# Local Government and Migration:

**A Review of Literature and Media Narratives with focus on West African Sahel**

Stephan Hochleithner
Andreas Exner

# Contents

# Abstract

This working paper untangles scholarly, media, and policy-related perspectives on migration with special regard to the West African Sahel and a specific focus on the nexus between local government and emigration, and on resource-dependent rural populations. A brief overview of media narratives constructing West African migration complements the discussion of the local government-emigration nexus and its entanglements with questions of (rural) development. We conclude that this nexus appears to be severely under-researched to date, but of potential relevance to better understand emigration of rural population groups. We propose framing the analysis of local government within governing coalitions characterized as multi-level and translocal.

# Preface

The mandate of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting local democracy in low and middle-income countries. In order to fulfil this mandate, we offer decentralized cooperation through our municipal partnership programme, international training programmes and exchange of knowledge through our Knowledge Centre. ICLD documents and publishes key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiates and funds relevant research, engages in scholarly networks and organizes conferences and workshops. We also maintain a publications series. This working paper, *Local Government and Migration: A Review of Literature and Media Narratives with focus on West African Sahel*, by Stephan Hochleithner and Andreas Exner, is part of a series of four review papers that provide background for the research project *Political Representation under a Changing Sky*, financed by ICLD. This project aims to understand the multiple causes for climate-related migration from the Sahel towards Europe and the role of local political representation by local government in facilitating or moderating this migration.

Multiple questions are constantly asked about migration. What are the driving forces behind migration? What happens at the intersection of climate threats, social injustices and migration? Is migration a product of social structures or voluntary individual action? And in general, what is the role of local governments in relation to emigration? Many of these issues concern municipalities that ICLD cooperates with. The issues of participation, equity, transparency and accountability that form the core of our programs are influenced by migration processes both nationally and internationally. ICLD has therefore asked researchers to deal with some fundamental issues surrounding migration that can increase our understanding of this phenomenon. This working paper presents a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature and media narratives about the role of local government in migration, with a focus on West African Sahel. It provides important background for local governments interested in understanding the complex phenomenon of migration and the role of local governments. It highlights the multiple causes behind a person's decision to migrate and the importance of putting the agency of migrants at the centre of any political debate. Moreover, this paper presents three key roles for local governments in the current debate: first, in framing social and economic development, second, regarding the importance of remittances for local communities and finally, the role of return migrants in local politics.

I hope this study provides the reader with an increased understanding of the role of local government in analyses of emigration that can enlighten our efforts to build a more inclusive and fair world. In this way, we hope to contribute to increase knowledge to achieve the sustainable development goals.

Visby, Sweden, August 2018

Christer Åkesson
Acting Secretary General, ICLD

# About the Authors

## Stephan Hochleithner

Dr.sc.nat. in Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland; Mag.phil. in Social Anthropology, University of Vienna, Austria. Currently Post-Doc Researcher at the Dept. of ESPM, University of California, Berkeley, USA, and Affiliate Researcher at the Dept. of Geography, University of Zurich, Switzerland. Research interests: development; access to resources; global history; the crossroads of material and social realms; social and cultural dimensions of agriculture; forced displacement, mobility and migration; social theory building; carefully combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

## Andreas Exner

Studies in Political Science (PhD candidate) and Ecology (Mag.), affiliated with the Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, currently Schasching-fellow at the Catholic Social Academy of Austria (KSÖ) investigating solidarity economies and social ecological transformation, working moreover in research projects at the Institute of Multi-Level Governance and Development, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria (on edible cities) and the Institute for Psychology of the University of Innsbruck, Austria (on democratic orga-nization and urban development). Research interests: political ecology, social ecological transformation, in-ternational relations, resources, Africa, urban studies, mobility and migration; combining political economy with discourse analysis and anthropology, and qualitative with quantitative approaches in critical mixed method approaches, in view of policy relevance in trans- and inter-disciplinary perspective; specific interest in epistemology and methodology.

# Introduction

This working paper is part of a series of three that resulted from extensive research on (theoretical) framings and empirical studies of migration and local government with a focus on the West African Sahel (see for the other two parts Hochleithner and Exner 2018a and 2018b). The overview presented in the working paper series provides background for the "Political Representation under a Changing Sky"[1] research project of the International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD). This project aims to understand the multiple causes for climate-related migration from the Sahel towards Europe and the role of local political representation by local government in facilitating or moderating this migration. The project examines the roles of local governments – particularly their function of representation – in generating, mediating and reducing the current trend in which rural people are migrating out of areas in Sub-Saharan Africa in regions where climate change is viewed as a driver of outmigration.

The project seeks to identify means to make policy and practical responses to climate change supportive of local democracy – to make these responses emancipatory – and therefore a transformative force for equity, justice, and security for those deciding their future in place or abroad. The field research for this project is conducted in the Tambacounda Region of Senegal and in the Dantiandou and Say Districts of Niger, where out-migration is prevalent and where the consequences of this migration are often dire: many migrants die in route to Europe or simply disappear, leaving their communities and families with less labour, a great loss from having invested in the migration of their children, and with the grief of loss. Their decision to migrate is multi-dimensional, as this review implies and as the preliminary field research is already indicating.

After the New York Times journalist Thomas Friedman visited Agadez, a transit city in Niger for Africa migrants on route to Europe, in 2014, he presented his thoughts in an essay that is emblematic of what has become the dominant media narrative about migration from West Africa to Europe. Reflecting on the planting of a Green Wall against desertification in the Sahel he wrote:

*"In the end, no wall will hold back this surging migrant tide. Everything you see here screams that unless a way can be found to stabilize Africa's small-scale agriculture, one way or another they will try to get to Europe. Some who can't will surely gravitate toward any extremist group that pays them. Too many are now aware through mass media of the better life in Europe, and too many see their governments as too frail to help them advance themselves"* [2].

The main elements of this and other dominant narratives are population growth, climate change, rampantly increasing poverty, political instability, land degradation, desertification, and the lure of a mediatized image of a better life in Europe. The message is that this combination inevitably motivates migrants to attempt to enter the European Union. This narrative, however, does not go unchallenged. Although less prominent, it seems, there are other voices to be heard by and via the media too. And although media narratives and scholarly debates are interlinked, research has different and more nuanced perspectives to offer. Some make their way into media reports or policy documents, in implicit and sometimes even explicit ways (see Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015 on examples of this dialectic).

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1. The research for this project is being conducted by Dr. Papa Faye, Executive Secretary of CADRE (Centre d'Action pour le Développement et la Recherche en Afrique – CADRE) in Dakar, Senegal; Professor Jesse Ribot, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; and Professor Matthew Turner, University of Wisconsin, Madison. See for details: https://icld.se/en/article/climate-or-economic-migration-local-democracy-and-vulnerability-reduction-in-africa:-political-representation-under-a-changing-sky

2. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/13/opinion/out-of-africa.html?mcubz=0 [23.8.2017]

Photo: Papa Faye

In this working paper, we untangle scholarly, media, and policy-related perspectives on migration with special regard to the West African Sahel and a specific focus on a possible nexus between local government and emigration. In doing so, we concentrate on resource-dependent rural populations. In the first section, we outline a tentative typology of media narratives constructing West African migration. In the subsequent section, we move on to present a likewise tentative model of a presumed local government-emigration nexus, highlighting that this nexus appears to be severely under-researched to date, but of potential relevance to better understand emigration of rural populations. We propose framing the analysis of local government within governing coalitions characterized as multi-level and translocal.

