menstrual cramps and still bleed anytime I have contact (Sex) with a man.” Fatou now leaves a life in Germany deciding on her own without any contact with her family in Gambia. “I decided to cut-contacts with my family because I escaped a life that awaits me anytime I return home. They could easily trace me and send me back to my ex-husband which is the last thing I would ever want to do.”

The Women’s (Amendment) Act 2015 bans FGM and imposes stringent punishments for perpetrators. Another advocacy success of the activists is the recent Children’s (Amendment) Act 2016, which gave a clearer and more meaningful definition of who a child is, thereby replacing the many ambiguous sections of the earlier 2005 Act which had encouraged the practice of child marriage. But the crucial questions are: Do the bans on FGM and child marriage in The Gambia mean the end of these practices in reality and how is society, particularly the men, reacting on this issue?

In a recent interview on one of the news outlets in The Gambia, the former Imam of Gambia’s state house, Abdoulie Fatty, claimed that FGM is a religious obligation and anyone that campaign against it is against the Islamic religion and shall not have a “good future”. This statement was seen as a very harsh and unpleasant by many, particularly some Gambian feminists both in The Gambia and in the Diaspora.

Alimatou Fatty, speaking on condition that her name be changed, since she fears prosecution, is one of those that exercise the harmful practice on her daughter barely three years after the ban on FGM. She travelled across the river to her husband’s village to have her youngest daughter circumcised.

She vehemently gives her justification for having the two-year-old cut. “Female circumcision is our religion and tradition,” says the tall, frail mother of five from her one-bedroom home. “If Gambia is a democracy now, why

should anyone stop us from practicing our religion and tradition?"

Two years after The Gambia's iron-fisted leader Yahya Jammeh flew into exile, residents of the tiny West African nation are enjoying newfound freedoms under president Adama Barrow, who ousted Jammeh with a shock election win. But to the dismay of human rights activists, some are also returning to the harmful practices that the former president - in a rare display of progressive values - had banned during his 22 years of autocratic rule.

Despite the ban, FGM is described by many as the worst practice among all norms, these according to many experts and FGM campaigners, the practice would ever remain a problem for its deep rooted patriarchal roots, which are expressed among other in cultural and religious terms. FGM might continue harming the women folk as many girls and the unborn are expected to undergo through the practice. Especially since the current government of President Barrow is doing little or less to upholding to the 2015 ban pronouncement by former president Jammeh.

Women trafficking

The trafficking of Gambian girls and women is a source of grave concern for Gambians. Media reports indicate that this ghastly practice is prevalent in the Middle East. Sources emerging from victims practice by its exponent on one of The Gambia's online radios and on social media, some victims claiming to pay the state to be trafficked to the middle east with a promise of a decent job, one is left with unmistakable impression that our own government officials are both encouraging and actively supporting this criminal enterprise during the Jammeh regime in the early days of 2013-15. The continued courage of some enslaved victims helped to fuel the demands for supporting measures in this shabby affair. The act is described by many Gambians as a shameful indictment against the Jammeh regime under whose watch such inhuman enterprise is flourishing, with impunity, was a mortally ashamed that the gambian state, in the name of poor Gambians, collect taxes from traffickers of Gambian women, at least three Gambian journalist were exiled and prosecuted for reporting on this issue.

A recent report published on the Kerr Fatou Network about the horror experiences of some returned women, who had suffered from trafficking to the middle east, seriously abused, tortured and some burnt alive while another victim left her kidney behind.

