

Chapter 2

BEING-ON-THE-LAND

The Agri-culture of Migration



Does it still make sense to become a farmer in Sabi? Several decades of uncertain ecological and marketing conditions have put farmers' confidence seriously to the test. Their hopes of making headway by farming groundnuts, or, more modestly, of feeding a growing number of mouths, appear as slim as ever. Although prospects of emigration are not as rosy as in the past, many families still expect their sons to go and find money elsewhere, especially abroad, as soon as they grow up. Without migrant remittances many Sabinko would be simply unable to eat three meals a day, to pay their medical bills or even to have a decent mosque in which to pray. So entrenched is the sense of migration as auspicious that even small boys fantasize about going to Europe and coming back with plenty of money. Few of them dream instead of a future of lush fields of crops and bountiful harvests. Yet barely any child or boy can skip his farming duties; boys still get up in the morning and go to the farms, and the lazy ones might be persuaded by the older ones after some beating. This is not (or not solely) because the Sabinko are conservative rustics, nor because they are necessarily under the pressures of production and exploit juvenile labour – households which could afford to subsist on off-farm incomes alone are no less committed to sending their boys to the fields. Rather, many villagers believe that becoming a farmer is still the best way for a boy to become a good *hustler*, as hard-working off-farm workers, especially those who travel, are called in the Gambia. Even children born abroad to migrant parents are often sent back to the village to spend from a few

months to their entire childhood with their families and farm in the fields.

While ‘sitting’ and travelling have increasingly become distinct livelihoods over the past few decades, their synergy is maintained at the socio-cultural level. In this chapter, I describe the role of ‘sitting’ in the cultural reproduction of mobile and immobile livelihoods and orientations. I use ‘sitting’ here in its most encompassing sense of leading a sedentary life, and more specifically, as a form of dwelling (Heidegger 1993; Ingold 2000: ch. 10) that insists on being on and with the land as a formative experience. Of all practices pertaining to a settled life, I concentrate, in particular, on cultivation. For the Sabinko, fields are not simply places of botanical growth but terrains of physical, social and moral maturation, where boys are turned into hard-working, disciplined and compassionate *hustlers*. Through farming, young men embody virtuous habits that will enable them to work hard and endure hardship not only in the bush but also in the travel-bush. In addition to instructions and techniques, cultivation involves coming to an experiential understanding of emplacement by enabling boys to awaken and attune their embodied consciousness to the rural life-world, thus grounding their sense of self in the existential condition of those who endure life on the land.

By spotlighting the centrality of being-on-the-land for enabling mobile livelihoods this chapter calls for a novel conceptualization of the relationship between migration, sedentariness and culture. A ‘culture of migration’ approach has since the 1990s contributed to embedding cultural dynamics more firmly in migration research as well as to overcoming the idea that migrant-sending societies are normally sedentary and thus troubled by outmigration. Writing about southern Mexico, Jeffrey Cohen (2004: 5) has used the notion of the culture of migration to show how a long-standing tradition of migration has made outmigration an accepted ‘path toward economic well-being’ whereby people deliberate over the necessity to travel ‘as part of their everyday experiences’. What can be just as mundane as practices of imagination as well as activities that prepare prospective migrants for life abroad (Ali 2007; Salazar 2010). In all such senses Sabi boys grow up in a culture of migration (Jónsson 2012: 105–6), for they attach positive values to travel and expect to follow in the footsteps of their fathers and brothers that have already gone to work and trade abroad (cf. Kandel and Massey 2002). However, insofar as it reduces the relation between culture (or acculturation) and migration to the signifying practices of movement, the notion of the culture of migration fails to account for the sedentary activities that propel mobility in Sabi. Rather than a culture of migration, in fact, Sabi men seem to have an agri-culture of migration.¹ Agrarian activities are harnessed

to construe a capability for mobility, or ‘motility’ (Kaufmann 2002), and vice versa, migration dynamics contribute to sustaining an agrarian way of life. In Sabi, migration is not dichotomously opposed to sedentariness but thrives in a symbiotic relation with it, and the two even coalesce in cultural terms in what I call an agrarian ethos of Soninke migration. This is not to say that the relation between movement and stillness is harmonious and unchanging. As will be shown in the latter part of the chapter, specific transnational dynamics both reproduce and affect modes and geographies of childrearing, while the commoditization of migrant labour in the West influences local views of cultivation, reducing its complex cultural meaning to mere economic value.