Our review of approaches indicates that migration is a multi-causal phenomenon that cannot be reduced to any single factor. The high attention paid to environmental factors in current research does not match their rather modest importance in explaining international migration (although it helps to explain part of internal migration). The influence of development, on the other hand, is more obvious, although levels of emigration increase with development only so far as there is labour demand from other regions. Any attempt to explain migration has to put the agency of migrants at its centre. Their aspirations mediate local and global, structural and conjunctural factors, and meet a structural demand for unskilled labour with weak or lacking legal protection, which can easily be exploited. Aspirations express the cultural framing and individual interpretation of economic, environmental, and political conditions.

Future research taking a closer look into the role of local government and emigration should thus bear in mind the internationalized character of many social relations. We thus call for a regime-theoretical[3] approach to local government that recognizes its trans-local character in the context of multiple levels of governing. In order to capture the whole picture, we argue, migration research should go beyond simple deterministic models and set a focus on including power relations.

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3. The basic idea of regime theory is that a formal view on government legitimacy and resources is not sufficient to fully understand government. For further details see the section "a tentative general model" below.

# Media narratives

The way a story is told reflects the ideological conception of the story-teller on the subject presented, constituting a certain narrative. This logic of storytelling resonates with the ways in which media presents emigration from the Sahel to Europe and also with how scholarly literature and media narratives are interplaying in this regard. Although not attempting to produce a thorough study of media narratives of migration from the Sahel to Europe in the report at hand – which would be a scholarly endeavour on its own – the most common narratives will be briefly outlined in this section. Media narratives of African migration from the Sahel to Europe can be classified under: "The Wave of The Destitute", "The Journey of The Ambitious and The Naive", "A Welcomed Resource and Remedy", and "Taking the Exit". While narratives are analytical ideal types, and often appear in the form of hybridizations, this working paper uses the typology put forward below to facilitate self-reflection and support contextualization of academic research (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015), and as a starting point for probing discursive strategies of other actors (Benford and Snow 2000).

## The wave of the destitute

The dominant narrative in media reports screened for this working paper[4], could be called "The Wave of The Destitute". Within this narrative, terrible living conditions are presented as the combined result of environmental change, demographics, economic problems and political conflict. These elements, so the narrative, create a situation of despair, almost panic, resulting in a fierce determination to enter Europe. Representing migrants as being driven by unbearable suffering beyond control is often linked to a sense of threat that these imagined beings pose to destination countries. This is expressed by Thomas Friedman's statement quoted in the introduction, as well as by the following quote of the spokeswoman of the UNHCR in Spain in *The Guardian*: "Vega said the international community needed to do more to tackle the root causes of migration, such as conflict, climate change and economic instability, to reduce numbers. 'It's clear that walls and fences aren't going to deter anyone who's desperate enough to risk their life and those of their children. Whatever lies ahead of them, it can't be worse than what they're leaving behind.

They know they could die', she said."[5] Analysing discourses of environmental migrants, Ransan-Cooper et al. (2015) identify two different frames, the environmental migrant as victim and as security threat, which are frequently linked to each other. It appears that when looking at media narratives of general migration from West Africa to Europe, the victimization as well as the securitization of the migrant are mostly applied as well. Quite often, the Sahel is narrated as the *locus typicus* of a confluence of major crises threatening to reach Europe: "A perfect storm of drought, poverty and armed conflict in Africa's Lake Chad basin could fuel Europe's migrant crisis if world leaders fall short at two crucial summits on migration and climate change this year, a UN official warned" [6].

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4. Anglophone media reports were retrieved from *The Guardian*, the *New York Times, Al-Jazeera, Newsweek, allafrica.com*, and a number of smaller news outlets, which appear in *Google* and *Google News* searches when entering the keywords "Africa", "West Africa", or "Sahel" in combination with "migration". Targeting especially national and local news outlets in french language, a Nexis® search was performed with the same keywords, as well as in combinations with "démocratie", "participation", or "citoyenne", to look for connections to local democracy.

5. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/17/spain-refugees-migrants-unhcr-warning [23.8.2017]

6. http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/africas-lake-chad-could-fuel-new-migrant-crisis-un-20151108-6 [23.8.2017]

### The journey of the ambitious and the naive

Another narrative – apparently less common – corresponds to a story line that might be called "The Journey of The Ambitious and The Naive". Migrants are therein framed as being somewhat dreamy and lost in illusions about their meagre prospects, or irrationally ambitious with a grain of reckless fatalism. They are portrayed as being driven by rather naive aspirations of a better future, which they attach to an unrealistic image of life in Europe. A report in *The Guardian*, for instance, claims: "Steeped in a fatalistic culture, many of the elders, while funding and encouraging the trips, see the dangers [of the journey to Europe] as beyond their control. 'If it's their destiny to die, then so be it,' Balde says. 'It's a painful loss, but it's God's wish'. But the young men's desire to go is as strong as that of their parents. Something like gold rush fever has taken over. 'There are young men who don't have the means to go, but there has never been any young man in this village who doesn't think of going', Balde says. 'If they don't, they have no ambition to escape from this low life, or they're crazy. Or they might be scared – but that means they don't believe in God'."[7] In this narrative's framing, it is not destitution, but rather dissatisfaction with life that is presented as the driver of migration, attributing an aura of the unexplainable to the phenomenon. It might be coupled with an allusion to threat in contexts of debates about the possible effects of "development aid" on migration, as illustrated in another report by *The Guardian* on agricultural development initiatives: "While donors hope the project will encourage would-be migrants to enjoy better conditions at home, some migration experts say such development policies might have the opposite effect. With a little more money in peoples' pockets, migration becomes more tenable."[8]

### A welcomed resource and remedy

A narrative rarely found, and which seems to be restricted to media of the Global South or to be somehow unconventional, envisages African immigrants to Europe as an economic and human potential, in the sense of "A Welcomed Resource and Remedy". Thus, an online article in *The Market Mogul suggests*: "Rather than viewing a complex and diverse continent as a looming threat that must be contained, Africa could instead be viewed as a partner for European countries and a source of markets that could help to counter Europe's sluggish growth. In changing the mindset away from containment, African populations and economies could be seen as an asset in aiding Europe's key economic and demographic challenges"[9]. Referring to research on mobility transitions, this article maintains that "both the status quo and advanced economic growth and development will only lead to an increase in sustained migration" (op.cit.). Adding to this, the text introduces the topic of social and political equality, alluding implicitly to the colonial past and contemporary North-South relations, saying "[w]hereas Emerging Powers such as China and India emphasize horizontal cooperation and employ the rhetoric of solidarity, friendship, and cooperation, the most recent European development reforms too easily fall into a Weltanschauung of the West and the 'other' to be contained" (op.cit.). In a related way, an entry on allafrica.com emphasizes, that "[…] Europe cannot claim to have no hand in the causes of migration. Most migrants come from countries with dark histories of colonial injustice and an enforced inequitable distribution of resources. In fact, Europe's problem is not one of the arrivals, but of atonement for past and current wrongs. Migration is not a question of border control and security, but global economics, politics and justice"[10].

7. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/09/dreaming-of-europe-the-last-young-man-left-in-a-senegalese-village [23.8.2017]

8. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/jul/19/will-africas-great-green-wall-discourage-migration-to-europe [23.8.2017]

9. http://themarketmogul.com/african-migration/?hvid=4MBOop [23.8.2017]

10. http://allafrica.com/stories/201708180339.html [23.8.2017]

### Taking the exit

Equally rarely, migrants are depicted as political subjects that choose exit over voice in relation with their life prospects in their home countries. Thus, a *Newsweek* story reports:

"Barrow says he is keen to open Gambia up to the world. 'We will accommodate investors, we must have very good laws to protect investors,' says Barrow, citing the industry of agriculture—which he describes as 'the backbone' of the country—as an area to be exploited. The president-elect says he is calling upon Gambians tempted to migrate to stay put and help rebuild the country as it moves toward a post-Jammeh era. 'We have worked very hard to get to this level,' he says. 'Let us remain united and work hard on that to help create a new Gambia.' But for would-be Gambian migrants like Manneh, talk is cheap. He wants to see concrete results to convince him to stay. 'When I go back to Gambia, if I see that the situation there is the same as normal, I will try again,' says Manneh"[11].

### Media narratives: what is missing?

Media narratives of African migration from the Sahel to Europe discussed in this section can thus be classified under: "The Wave of The Destitute", "The Journey of The Ambitious and The Naive", "A Welcomed Resource and Remedy", and "Taking the Exit". This tentative typology comes close to the types of frames of environmental migrants, which Ransan-Cooper et al. (2015) identified: victims, security threat, adaptive agents, and political subjects; although the substantive characteristics differ. The image of migration as adaptation, for example, is conspicuously absent in the media, while it is one of the most prevalent in scholarly literature and is also a rather frequent element of policy reports (see respective sections below). As the following sections will illustrate, each of the media-frame-types refers – partly, at least– to a scientifically legitimated construct in order to explain and understand a certain aspect of migration. As the literature on migration aspirations shows, destitution and the determination to escape are implicated in certain types of migration. The same holds true for ambition, the search for a higher standard of living or personal fulfilment, and a relation to risk, which does not conform to rational

calculus. Economically or even politically, one might indeed discuss African migration as a boost to European economies or certain sectors and regions of it. Demand for cheap labour as one condition for such migration can hardly be underestimated. Colonial pasts and global inequality also play a certain role in understanding the phenomenon. Likewise, certain forms of migration might be interpreted as a result of political frustration or as an expression of political agency even. However, since frames (and narratives) serve primarily to reduce complexity in order to orient political action, they are often constructions that overly simplify social reality. It is thus notable that in media reports and policy documents (and partly also in the scholarly literature) migrants often are presented as a homogenous social group. Although science pursues at its core the task of reducing complexity in order to bring theoretically justified and empirically grounded structure into what Hannah Cross has called the "apparent chaos of migration" (Cross 2013: 203), this must not take place to the detriment of the non-identical (in the sense of Adorno 1966) underlying scientific constructions and which might ultimately defy the ambitious attempt to fully capture the contested phenomenon of migration by a single theory or concept.

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11. http://www.newsweek.com/can-gambias-new-government-close-migration-backway-535136 [23.8.2017]

# Local government and emigration

## Development, remittances, return migration

To a great extent, the media narratives outlined above overlap or are partly even identical with stories some scholars tell about emigration from the Sahel. As our review indicates, a perspective that is significantly lacking in both is an explicit perspective on local government in origin regions. At best, emigration is interpreted as taking the exit option due to national political circumstances. But the intricacies of local government, which might be highly relevant in political terms and for the conditions of everyday life, are often left out of the picture. This is not only a matter of emphasis, which is implicit in any kind of issue framing; just as much it is the result of a lack of scientific research and evidence on the concrete matter. The influence of local government on emigration appears to be hardly considered in various research designs, and even hypotheses are not often found in the reviewed literature. There are, however, a number of studies that focus on certain phenomena that connect questions of emigration with local or at least sub-national corpus, for example regarding development, remittances, and return migration.

## Development

Development research is increasingly focusing on subnational units in an attempt to explain growth and well-being. Mitton (in a global study, 2016), for example, argues that subnational institutions and their quality in terms of governance measures (e.g. corruption, property rights) have significant influence on economic development, and Angeles and Elizalde (2017) report statistical evidence for the influence of the political complexity of pre-colonial institutions on current levels of economic development in Latin America (see further literature on the influence of slave trade in Africa cited ibid.). Since emigration rates are statistically positively linked to economic development as measured by GDP per capita within the range of income levels in West Africa (Clemens 2014a, b; see also below), this represents a specific type of evidence pointing towards the importance of local government in explaining determinants of emigration. As local government in Africa has so far drawn remarkably little interest in the reviewed scholarly literature in general, this is also the case for its relations with emigration more specifically. However, there are

some arguments, which state that local government can exert crucial influence on local economic development. Greco (2016), for instance, investigating opposition to land grabbing in Tanzania, analyses how local government stabilizes power relations in favour of village communities confronted with attempts of land grabbing; a detail that goes easily unnoticed when not explicitly looking at this level of decision making.

## Remittances

To the extent that local government contributes to economic development, it can be expected that it also plays a role in emigration, especially to Europe. Local government may facilitate migration through other mechanisms, too, for instance by strengthening a particular local development path focused on migration remittances, in which feedback loops are involved. Local government may attempt to stop illegal emigration when the journey involves high serious risks related to imprisonment, death and slavery, or implies loss of agricultural work force in their jurisdiction. Emigrants who intervene in local affairs in their origin region might enable or facilitate further migration either through personal example or through improvements of local conditions. Such dynamics are addressed by the cumulative causation theorem (see below for details), although the theorem is mostly used in regard to the impact of migration networks on facilitating further migration from a given region.

Emigration is often coupled with remittances, which can be considerable when compared to development aid or even foreign direct investment (e.g. Sutherland 2013; Skeldon 2015; Gonzalez-Garcia et al. 2016). Remittances also have an effect on local social, economic, and political development. While the evidence concerning the so-called brain drain hypothesis appears contradictory or mixed, and some empirical findings and conceptual reflections contest its validity (cf. e.g. Lucas 2006; Skeldon 2015; Gonzalez-Garcia et al. 2016), there is more and more conclusive material available concerning different types of remittances and their effects. Many studies have, for example, documented the overall positive effect of remittances on democratic conditions in origin countries over a range of scales and regions,

including Africa (Pfutze 2013; Kapur 2014; Escribà-Folch et al. 2015; Konte 2016; Baudassé et al. 2017; Rahman 2017; Williams 2017b). Levitt and Lamba-Nieves (2011) review material on the importance of so-called social remittances. New ideas and capabilities have repeatedly been documented as influencing origin societies, a circumstance that has been assessed as having both positive and negative consequences (see McGregor 2014 for an illustrative case). Economic and social effects might in this regard also be linked. Boly et al. (2014), for instance, report high performance and disproportionately international orientation of companies founded by emigrants in diasporas, or via their investments. Some studies have shown how diaspora entrepreneurs may affect social transformation in their origin region (see for the example of Nepal Riddle and Brinkerhoff 2011). Diaspora associations may be specifically important as a positive change agent (Kshetri 2013), although transnational immigrant organizations in general do not always exert strong influences (Guarnizo 2017).