Mariama Jobe, 26, a native of Manjai, was hoaxed into travelling to Cairo in Egypt with the promise of a better life only for her to realize she had been sold to Nigerian agents by a Gambian. The man who allegedly trafficked her, an immigration officer who she identified as Gibril Ceesay, had told her she was going to be paid \$450 monthly. Jobe, who left in December 2014 and came back in 2016, only came to know upon arrival in Egypt that the money spent on her ticket and visa was to be paid from her monthly pay. Several women were interviewed by the online media house Kerr Fatou and almost all of them have faced phys-



A poster by the Network Against Gender Based Violence.

ical violence. According to the reporter he has exclusive access to a WhatsApp video recorded by a Gambian who has been burned all over her body by her boss. The women concerned, Kaddy Jammeh who currently lives in Kuwait, had originally shared the with a Gambian from whom she was seeking help. The video showed almost all parts of her body burnt after her boss poured hot water over her. The grim wounds all over the body of the girl are difficult to watch for a second. "I had to wake up early in the morning to clean the house, bathroom and prepare breakfast. And the doctors have asked me not to put on a shirt," she said, showing the wounds.

Media reports indicated that 2.8 Million african women including Gambians live and work in the Middle East, many have their passports confiscated on arrival and some find themselves trapped in homes where they are overworked, underpaid and physically abused. In a recent interview with one of the local radio's, The Gambia's Tourism and Culture Minister said he is signing an MOU with the Saudi government that will allow over 1000 Gambian youths including women and some well trained teachers to work in Saudi Arabia due to the lack of unemployment rate among youths in the country. Bah is optimistic that the right of the said youths would be secured, insured and guarantee before the final signing of the said MOU between the two government.

Already over 1000 Gambian youths worked and lived in Saudi Arabia alone, despite such a huge amount, the government of The Gambia is still looking forward to sending more of the same amount, Gambians, especially young people across the country and beyond took on to social media to buttress grievances on the ongoing saga of send-

ing Gambian youths including Women to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under the said bilateral agreement.

Fatou Jeng was a victim, trafficked as a domestic worker to Saudi Arabia, she now serve as a human right activist for women and girls sent to the Middle East as domestic workers with her team of women called the “Network of Girls Against Human Trafficking”.

Fatou Jeng has served several years in the hands of Saudi individuals as domestic worker before her escape in 2017. Fatou said she was seriously abused and sent to prison before her escape, while urging on our government not to send women to Saudi. “ This issue is very serious and we should not allow the minister go astray with his proposed decision on sending our youths especially women to the Middle East, the said agreement will never be met, our women will suffer and will never work on the terms that were planned or signed’.”

Speaking from her personal experience, she added: “I was vigorously abused, violated, beating, staffed, jailed for fighting with my boss on the basis of working in vein with all of the mentioned conditions.” According to her, she managed to escaped from what she describes as a condition of slavery, while spending weeks in jail before finally finding her way back to The Gambia in 2017.

Women struggle for self-determined development

Women in The Gambia do not have full and equal access with regard to the socio-economic, cultural or religious affairs, Political institutions of the society and are mainly restricted. They are prone to all sorts of violations, like abuse, discrimination, trafficking and could even lose their self esteem.

But there is a group of Women struggle hard for self-determination and emancipation. This struggle has created constant pressure. Frequently the pressure has existed during this process, the driving force behind women’s aspiration toward freedom has lain deeper. It has asserted itself among the different classes within The Gambian society. There are many different factors which motivate a huge number of gambian women to migrate, thus risking of going back home after seeking for protection (asylum) in their host countries. These factors include unemployment ratio, different cause of frustration including early or forced mar-

riage, or stories of other people succeeding abroad (financially and morally).

The Gambia’s societal ideology does not support women in decision making or even to cater for themselves either leaving alone, being an adventurer, speaking out loud ‘in public’. Some gambian households disapprove of women working, because they fear this increasing the likelihood that women could fall in love or even got pregnant before marriage. In this societal ideology, women struggle to be self-determined.

In The Gambia, as in other parts of the world, various forms of gender-based violence occur, such as rape, domestic violence and harmful traditional practices (FGM, forced and early marriages). To address this and other issues of violence against women in April 2009, a group of NGOs and Government Institutions, in partnership with FINDECO, a Finnish Government development agency, formed a consortium called “Network Against Gender Based Violence” (NGBV) to implement prevention and response programme for Gender Based Violence (GBV), among other women networks like the Girl’s Generation, Think Young Women etc. The Network thus serves as a platform for action and discussion on gender based violence issues in The Gambia. Its members are working to eliminate or reduce gender based violence in homes, schools etc.