Back to the Land?

That agricultural development is associated with the formation of human virtues and values, rather than simply with agronomic improvement, could not be more clearly seen in the Gambian public sphere. In the early 2000s, President Jammeh launched a call to Gambians to go ‘back to the land’, which has over time become the mantra of the state rhetoric on agriculture. Painting a bright future for the nation’s agriculture, even a green revolution, Jammeh has repeatedly exhorted Gambians to actively contribute to achieve food self-sufficiency by 2016, when rice imports should cease (e.g., State House of The Gambia 2003). Each year the president tours the countryside to promote the campaign and his other initiatives; in his speeches, he often promises the means to those who want to invest in modern agriculture (Wright 2004: 235–37, 244–48). New agricultural projects and foreign donations of machinery, especially the tractors donated by Taiwan, are occasions for pompous ceremonies in which these pieces of modern technology are put on display and then distributed to ‘entrepreneurial farmers’, usually political clients of the ruling party. Rather than exogenous aid and innovation alone, however, the Back to the Land campaign insists on self-help and hard work. During the rainy season, the TV broadcasts images of Jammeh leading by example in the fields of his huge plantations near Kanilai, his own home village in the Western region of the Gambia. Wearing plain clothes, the president bends down to the ground to energetically weed the crops by hand and hoe. Several teams of young volunteers flock from all over the country to assist him (and to receive generous handouts for their contribution). The produce is then managed by Kanilai Family Farm, which sells it at subsidized prices or to support other charitable initiatives, or donates it as food relief.

During the 2007 rainy season, some Gambian villages began to follow in Jammeh's footsteps by organizing collective farms for community projects and for a scholarship scheme run by the Jammeh Foundation for Peace. One news report I watched on GRTS TV in late September featured university students (the beneficiaries of the scheme) participating in the weeding operations of one such field. When interviewed, one of the students tried to dispel doubts about the students' inclination towards purely intellectual occupations and reckoned that his group worked harder than the local farmers themselves. Responding to the government's call in such a way has since become a way for interest groups and villages to become visible and link up with state patronage networks. In 2011, a group of Sabi women were thus mobilized to farm rice in the hope of receiving machinery for income-generating activities from the government, while the Serahulleh Youth Development Organization (SYDO), one of the main Soninke youth associations in Serekunda, sought land in the Kombo area to grow groundnuts.

As noted in the previous chapter, the Back to the Land campaign is in many ways a rerun of earlier campaigns in the Gambia that promoted agricultural development by insisting on hard work, industriousness and fortitude. At the same time, it differs from past initiatives because it places greater emphasis on youths and migration.² Not only is a sense of reversing a rural exodus implicitly conveyed in the slogan; agriculture is also seen as an antidote to the lure of international migration for the nation's youth. In almost any official speech to the nation, President Jammeh has spoken of 'the attitudes of youths' as one of the main reasons for Gambia's underdevelopment. For his government, the future of the country involves reforming their ideas and prospects, including ideas and values about international migration. Instead of indulging in the dream of Eldorado Europe, and despising menial jobs by acting like 'big men with shallow pockets', young people are being encouraged to take up available jobs and work hard to bring the country forward.³ The media controlled by the government often reiterate this message. In an issue of the Gambia's newspaper *Daily Observer* published in 2007, the editorialist took issue with youths' dream of migration, and blamed the excesses of the *semesters*, as Gambian emigrants to the West are sometimes labelled,⁴ for instigating such desires:

The promise of El Dorado has befuddled the minds of many would-be adventurers, and the glazed-over vision of the West which such a befuddlement entails, is nothing but the glow of an illusion ... To some extent, this malaise is constantly renewing itself because of the 'display rituals' of 'semesters': those who'd managed to get to the West, and who frequently,

or not so frequently, come back for holidays. Some of these ‘semesters’, like peacocks, prance about town preening their plumes in an unspoken but comic *concours d’elegance*.⁵

Going back to the land is envisaged as a way of submitting lazy, unruly youths to proper agrarian discipline and work. In 2003, the government went as far as banning rainy season football matches, which are especially popular among young people (including girls), based on the argument that it distracted youths away from farm work. As noted in the previous chapter, in the wake of the boat migration to the Canary Islands in 2005/6, going back to the land became a way to undo a culture of migration that had grown beyond proportion and was nourishing deviant and even self-destructive urges towards emigration among the younger generations.

So far, rhetoric and intent have not been translated into systematic agricultural policies. Actual aid to farmers has been sporadic and driven by political interests (Gajigo and Saine 2011). In 2012, a pro-APRC elder in Sabi observed, ironically: ‘You see, the way we were on the land in the past is the way we are still now’. That is to say, in Sabi, as in many other villages of the Gambia, people do not need to go back to the land because they are already on the land (Dibba 2009). The populist character of the campaign does nevertheless chime with widespread fears of young people’s disengagement from farming in the country, as well as in the rest of Africa (see White 2012). Donald Wright (2004: 230) mentions that modernization, mainly in education and urban life, has made youths in Niimi (Western Gambia) less inclined towards farm work. In her work on female farmers in Brikama (Kombo, Western Gambia), Pamela Kea (2013: 107–9) has confirmed such views and added that young girls aspire to move out of farm work one day, and thus needed greater incentives (material and financial) for helping their mothers in garden plots. In Sabi, too, youths envision a future away from the farms and seemingly fall into the stereotypical image of the youth daydreaming of Europe. This being the case, however, is an aspiration to travel and to be modern opposed to agriculture and agrarian values?

Of Bushmen and Moneymen

In early October 2007, after being exposed, in Serekunda, to numerous TV newsreels about Jammeh or pro-Jammeh farming initiatives, I returned to the land myself bringing with me questions about what youths’ migratory aspirations meant for agriculture. The Sabinko were

going through their third week of Ramadan, suffering from the heat whilst trying to recover energies after weeding the fields for weeks on end. When a few weeks later the rains stopped, and the cones of sorghum bent downwards, the harvest season began. Every able-bodied person in the village was expected to contribute to the agricultural feat. Without much prompting from the government, most villagers who were in the city during the dry season had come back to the land: only some young men had gone again to look for money in Serekunda after the bulk of the weeding operations were over. Early in the morning, women could be heard pounding grains in their mortars and fetching pots to cook breakfast and lunch, which they would later send to the men and women in the fields. Men knocked vehemently on their juniors' huts to wake them up and get them ready to go to the fields. Even migrants on holiday, especially if young, set aside their nice *semester* clothes and joined their brothers on donkey carts bound for the bush. Upon return in the afternoon or in the evening, young men continued to talk about farming matters in their meeting places. They discussed the work schedule for the following days, the amounts of crops they had reaped, and whether the unusually strong storms that fell in mid October had affected the ripening millet cones. Much mocking banter was addressed to those who had not gone to the fields, on suspicion of laziness and skipping their duties.

So compelling was the farming frenzy around me that I felt I could not skip farm work either: I had to go to the bush. Ousman (aged 30), the most experienced farmer in my host family, left for the city after weeding the fields. In that rainy season, the household had taken in a *strange farmer* from Guinea-Conakry, who, however, worked two or three 'landlord days' (*jatiginkota*) on the household fields and spent the rest of the time looking for service work (*sassi*) commissioned by other farmers. Thus, my help was much appreciated by Musa (33), Tamba (27) and Ibrahima (19), the young men who remained in Sabi to farm for the harvest. Even more appreciated was the arrival of Ibrahima Silla, Tamba's matrilineal cousin (his mother's sister's son), who hailed from Garawol, a Soninke village some 40 km to the east of Sabi. As a young man of around twenty years of age, he was lodged in a hut in the boys' quarter, together with his namesake and peer, and joined the work party heading to the farms.