Furthermore, the political effects of diasporas' activities may not always be beneficial to home countries, as they can, for example, also exacerbate conflict (Beyene 2015). Likewise, Davies (2010) emphasizes the heterogeneity of African diasporas, the crucial role of context to understand their impact in terms of development, and that scientific knowledge in this regard still is limited. The presence of neo-patrimonial systems of governance and the crisis of "stateness" in some parts of Africa may be particularly relevant in this regard (Davies 2010). The heterogeneity and the context-dependency of whether and how diasporas contribute to positive change or not are also stressed by Turner and Kleist (2013) and de Wenden (2017). This context-sensitive approach is supported by case studies, like, for example, by Diedhiou (2011), who argued that transnational Murid brotherhood youth organizations in Senegal, the *dahiras*, are "potent entry points for responsive governance reforms" (Diedhiou 2011: 171). A circumstance, which Saharoui (2015) emphasized even stronger for Morocco, while Enoh (2014), for the case of Cameroon, highlights that the critical impetus of the respective diasporas strongly depends on the attitude of the government in the final instance. Grillo and Riccio

(2004), on the other hand, have analysed examples of co-development between Senegalese migrants in Italy and business or cultural projects in Senegal, pointing at social and economic limits of the engagement of diasporas with development.

*Return Migration*

Return migration is one form of influence of emigration on local government, potentially mediating further emigration dynamics. The perspectives of returning migrants might however be contradictory, as Sinatti (2011) argues for the case of Senegal. Romankiewicz et al. (2016), studying a village in rural Senegal, emphasize the adaptive effects of emigration towards environmental change without any intention to adapt being at play. Similar to Dedhiou (2011), they illustrate the crucial role of Sufi brotherhoods and a local culture of positive expectations of prosperity associated with attachment to the local marabout. In the case investigated by Romankiewicz et al. (2016), the village taken as a web of social relations is to a great extent a translocal community, diversified into different diasporas. These are held together inter alia by regular visits of the local marabout and common gatherings, during which political matters are discussed. Social cohesion and religiously mediated place attachment lead to enormous investments into village facilities through remittances over time. This study provides important insights, but does not specifically address issues of local government that go beyond informal relations with the marabout. Such issues are however in the centre of Sall's study (2010), who analyses the local political influence of emigrants in two small towns in the Senegal river valley. Due to their financial power and critical attitude towards how local affairs are handled, emigrants have started to exert strong influence in their origin regions. One major way to achieve influence is by supporting specific local candidates running for political offices. Sometimes, migrants themselves acquire positions of power. Sall (2010) does not describe a struggle for democratization, but rather finds that emigrants exert political influence within the existing clientelist system due to their financial power, specific organizational capabilities, and local reputation based on their migration experience.

The author suggests that migrants' "appetite" for political influence may not only be tied to their investments to foster development and to thus demand transparency, but by the decentralization of land management competencies to local levels of government (Sall 2010; cf. Sall et al. 2010; cf. Faye 2008 on the decentralization process). Romankiewicz et al. (2016), Sall (2010) and Dia (2013) all highlight the investments made by Senegalese migrants in origin regions, their political influence, and the translocal character of their regions of origin.

## A tentative general model

Building on the arguments briefly discussed above and anticipating results of the literature review detailed in this working paper (and summarized in the introduction), we propose a tentative model for analysing a potential local government-emigration nexus. Before going into details, however, some of the conceptual challenges involved must be addressed, for the notion of government has undergone substantial controversy and change over the last decades. Very briefly put, there has been a shift from the notion of government to governance in political science analyses from the 1990s onwards, starting with Rhodes (1997), denoting a new mode of governing within networks, where the state resorts to the role of moderator, and NGOs as well as other stakeholders become decisive actors in policy making and partly also for implementing policies. Further important features of governance are marketization, the emergence of public-private partnerships, and agenturisation (Rhodes 2007, Howlett and Ramesh 2016).

This diagnosis was initially associated with hopes for more horizontality and democracy in decision making, but has met more nuanced views in recent years: Firstly, the empirical foundation of such normative claims or hopes has been disputed; secondly, a linear and homogeneous development of government towards governance has been disproved empirically; and thirdly, the conceptual usefulness of a separation between government and governance has been criticized (Blanco 2015). Although this debate in general was limited to the global North or to even narrower exemplary cases such as the political system of the UK, the notion of governance became very prominent in terms of so called "good governance" as a prescription for the manner of governing a country – usually instrumentalized as a conditionality for distributing financial transfers (Doornbos 2001) in a context of the increasing role of NGOs in donor policies. As a result of these tendencies and widespread decentralization reforms in African countries from the mid-1980s onwards (Ribot 2002, Boone 2003), local government and how to conceptualize it constitutes a major analytical concern when trying to understand local politics and policies. Like the notion of governance, decentralization has been imbued with hopes of democratization. But in many cases, detailed studies of the establishment of local government in this context revealed considerable continuities of previous forms of rural politics (Boone 2003; see in more detail, e. g. Agrawal and Ribot 1999; Ribot 1999; Ribot 2002). The move towards decentralization in many African countries (for instance also in Senegal) was thus associated with an increasing role of NGOs and new forms of community-based resource management (e.g. Ribot 2002).

According to Bakewell (2010; see also further below), a satisfying theory of migration from the West African Sahel should account for the structural forces that promote emigration from the origin area and enable immigration in the region of destination, as well as for aspirations of migrants, and the structures that are formed to connect outward and inward migration. In this general account of the basic requirements of a theory of migration in a given context, local government is hardly ever addressed. To this adds that local government studies in African contexts appear to be rare overall. This circumstance is unfortunate, for local government certainly plays a role in mediating the promotion of emigration, the aspirations of migrant, and the structures that are formed as a result of a connection of outward and inward migration. In this regard, two main routes of a local government-emigration nexus are possible. Firstly, local government may shape political, social, and economic conditions that are locally relevant. Insofar as these conditions correspond with determinants of emigration, local government would exert an influence.

Secondly, emigrants may shape the character of local government themselves, according to their own agency and the dynamics, opportunities, and constraints of local polities. This may happen through their influence on candidate selection and support as well as on party programs, on governing coalitions (in the sense outlined above) either through remittances (including investment) or personal engagement (backed by reputation and financial means gained through emigration) within governing coalitions. Although serious methodological and conceptual challenges are involved in researching these two avenues, there is at least some evidence supporting their potential. Further research is needed to shed light on the effect of local government on emigration. A comprehensive picture of a local government-emigration nexus could not be found in the literature reviewed.

How to conceptualize government on the local level has important analytical repercussions. To account for this, we adopt a regime-theoretical approach that circumvents both the impasse of the more traditional government focus, which does not sufficiently capture the establishment of new modes of governing and the role of NGOs, and the governance perspective, which tends to neglect power asymmetries and the crucial role of state bodies. Furthermore, the regime-theoretical approach is able to come to grips with varied forms of government depending on policy issues and geographical location (Blanco 2015). The basic idea of regime theory is that a formal view on government legitimacy and resources is not sufficient to fully understand government. Rather, one needs to know how broader governing coalitions are constituted, how their relations are structured, and which resources the members of such coalitions command. Moreover, the socio-economic environment is important to reflect on, for problems and challenges to which regimes respond emerge therein. In order to be able to govern, a government thus requires an appropriate coalition of actors in support. The legal authority of a government, on the other hand, is not seen as sufficient to govern. A regime-theoretical approach conceived in this way transcends the idea of an autonomous government whose legitimacy and power rests primarily on the vote, and problematizes a neat distinction between government

and economy. It rather assumes that "the effectiveness of local government depends greatly on the cooperation of nongovernmental actors and on the combination of state capacity with nongovernmental resources" (Stone 1993: 6), also implying that the winning coalition of an election is not necessarily identical with the actual governing coalition. Therefore, such an approach also overcomes the dichotomization between government and governance *avant la lettre* (Blanco 2015; see Davis 2012 for a somewhat similar argument on a Gramscian basis). This kind of a regime-theoretical approach goes beyond issues of representation and accountability in the liberal sense, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of politics.