Even though the setting up of such an organization to fight against gender based violence and other harmful practices among women in The Gambia is describe by many as a laudable initiatives, however, their efforts might be in vein for many as it does not stop women fleeing the country. Many victims of early and forced marriages said the organizations need to fill in some loopholes that are stopping them from taking actions against the victims families. But according to the mandates of the organizations, they have limits and do not file law suits against families of a victim, rather they engage them into dialogues. Tribes play an important role in the culture in The Gambia and this leads to a situation where tribe elders are called on to resolve conflicts rather than taking legal actions against a matter at hand. These has made many women unsafe in their own homes, thus prompting them flee for a better life.

The author is an activist and journalist and remains anonymous at her own request.

Trapped in freedom

The fate of LGBTQs in The Gambia

By Sanna Camara

The official Gambian policy on LGBTQ is that homosexuality has never been an issue in The Gambia. President Barrow said this to the EU delegation that met him in February 2017, soon after he was sworn into office. In April 2018, Barrow repeated the same position at the CHATHAM House, London, when he went to attend the Commonwealth Heads of States meeting.

This is a far cry from the earlier official policy on the LGBTQ in The Gambia under former President Yahya Jammeh. He openly uses expressions like “cutting off their heads and genitals” in reaction to the issue. Jammeh considers this very “unnatural order of nature” – a view shared by many Gambians. The country is 95 per cent Muslim population. Socio-cultural values are still strongly preserved.

When the EU withheld more than 33 million Euros in aid to The Gambia over the deteriorating human rights conditions and concerns over the targeting of the LGBTQ community, it made the dictator even staunch against LGBTQs – he told the nation that he was being punished for not tolerating the LGBTQs in The Gambia. The public opinion went in his favour.

However, some critiques saw Jammeh’s anti-LGBTQ stance as a political scapegoat at a time when the the economy was crumbling, and discontent was rising in The Gambia. “He needed something, a target that he could unify people around. So, he chose a scapegoat, rallying behind purported values and lashed out against LGBTQ people,” Josh Scheinert a former Canadian Professor at the University of The Gambia, who recently authored a book on the issue in The Gambia, *The Order of Nature*.

Gambia’s former President held homosexuality in contempt and hatred. In September 2013, for example, Jammeh said that homosexuality was “more-deadly than all natural disasters put together”. In an address to the UN General Assembly, he put homosexuality alongside “greed” and “obsession with world domination” as the three “biggest threats to human existence”.

“I think a lot about Jammeh was perplexing. It is important, however, to view his words in their proper context. When Jammeh started to be most hateful in his language, it was towards the end of his rule.... There was certainly a measure of anti-LGBTQ prejudice in The Gambia to build on when he did that, but you can’t discount the political expediency of his doing so either,” Scheinert argued.

That is the main reason why President Adama Barrow sees it as not a non-issue in The Gambia. However, by law, Gambia’s criminalisation of homosexual activity, which already violates international law, are even more likely to be used broadly and arbitrarily, Rights groups warned.

An act of homosexuality already carries a minimum of 14 years in prison. In May 2008, Jammeh declared that laws “stricter than those in Iran” would be introduced against homosexuals. He vowed to “cut off the head” of any homosexual caught in the country. On May 15th 2008, Jammeh gave homosexuals 24 hours to leave the country. He also commanded “all those who harbour such individuals to kick them out of their compounds, noting that a mass patrol will be conducted on the instructions of the [Inspector General of Police] ... and the director of The Gambia Immigration Department to weed bad elements in society”.