With five to six grown-up men in the fields (see Figure 2.1), harvesting proceeded smoothly and speedily. By the time we had harvested all the sorghum and moved on to the women's groundnut farms,⁶ Ibrahima had become a lively presence in the fields. He related news from Garawol, and from time to time he yelled Jamaican Patwa expressions across the field, disrupting the repetitive thud of our hoes plunging into the sandy ground to uproot the bushy plants and their underground nuts. As a keen



Figure 2.1 The ‘Bushmen’ Harvesting Bicolour Sorghum (from left to right: Ibrahimia (Garawol), Tamba, Ibrahimia, Amadu – *strange farmer*)

Reggae fan, Ibrahimia was proud of the little Patwa he had learned, and he liked his friends to address him as Diamond Star. The inspiration for this fancy MC-like nickname turned out to be closer to home than expected. His father’s younger brother or ‘younger father’ (*faaba tugune*) was a well-known diamond dealer based in Angola. One day, as the work party began to chat about wealthy Soninke men, Ibrahimia offered first-hand information about his *faaba tugune*’s exploits. He told us that this man had built a storey building in his household in Garawol and several others in Serekunda. He drove around in a luxury four-wheel drive, and as Ibrahimia explained proudly: ‘He kills a goat every week for his compound. Morning time, you see a whole bag of bread loaves, there is butter; there is mayonnaise’. Musa, a former migrant, added that he saw the man in Pointe Noire (Republic of Congo) meeting up with four of his sons and handing each of them a wad of cash of about U.S.\$2,000, to recapitalize their businesses.

Fascinated by Ibrahimia’s story, we had momentarily stopped working, and gathered around him to listen. Ibrahimia, however, prompted the party to go back to work. He brandished his hoe in the air – ‘Acha! No waste time!’ he uttered in English. He attacked the bushy area in front of him, and by moving rapidly and thrusting his tool with great vigour, he

managed to harvest a good number of plants before we had even had time to bend down. Swallowed by the small dust storm that he had kicked up, we watched his performance half annoyed, half bemused. When Ibrahima walked past me to stack up his oleaginous bounty, he stood still for a second and told me that he knew a lot about farming: he had grown up in it. Only that year had Ibrahima come back to farming, after spending three years working as a driver on a passenger van owned by his *faaba tugune*. He did this job, he later told me, to raise some money, while waiting for an opportunity to travel abroad. ‘To Angola?’ I asked; ‘No, to Europe’, he replied. Of course, he added, he could go to Angola, but given a choice, he’d rather work in Europe and – he smiled – enjoy some European life. At that time, his van was undergoing maintenance; so he had decided to take some time off and visit his relatives.

Ibrahima launched himself into the crops again, but this time he soon slowed down to a normal pace of work. When he paused again, the other young men prodded him to say more about his *faaba tugune*, and compared his achievements with those of other wealthy businessmen and migrants in the Gambian Soninke community. They talked about these people’s careers and rise to wealth, their buildings, and the expensive cars they drove.

While panting along with my work mates, I could not help thinking of the stark contrasts that dominated their actions and conversations. Later that day I wrote in my notebook of bushmen (*gunnenko*), as the young men ironically referred to themselves, who sweat, cough up dust and break their backs to dig groundnuts from poor soil, and of moneymen (*xalisigumu*), like Ibrahima’s *faaba tugune*, who have teams of miners to dig out diamonds in Angola: two harvests of incomparable value. While the young men’s bodies were in the crop fields, their minds were travelling afar, longing for a migratory life that would make them shine in the firmament of diamond stars of the Soninke epopee of migration. Agricultural bodies, migratory minds: a veritable culture of migration hued with a transnational Reggae culture.