Photo: Jesse Ribot

In such form, the regime-theoretical approach has been applied to urban arenas in the global North as one example of local government (Stone 1993; Blanco 2015). Specifically targeting the issue of local governance (and hopes attached to it), and including one example from (South) Africa, Stoker (2011) also criticized a notion of governance that neglects issues of hard power traditionally associated with local government. This issue becomes even more relevant in an African context, where decentralization is often crucially linked to a history of urban-rural power relations rooted in colonial times (Mamdani 1996), and where power relations on the local level are often more or less dependent on relations with the central state (Boone 2003).

## Trans-locality, re-territorialisation and geopolitics

Dia (2013) suggested to capture the particular character of territoriality prevalent in many regions of Africa by the notion of the multi-sited village. Indeed, relevant political relations do not neatly map onto physical boundaries, as has been emphasized already above when discussing the concept of local government. This, however, also affects two further issues of territoriality: the boundedness of human movements, and the trans-local character of states. Firstly, through their geopolitical interventions, especially by European states in West Africa; secondly by the activity of supra-state organizations such as the World Bank or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and thirdly, by NGOs of various types. Regarding the first matter, it shall only be briefly mentioned that according to Mechlinski (2010), a confluence between internal and international mobility control within the West African region can be observed and that people in the region consequently distinguish little between these two types of borders. The second matter however merits some more detail, given recent developments in EU migration policies and foreign intervention in the Sahel more generally, on which the following remarks will be focused, together with some considerations regarding NGOs. This section will draw attention to theoretical issues involved, while more empirical detail is provided in Hochleithner and Exner 2018a.

The three dimensions of the mismatch of territory and territoriality on the level of the village, internal boundaries, and geopolitics indicate that certain notions of sovereignty and place have become misaligned (if they ever were appropriate) with social worlds under conditions of globalization, regionalization, and internationalization (Sassen 2013). In a way, the disentanglement of territory from territoriality, which some scholars call for, resembles the conceptual disengagement of mobility from migration. In both cases, sensitivity for the complexities of social relations in an internationalized world is enhanced: where units of analysis are not as (seemingly) self-evident as they had been in former decades, Geertz' dictum, that anthropology is not studying villages, but is studying in villages, is being taken seriously. With the advent of multi-sited ethnography and further attempts to stretch, criss-cross, and overcome perceived social entities, anthropology is of course not confined to villages anymore, which renders Geertz statement ultimately metaphorical. But even when research is starting within a village, trans-locality has to be taken into account to not fall prey to what could be called a "naturalistic village bias".

The Sahel migration regime is strongly influenced by EU interventions that have increasingly securitized migration and thus exert a considerable influence on nation states, and, possibly, on local government. A large array of studies has described how this influence takes place, although little attention has been devoted to the local level and to actors, who are specifically relevant there. The attempt to close borders for immigration has generated a growing border or migration industry which creates incentives to use migration for making profits (Andersson 2016), causing repercussions that reach out to origin regions and are supported by international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (Brachet 2016). Overall, the EU has set out to redraw its geography by a comprehensive process of re-bordering, marked by extraterritoriality [12] (Casas-Cortes et al. 2012; 2016). Extraterritoriality has far reaching consequences for stateness and government in West African countries, as Cross (2011) argued for Mauretania, and Trauner and Deimel (2013) for Mali.

The high level of interventionism of foreign institutions and organizations in African governments engenders a weakening of the accountability and capacity of domestic government. This is especially the case for NGOs, playing a crucial role in many matters concerning Africa and probably undermining the capacity of local government(s), as Ribot (2002) suggests. This assertion is indeed supported by other studies.

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12. Extraterritoriality in this context can be defined as an expansion of one state's institutions, authorities, jurisdiction, and/or similar, into the territory of another state; Casas-Cortes et al. (2016) illustrate this in regard to EU border-protection policies, describing how the Spanish border control and infrastructure project "Seahorse" signals "the emergence and consolidation of a territorially extended, increasingly informal and itinerate bordering assemblage of institutions, state authorities, and policies" (Casas-Cortes et al. 2016: 232).

Based on statistical data from Bolivia and Guatemala, Cook et al. (2017) have, for instance, found that NGOs crowd out local grassroots actors, which makes local government less responsive to local needs and citizens' concerns, although "more generally, the findings underscore the importance of local political contexts in moderating the effects of NGO interventions" (Cook et al. 2017: 203). Considering the situation in many states of the Global South, Moore (2001) emphasizes that Northern states perpetuate political "underdevelopment" of the South insofar as state elites can remain too independent of their own citizenry. Although it is clear that trans-locality and geopolitics have to come into consideration when analysing a local government-emigration nexus, possible relations between the increasing level of trans-locality of West African states and local governments on the one hand, and emigration on the other, appear as substantially under-researched from the reviewed literature.

## Local government and the migration-development nexus

Following the presentation of a tentative general model of the possible linkage between local government and emigration, and after an outline of a reflexive notion of concepts of the village, the border, and the state, this subsection will go into details of existing literature on the migration-development. Insofar as local government acts as a mediating factor, the migration-development nexus is important for the understanding of emigration. In fact, research into local rural governance, including issues of representation and democracy, appears highly important in a region, where vulnerability reaches way beyond drought (see e.g. Trench et al. 2007), i.e., must be addressed by structural changes in power relations (Ribot 2014), and by increasing the accountability of local rural institutions. However, it remains unclear that reducing vulnerability in this way will mitigate outmigration from rural areas. Insofar as such a transformation would amount to or require economic development, emigration might be expected to increase, if following the logic of the theorem of the mobility transition. And to the extent that vulnerability is not the only or not even the predominant factor for attempts to emigrate out of West Africa, addressing vulnerability might not be the prime point for an approach, insofar as migration is perceived to constitute a problem.

Yet this view on migration has repeatedly been criticized in the scholarly literature on the topic, not least with regard to development. Tacoli (2009) thus demands to support migration, albeit together with initiatives of rural development, especially directed towards the bottom-up establishment of small towns in rural areas. However, according to Tacoli, "agricultural adaptation initiatives should not assume that they ought to contribute to reduce out-migration, and especially rural– urban migration, as there is ample evidence to show that rural development usually has little effect on migration, and where it does it tends to encourage rural– urban migration" (Tacoli 2009: 521).

Still others highlight the adaptive potential of migration and argue for its support not least in the face of political and economic turmoil or stressors, and of the possible effects of future climate change.

Molenaar and El Kamouni-Janssen (2017), for example, stress that curtailing migration (as the EU currently attempts in Sub-Saharan Africa) might thus exacerbate social and political tensions. This view might not necessarily amount to outsourcing the burden of dealing with environmental or broader societal change and transformation to those least capable of shaping the conditions of their livelihoods, as it has been criticized with regard to adaptation (e.g. Ribot 2014). Rather, this view might account for the political and social realities on the ground in Sahelian countries, and might be the result of assessing likely impacts of substantial reductions of migration in societies, which have been oriented towards the production of mobile subjectivities that are able, willing and desiring to migrate to Europe, as several studies on this topic indicate.

This perspective might be countered by interpreting emigration from West Africa as a disengagement from local development issues. An interpretation that has however become doubtful considering the arguments put forward by literature on the increasingly strong economic effects of remittances. Although there are serious and quite plausible warnings against the assumption that these effects substitute for genuine development, in the sense of structural societal change with generally

improving living conditions (e.g. Grillo and Riccio 2004; Adepoju 2008; de Haas 2012; Obeng-Odoom 2016; 2017), a wider assessment of the manifold effects of emigration possibly requires two further considerations: first, the extent to which this issue is framed as place-bound; second, how emigration feeds back into political conditions in origin regions.