President Jammeh said in a speech before newly promoted army chiefs on 7 December 2009, “We will not encourage lesbianism and homosexuality in the military. It is a taboo in our armed forces. I will sack any soldier suspected of being a gay or lesbian in The Gambia. We need no gays in our armed forces.” Jammeh advised the army chiefs to monitor the activities of their men and deal with soldiers bent on practicing lesbianism in the military.

In a cable from US Ambassador to U.S. Secretary of State on 26 February 2010, Jammeh admitted to gays being in the country, yet he never “cut off anybody’s head” or arrested any of them. “There are gays here in The Gambia, I know that. But they live in secret and that is fine with me, as long as they go about their business in private we don’t mind. But if you are talking about marrying in this country, that will never happen. We will never accept gays,” he was quoted as saying.

The U.S. Department of State’s 2011 Human Rights Report found that “there was strong societal discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, some of whom were shunned”, although “there were no reported incidents of physical violence against LGBTQ individuals during the year”.

Minister of Information Demba Jawo also told the press in a monthly conference in April that Gambia was “free for all, including gays”. The tendency of accepting or coming to terms with LGBTQs either now or the near future is very highly unlikely. When President Adama Barrow traveled to the Commonwealth Heads of State meeting in London in March, he was quizzed on the topic of gay rights in The Gambia.

In response to the British Prime Minister May’s suggestion to decriminalize same sex marriages across the Commonwealth, the President responded it is a non-issue here in Banjul. But because Gambia is such a conservative society, this message was seen as an endorsement of gay rights as the President did not come forward to condemn the LGBTQ issue instead. The situation for LGBTQs in The

Gambia will never change as long the government doesn't take it seriously.

Social media messages – including WhatsApp audios - went viral. Some of them spoke ill of the President to the point of insulting him, calling him a slave to western aid, being willing to sell the morality and culture of his people for western aid.

An Imam, Baba Leigh, one of the staunchest supporters of the Barrow regime and foremost critic of the Jammeh dictatorship (arrested, detained, tortured for months and exiled) was even on the front pages of newspapers, calling it “unacceptable” for President Barrow to endorse gay rights in the country.

Around mid-May this year, I was also a part of a seminar on communication, participants drawn from government agencies and security sector. One of the topic there was Gender-sensitive and Religious Communication. When we were asked what our views are regarding the subject of LBTQs, more than eighty percent see it as “unnatural”, “unacceptable” to them. “I will disown any family member that is gay,” a government employee said.

In January 2017, when The Gambian exiled community in Dakar met to brainstorm on how they would return upon exit of Jammeh, a lady, suspected lesbian that was arrested and tortured by the intelligence agency under Jammeh burst into tears.

“I have nowhere to go to. My family has disowned me and declared I am no longer their daughter when I got arrested on suspicion of being lesbian. My community will not accept me when I return,” she cried. In early March, I ran to rescue a gay guy whose life was threatened (repeatedly) by a drunk Gambian friend at his house. I took the matter to the Police, with legal advice from a human rights lawyer, who could not hide his surprise that I would stand for LGBTQ rights in Gambia. But even at the Police, I could read in the expressions of Police officers utter contempt for the gay. Normally LGBT don't even go to the police because they have the legitimate fear of being discriminated or treated with contempt, instead of getting help.

These shows how The Gambian society would not generally accept LGBTQ people even if the government were to politically recognize their rights to exist – which for now is still not the case. So the New Gambia may bring all freedoms but not yet the LGBTQs.

Sanna Camara is a human rights and investigative journalist in The Gambia. He spent three years in exile due to his reporting under Yahya Jammeh. He currently works as Media Officer, Office of the President of The Gambia.

Conclusion

By Julian Staiger

Translated from German by Stephan De Maria

In the previous texts, Gambian experts described the long way The Gambia has come as well as the obstacles and difficulties still remaining two years after “The Gambia has decided”. In many ways, Gambian and German politics have already been both directly and indirectly entwined for many years: be it through colonialism, climate change, or the relatively large Gambian expat community in Germany.