Regarding the place-bound notion of development, which reaches back to colonial policies to impose sedentary lifestyles in Africa, and is reproduced within globalized ideas of national development, which put the interests of nations before the needs of individuals, Bakewell (2008) observes that

"when it comes to migration there still appears to be a gulf between development organisations' conception of the good life and that of many people with whom they work. While the former look to a future where people can achieve a better quality of life at 'home', the latter might see improved quality of life related to new opportunities, which might include moving and establishing a new 'home' elsewhere. Such autonomy is an essential part of the notion of development-as-freedom put forward by Sen but it is not clear how it can be incorporated into the mainstream of development practice" (Bakewell 2008: 1351).

While the first question thus appears to be primarily a normative one, the second is moreover a matter of empirical data.

A vast literature analyses the effects of migration on remittances and of these on development. Akobeng (2015), for example, finds that remittances reduce poverty and decrease income inequality in African countries. Furthermore, several studies have investigated patterns of spending remittances and whether or not they are productively invested and under which conditions[13]. Contrary to the economic effects of remittances, the potential political impacts of outmigration on origin areas have been studied to a lesser extent. A conventional reasoning would be to assume that migrants choose exit over voice by leaving a country (see e.g. Ifekwunigwe 2013 for Senegal's youth migration), and one might speculate that

this move might have detrimental effects on the origin regions' politics. In fact, more of the studies reviewed by Baudassé et al. (2017) show a positive influence of migration on home country institutions – rather than showing a detrimental impact.

Kapur (2014) provides a review of findings in the literature on political effects of international migration. In a critical discussion of Hirschman's hypothesis that exit reduces voice, Kapur (2014) argues that both options are in fact complementary and reinforce each other, as do Baudassé et al. (2017). Kapur (2014) also highlights the transmission of ideas of "modernity", including democracy, through international migration to origin countries (see Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010 for a case study of this aspect in Mexico) – which, on the other hand, has been criticized as colonialist by Obeng-Odoom (2016). Escribà-Folch et al. (2015) argue that remittances undermine electoral support for autocratic leaders in party-based regimes by reducing the effectiveness of spoils-systems and provide empirical evidence supporting their argument. This conclusion is also drawn in the study of Pfutze (2013) on Mexico, and in Rahman (2017) on Bangladesh.

Interaction effects of economic remittances and democratic regimes in origin countries have been documented by Adams and Klobodu (2016) for Sub-Saharan Africa, by showing that remittances have a positive effect on GDP growth only under democratic conditions.

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13. It should be noted, that indeed, as Bakewell (2008) states as a more general claim, some studies refer to conspicous consumption of migrants in their origin countries in a rather pejorative tone, which actually is unwarranted as a moral judgment. Analytically, conspicous consumption or, more broadly, changes in habitus as reported by studies on African migration might well have an important effect on migration aspirations of others. But it should be obvious that conspicous consumption appears to be a pervasive feature of many societies, and certainly it is a basic characteristic of capitalist societies. Envisaging development of African societies without the very characteristics of development is evidently impossible. This, in fact, has also been argued in regard to mobility in this working paper. It might be worthwhile noting that a study on Senegal (Garenne 2015) shows that possession of "modern" goods (including those often cited in terms of conspicous consumption) at the household level significantly correlates with decreased fertility, lower mortality, higher age at marriage and higher level of education –features that many of those engaging in the discourse of migration would probably hail as beneficial. In contrast, traditional wealth is not associated with fertility and mortality, and the study reports a negative correlation with marriage and education, pointing to particular attitudes related to consumption patterns beyond levels of household wealth measured in purely monetary terms (Garenne 2015).

Williams (2017a) reports this effect for global data, too. Deonanan and Williams (2016) demonstrate that remittances do not only foster the transition to democracy as Escribà- Folch et al. (2015) argue, but that remittances also improve the quality of democratic institutions that already are in place. Deonanan and Williams (2016) further indicate that this effect is stronger when government spending is low. They interpret their finding thus as evidence that remittances are substituting for government spending. Williams (2017b) argues that remittances improve democracy in Africa in general. However, on an individual level, the effects of remittances on the legitimacy of democracy vary depending on the priorities of individuals.

When benefiting from remittances, those that are more concerned about the improvement of their economic conditions appear to support democracy less than those that prioritize freedom and rights in national politics (Konte 2016).

Summarizing the ambiguous notion of migration in relation to development, and several of the arguments put forward in some detail in the preceding sections, Bakewell (2008) states:

"The recent enthusiasm for exploring the links between migration and development has not been accompanied by a significant change in development actors' ambivalent views of migration; there remains an underlying assumption that development is about enabling people to stay at 'home'. It argues that these concepts of development fail to take account of people's different development goals, struggle to cope with transnationalism, which takes development beyond the borders of nation states, and maintain echoes of colonial paternalism. In conclusion, it calls for development to be reconceptualised for a mobile world" (Bakewell 2008: 1342).

There is little evidence thus that international migration is detrimental to the economic or political development of origin regions in general or by necessity, and the literature indicates a rather positive outlook on this type of migration. On the other hand, an unanimously positive effect across regions and countries might be difficult to uphold, and it is beyond doubt that international migration might constitute formidable challenges ranging from shifting notions and relations concerning gender, generation, class, and ethnicity, as they are typical for social transformations. These challenges are maybe not in direct proportion to the quantitative relevance of outmigration in a region or country.

Baudassé et al. (2017) thus conclude their review of studies on a possible institution-migration nexus by saying that "it is very difficult to identify the real *causal* impact of institutions on migration and vice versa" (Baudassé et al. 2017: 2; emphasis in the original), and few studies establish a clear causal effect. Furthermore, "there are more works that succeeded in identifying a causal effect of migrants on the institutions of their country of origin; but the specific mechanisms at play are still unclear" (Baudassé et al. 2017: 2). This result is, however, not much of a surprise, given the limited role of subsistence crises for long-distance and international migration – whether or not they are related to climate or to climate change –, forms of migration that are characteristic for regions with low levels of development, and with a limited prevalence of typically "modern" or even post-modern aspirations and capabilities, which are conducive to and allegedly prerequisite for international migration.

At best, the relevance of the formal characteristics of local government such as local representation and accountability – let alone the informal features of local government coalitions (see remarks on the regime approach above) – is severely under researched. There is evidence that migration increases with the degree of political freedom in a country (de Haas 2010; cf. for a somewhat more nuanced, but in general similar result in Czaika and de Haas 2012), and that opportunity differences between institutional quality in origin and destination countries play a role, especially for the highly skilled (Ariu et al. 2016). But these statistical analyses refer to national scales, and both qualitative and quantitative case studies on sub-national scales with a focus on international migration would be required.

Photo: Jesse Ribot

### Local institutions and emigration

In the light of the analysis of this summary chapter (reflecting the propositions of a regimes of mobility-approach), however, the issue of forced immobilities and *involuntary* stasis as well as the issue of *voluntary* immobility and migration should be investigated in relation to local governance. Moreover, the notion of 'institution' may not be confined to formalized organizations. In such a manner, migration as such has been described as an

institution by Guilmoto (1998) for West Africa, and Senegal in particular, following an institutionalist perspective. The possible impact of local government on emigration as a mediating set of (power) relations is itself mediated through institutions such as property, gender or family, or local organizations of various sorts. It is thus an important optic for understanding local government coalitions.

One of the very few indications in the reviewed literature that points toward a potential relevance of local institutions in mediating or mitigating migration are provided by Sarr (2008), Cross (2013), and Bouilly (2016) on local resistance against undocumented emigration by Senegalese mothers in the region of Dakar. Likewise, Mondain and Diagne (2013) also take a look at the

agencies of those "left behind", but rather insofar as these enable and foster emigration. Referring to Mali and to Senegal, Hummel (2016) describes policies and institutions that inter alia target the issue of emigration. However, in her cases, internal migration is more important than emigration. One of the problems Hummel identifies, concerns "fragmented institutions, rules and governance systems in heterogeneous policy fields and barely integrated sectors". Hummel states that

"Several national frameworks such as PRSPs [Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers] and NAPA [National Program of Action] also take into account the positive impacts of migration such as remittances and the transfer of skills which in turn contribute to development, but their implementation at the regional and local levels poses great challenges, since they often lack transparency and good governance, and thus the ownership of the citizens is low. Furthermore, there remain considerable inconsistencies between and within international frameworks such as PRSPs and NAPA, plus a lack of integration and harmonisation. Moreover, there are the inconsistencies within the migration policy of the European Union and bilateral migration policies between European countries and ECOWAS members such as Mali and Senegal" (Hummel 2016: 229).

Hummel (2015) stresses that many people, especially the young and better educated, do not wish to continue farming. Policies enhancing livelihoods in agriculture will thus not reduce migration, suggesting once more that development might in general increase migration, not reduce it.

The significance of local institutions has repeatedly been highlighted in research on environmental issues, including adaptation to climate change. For instance, Agrawal et al. (2008) conclude their study of the role of local institutions in adaptation to climate change by arguing that

"The current studies tend to show that climate change adaptation and response coordination benefit from centralized command during extreme events but most of the adaptation and resilience related functions require appropriate decentralization of functions, devolution of authority and community participation to complement the centralized system" (Agrawal et al. 2008: 20).

Recalling that structural adjustment since the 1980s severely limited resources that African states can use independently of foreign donors, often also depriving local governments of independence, it however remains an open question whether or not local institutions, beyond government, or institutions that are not accountable to local populations (unlike local government in the sense of democratically elected officials with descretionary powers) are indeed better equipped to respond to extreme events (pers. comm., Ribot; also see Ribot 2002). The discussion of the literature relevant to trans-locality above lends support to this hypothesis.

Evidence of the importance of local institutions with regard to environmental issues, however, stands in sharp contrast to doubts about their potential in relation to subsistence crises that reach catastrophic dimensions. In case of famine, for example, even national governments easily reach the limits of their capacities, and political representation and liberal democracy, at least in a formal sense, can clearly not guarantee access to food. Accordingly, in a study on the Niger famine in 2005, Rubin (2009) concludes, that food accessibility is a much more important

issue than food availability, following Sen (1981; see Giannini et al. 2017 for a similar emphasis in the case of Burkina Faso). However, political pluralism did not positively influence policies against the famine, contradicting Sen's theory. The Niger 2005 famine is classified as a moderate famine, exacerbated by the collapse of remittances from Ivory Coast. Men often left homes to work in cities, while women staying behind had been weakened by hunger to an extent that made it impossible for them to continue to pursue agriculture and care for families. Children often fed on wild leaves (Rubin 2009). In correspondence with Rubin's (2009) account, a report issued by The Sahel Working Group stresses the long-term structural conditions of vulnerability of people in Niger and neighbouring countries beyond drought (Trench et al. 2007), while Mousseau et al. (2006) lay more emphasis on the impact of long-term economic liberalizations, which they see as particularly detrimental to food security, identifying a "free market-famine" in Niger.

Although many of the examples of initiatives with adaptive relevance – regarding climate change or social transformations – have local origins and might develop without further involvement of the state or even NGOs (while contributing to adaptive transformations on much wider, trans-regional scales), drylands such as the Sahel are increasingly affected by globalized societal (and environmental) relations, as has been stressed above (see also Reynolds et al. 2007). These relations limit the leverage of merely local adaptations or more broadly conceived measures in local contexts. As we have highlighted, the global in the Sahelian locales is however multi-tiered. Mousseau et al. (2006) thus emphasize the disastrous consequences of regional economic integration in West Africa on farmers – quite in contrast to the impact of regional integration within the EU, where agriculture largely was (and is) protected by deliberate policies that limit the potential impact of free trade and competition. The relevance of strengthening food sovereignty on a regional, cross-national level in West Africa was early recognized by Sahelian farmers groups, Mousseau et al. (2006) argue. However, programmatic work and political demands were thwarted so far, possibly by the strong role of donors, in particular by

France, in West African politics (for vivid descriptions of the scope of the role of foreign forces within the Nigerien state, see Rubin 2009 and Larsen and Mamosso 2014). Market regulation, Mousseau et al. (2006) emphasize, would be an imminent requirement to reduce the risk of future famines. This, however, runs counter to dominant political agendas on national, regional, and international scales of decision-making. Local participation has little prospects of initiating change, it seems, when considering the conclusion Mousseau et al. (2006) are drawing with respect to Niger's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers:

"The way the national policies have been designed in Niger reflects this lack of rural engagement in decision-making. Despite the much-publicized participative approach used in the design of the PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers] the skewed nature of this strategy raises serious questions about the nature of the representation. It seems unlikely that the voices of the landless and small-scale farmers were heard in the PRSP process, given that the resulting strategy prioritizes commercial agriculture and free trade" (Mousseau et al. 2006: 41).

Nevertheless, Mousseau (2011) reiterates the necessity to build progress starting from further developing and implementing regional policies, the most promising of which was the Regional Program for Food and Agriculture by ECOWAS in 2010.

One important avenue of research on the relevance and potential of local institutions in the context of climate change are commons regimes of natural resource use. Just a few examples from an increasing and already vast literature on local management of environmental resources shall be mentioned to illustrate the case. Recently, for instance, Snorek et al. (2017) highlighted both the importance and the loss of commons systems in northern Niger to the detriment of pastoralists relying on water access. The neglect and repressions of pastoralists have been described in many publications. Despite increasing attention to the pastoralist cause, with calls for more participation of these groups in the governance of resources, Turner (1999), in a case study in southeastern Niger, points out the persistence of narratives

that associate herders with chaos and overuse of land. It remains open how much such narratives have changed since then. In any case, the long-standing political discrimination of pastoralists dating back to colonialism continues into the immediate present, with prominent repercussions in terms of armed rebellions in Mali or Niger (Benjaminson 2008; Emerson 2011). Notably, Raleigh (2010) finds "no evidence" that "links the onset of such events to a direct scarcity of resources" (Raleigh 2010: 79), summarizing that "[e]nvironmental issues can be catalysts to low-level conflict in marginalized communities, but the critical factor is the extent of political and economic marginalization" (Raleigh 2010: 69). Important as such observations and analytical results are in order to understand social dynamics in regions with the presence of pastoralism, and to possibly make political or social interventions more efficient in terms of human well-being, there is hardly any evidence linking mismanagement of the commons, enclosures, or low-level conflicts −regardless of their explanations− to significant outmigration from Sahelian countries. Democratization and decentralization might even exacerbate low-level conflicts, as Benjaminson et al. (2012) have shown for Mali, since it was coupled with weak government presence and an uncertain future amounting to a power vacuum, which was exploited by various actors making claims to land.