These global entanglements result in a situation in which German domestic and foreign policy can directly influence the development of a democratic Gambia. The closing lines of this brochure aim to provide German politicians with a picture of how meaningful support for The Gambia can be achieved.

After overcoming dictatorship, The Gambia can offer German politicians a great opportunity to demonstrate their serious interest in fighting the causes of migration and flight – or whether this is simply well-intended lip service. If Germany is truly interested in addressing the causes of refugeeism, it must give The Gambia time. Sadly, a number of German politicians want to exploit the regime change in The Gambia to enact new measurements to expel more Gambians. This would represent a dismal continuation of the lack of acknowledgement of Gambian reality in Germany. Even during the dictatorship, recognition of Gambian refugee status was already at an extreme low. Although reasons for this may be diverse, they nevertheless show that the dangers people in The Gambia are exposed to have thus far been only minimally acknowledged.

The Gambia is still confronted with many problems. It is likely to take several years just to fully process the dictatorship and truly change the power structures. We Germans must actually be well acquainted ourselves how much time and effort the historical reappraisal of a dictatorship costs. And to be very clear: Those who force the expulsion of more people back to Gambia under the current political and economic circumstances, risks creating new causes of refugeeism instead of combating them.

A further effective step toward addressing the causes of refugeeism is to support and to seek real dialog with Gambians already living in Germany. There is likely no developmental cooperation more effective than calling upon Gambians who already live here. Instead of keeping them from work, it is precisely these people who should be supported with education, schooling and job opportunities. Around 22% of The Gambia’s GDP is based on money transfers from expats, translating support for Gambian expats into simultaneous direct support of the people of The Gambia. It is difficult to imagine a more logical, direct cooperation for economic development. In this economically globalized world, development cooperation cannot be considered without context. As long as European corporations are allo-

wed to raid the seas off Western Africa’s coast by overfishing, as long as subsidized European chicken drumsticks flood and destroy local markets, it is nothing but cynical to create support programs for Gambian fishers and to motivate those returning to Gambia to run chicken farms.

An honest dialog of German politicians with Gambians living in Germany is desirable and needed. They are the experts of their homeland and should be asked which support efforts are helpful or harmful. Equally enriching would be to actively ask Gambians in Germany about the long-term effects of colonialism, about racism, or about how many Germans view Africa. We might even consider what Germany could learn from The Gambia. For example, there are many symbolic acts which are signs of religious tolerance to Gambians, but which cause a very different type of public discussion here. Just think of the debate caused by the statement “Islam is part of Germany”. Even taking in refugees seems less complicated in The Gambia than in Germany. When huge numbers of refugees arrived in The Gambia during the civil wars and dictatorships in Liberia and Sierra Leone, this occurred relatively peacefully. Those seeking asylum in The Gambia are, to a large extent, granted the same legal status as Gambians themselves. Their inclusion did not trigger racist debates or frantic changes in legislation. In addition, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a good example of a political reality with rather open borders and which does not exclude surrounding non-member countries.

I would like to conclude by extending my thanks to the many people in The Gambia and in Germany who, against all adversity, stand up for a world in which human rights and humanity are not just empty phrases, but reality. The people of The Gambia have shown to the world that engagement in civil life can even overcome a dictatorship. And in Germany, our “autumn of solidarity” in Hamburg, Berlin, and right here in Baden-Württemberg has shown how many people stand up against racism and for peaceful coexistence. I am thinking particularly of the many active refugees who are unfortunately rarely noticed by the general public (therefore, one final book recommendation: “Die Bleibenden” (“The Remaining”) by Christian Jakob). We hope that German politicians take these signals seriously and that the engagement of so many citizens can be reflected in political decisions.

By the way: You can find an up-to-date article on the subject of deportations to The Gambia in the current (1/2019) issue of the “Rundbrief” magazine of the Refugee Council of Baden-Württemberg.