The ambiguous and partly negative impact of recent decentralization reforms are also highlighted in the review of literature on responses to drought in the wider West African context by Gautier et al. (2016), who suggest that "there has been no full transfer of authority over natural resources to local authorities. For these reasons, decentralization has not really enhanced local resources management but has increased the marginalization of both herders and women" (Gautier et al. 2016: 9). Moreover, Gautier et al. (2016) highlight the role of solidarity networks and collective adaptive responses, including tenure systems, rather than of those on the individual and household level, that have been the subject of a larger number of studies. That local institutions might be more effective than NGOs in advancing coping mechanisms and responses to drought is indicated by the observation that many reforestation projects fail after

NGOs leave an area, while reforestation in the Maradi bottom-up (Sendzimir et al. 2011). Corresponding to this view, Tougiani et al. (2009) argue that "[i]nclusion of all stakeholders in decision making has been pivotal to the successful adoption and spread of FMNR [farmer managed natural regeneration]" (Tougiani et al. 2009: 383) in the Maradi region.

Despite such positive examples of more decentralized control of development, failures of decentralization initiatives are widespread. Ribot and Larson (2012) thus argue for the potential of community-based forestry in Senegal, which is however blocked by asymmetrical power relations. Strengthening local voice and accountable institutions is suggested as remedy. Boone (2003) explains widespread failures of decentralization initiatives to meet expectations from donors and other actors by considering political economy, arguing "that decentralization remains a strategy that regimes employ (or avoid) in attempts to reinforce their own advantage" (Boone 2003: 375). It is thus unlikely that decentralization or, by extension, local government can by itself change unfavourable power structures. On the other hand, Arcand and Wagner (2016) describe community-driven peasant initiatives in Senegal in the frame of a decentralized agricultural development program as successfully supporting inclusion, indicating leeway in the design of local institutions given conducive conditions. Nyong et al. (2006) highlight the value of traditional conflict-resolution institutions, while Njock and Westlund (2010) rather emphasize the challenges of communal resource management when sizeable shares of migrant fishers are present.

In the general literature on land and institutions, commons systems or otherwise democratically accountable systems of local resource governance are recurrently described as pillars for solutions for structural subsistence crises and vulnerable livelihoods. The review of land institutions in Africa by Toulmin (2008) makes a case for locally grounded systems of land titling, for these are pragmatic solutions in the face of restricted state capacities. Moreover, Toulmin argues, they are more apt to reflect "the diversity and overlapping nature of land rights, and having full regard for the importance of collective property" (Toulmin 2008: 18). In this context,

Boone (2017) shows that land tenure patterns are of crucial importance to understand an absence of sons-of-the-soil-conflicts in Africa.

Obeng-Odoom (2017) relates the African land question to migration by arguing that "much of the crisis of migration



Photo: Jesse Ribot

− if it can so be called − can be understood as driven by the crisis of the commons, to wit, inequality, poverty, and social problems arising from unequal access to land" (Obeng-Odoom 2017: 169). While not suggesting that all migration arises from unequal access to land, Obeng-Odooms argument concerns the prospective solution of a "myriad" of social problems and "policies driving the mass migration of people", which, in his view, "cannot be satisfactorily resolved or fully understood without addressing the class-based land question" (Obeng-Odoom 2017: 169). Obeng-Odoom argues for institutions inspired or guided by Georgism, referring to Singapore and Alaska as two examples which might illustrate the emigration-reducing effect of land policies, extending to the provision of social housing (in the case of Singapore) in accordance with Georgian policy principles. However, these policies are not restricted to local contexts, but are national in scope, and Obeng-Odoom is suggesting that in the final instance, they should −or even must− be global. The merits of this reasoning and the disastrous role of enclosures of land and derived forms (such as in housing turned into private property instead of social property) notwithstanding, Obeng-Odoom's account's view of the conditions of emigration can only partly be substantiated by the literature on migration as assessed in this working paper.

As far as migration is influenced by conditions which are mediated by local institutions, increasing accountability in order to raise a feeling of control of one's livelihood might be paramount to improve local welfare. The psychological study of farmers and pastoralists in Mali and Burkina Faso by Van Haaften and Van de Vijver (2003) emphasized that enhancing control might not be side-lined, for "interventions, that aim at an increase of security of tenure and the establishment of conditions favorable for sustainable land use may have no or even adverse effects (...), if they have no connection to the psychological dynamics of control of the land users" (Van Haaften and Van de Vijver 2003: 98). The potential of well-designed development interventions including institutions to even reverse negative environmental change and improve livelihoods, which are also better able to withstand droughts if the context is conducive, is illustrated by Sendzimir et al. (2011) in a study of dramatic reforestation efforts and success in Niger. Although "[r]eversals toward de-forestation or reforestation were preceded by institutional changes in governance, then livelihoods and eventually in the biophysical environment" (Sendzimir et al. 2011: 1), Sendzimir et al. (2011) emphasize that "the pattern of interactions was more important to the sustained success of regreening than any single factor or process" (Sendzimir et al. 2011: 17), thus supporting doubt to put sole trust in institutional engineering. Moreover, "[t]he sustainability of the Maradi/Zinder region depends in part on seasonal migration" (Sendzimir et al. 2011: 18), which confirms the frequent statement in the literature on the importance of migration to sustain livelihoods.

# Conclusion

The broad range of literature, reaching from scholarly articles to reports of international organizations – including NGOs – to media texts, reviewed in this working paper shows that migration is multi-causal. No single factor can be seen as the prime condition of movements of people, neither within West Africa, nor those reaching beyond. Moreover, the ways that migration is categorized often simplifies social reality and has political implications and consequences for research and understanding of human movement. We find important distinctions between the ways media and research characterize human movement and thus in their implications for policy and practice.

This working paper first outlined a tentative typology of media narratives constructing West African migration, after which we moved on to presenting a likewise tentative model of a presumed local government-emigration nexus, highlighting that this nexus appears to be severely under-researched to date, but of potential relevance to better understand emigration of rural populations. We proposed framing the analysis of local government within governing coalitions characterized as multi-level and translocal. We identified two main roles of local government within this nexus: firstly, local government might influence emigration by shaping local conditions; secondly, emigration might influence local government and foster or reduce further emigration. In a case of opposition to land grabbing in Tanzania, for example, Greco (2016) observed how local government takes on a stabilizing role with regards to power relations, averting a threat posed to village communities by large scale land acquisitions, which might lead to emigration under certain conditions. Emigrants, in turn, shaped local government in villages in the Senegal River Valley by (also financially) supporting certain candidates or running for office themselves, inter alia aiming to decentralize land management competencies to local levels of government (Sall 2010; Faye 2008).

The neglect of the role of local government thus adds to an array of misframings discussed in this working paper. We argue, that putting more emphasis on local government in analyses of emigration might help to better understand migrants' reasons for leaving the Sahel. The presence of active institutions and specific sets of actors is a fundamental quality of West African societies. They shape the direction societies are taking in their own transformation. Institutions of local government can play a role of representation of that agency within their relations to local populations. Emigrants in many cases prove to be interested in the economic development of their origin areas for various reasons and may exert influence on local conditions as well.

To better include local government in analyses means to better acknowledge agency and choice together with structure and constraint. Power relations condensed in government on various levels are important to understand the conditions, forms, and consequences of emigration. To recognize local government as a central mediator of migration works to bring the concept of power back into a mediatized discourse that is too often replacing serious analytical efforts with biased political agendas, unreflective research framings and questions, resulting in superficial considerations, policies and practices.

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