Although the conclusions one draws from looking at the men’s desires of migration from the ground up do not easily fit into the simplistic discourses of policymakers and politicians comfortably sitting in air-conditioned offices, such contrasts are not without foundations. Young men openly admit that the houses and other investments of migrants give them an ambition (*hanmi*) to go and look for money so as to emulate their achievements. Like Ibrahima of Garawol, few boys and young adults in Sabi imagined their future as farmers, and if they did, it was clear that they had had no opportunity to travel or to find a route (*kille*) again after they returned from abroad. Ibrahima wanted to follow in the

footsteps of his *faaba tugune*, who left the village, accumulated money and invested at home. Ibrahima's relatives too shared similar expectations of emigration, and they assisted him to find an occupation as a driver in order to earn some money while he waited for an opportunity to travel to Europe.

However, travel fantasies are only one version of the bush story. With hindsight, I realize how tempting it was to go along with the government's discourse on migration, or even with much scholarly discourse, and focus on the powerful images of success and mobility held by young men determined to leave the land for greener pastures abroad. There is, however, no valid epistemological reason for subordinating the evocative power of words and deeds rooted in the 'local' universe of the bush to imaginations routed to a prosperous elsewhere (see Weiss 2004b). Why, after all, did Ibrahima – a young man from a wealthy family who not only aspired to emigrate but almost certainly would in the near future – harvest groundnuts for his relatives instead of directing his efforts towards finding a visa? Indeed, if his future was in business and travelling, why was he brought up as a farmer instead of being sent to a business school? And why did he himself remark on his agrarian skills and give such a theatrical, and yet compelling, performance of agricultural prowess? What values and imaginations did his performance reflect and express? Shifting attention to the social imaginary of travel risks distracting attention from the fact that agriculture and agrarian upbringing play an important role in the young man's self-perception as a potential moneyman. In order to contextualize and understand bushmen's compelling plea for emigration, therefore, I propose to inquire into a domain of social life that is often believed to be antithetical to it: agri-culture.

Earning Calloused Hands: The Embodiment of Rural Suffering

It is first necessary to clarify that the presence of aspirant migrants on farming land is not solely the result of the high costs and restrictive policies of transnational migration. Agrarian life remains central not only to the domestic economy but also to identity.⁷ Of all the men on the Sumbunu fields, I was the one in most need of becoming a farmer. When I began to harvest groundnuts, my host family either teased me or worried because I got blisters on my soft hands that were unaccustomed to handling a hoe for long hours. Men sometimes took my hand and rubbed it against theirs to make me feel the rough surface of their palms. In his field research in a Soninke village in Mali, Bruce Whitehouse (2003:

35–36) was subjected to similar remarks and tests, which he felt were less about proving the inexperience of the ethnographer than commenting on his foreignness. In the Casamance region of Senegal, Michael Lambert similarly found that ‘even urban-based Jola are proud that their hands are calloused. They will use their hard hands to convince their friends that they are really Jola, that although they may live in this city, they have not forgotten their roots’ (Lambert 2002: 36). As a foreigner, going to the bush and earning blemishes and blisters on my soft hands was almost a rite of passage which bridged the gap between my life-world of material abundance and the life-world of want of my interlocutors. When friends or household members introduced me to people, they often emphasized that I had spent a long time in the village, I spoke Soninke and that I even farmed, something which invariably fetched surprise and remarks such as ‘you are a Soninke now’.

As bodily marks, calloused hands are more than signifiers of belonging. They index a particular past, an accumulated experiential knowledge of, and presence in, the agrarian world and the hardship (*tanpiye*) that characterizes it. *Tanpiye*, usually translated as ‘suffering’ (or hardship, fatigue), is inherent to human existence. References to *tanpiye* recur in countless verbal expressions (see also Diawara 2003: 70). ‘*An do tanpiye*’ – you and fatigue – people state in their customary greetings, referring to the burden of work and material hardship with which one puts up in everyday life. *Tanpiye* is ambivalent. As a generalized condition of existence, it is something one should know and experience; yet at the same time, each person should strive to lift his family from hardship and poverty. The former is indeed the precondition of the latter, for one must *suffer* or *struggle* in order to achieve something (cf. Lemarie 2005), two English terms that young people often mix with Soninke when describing their work or their efforts in life, be they in the Gambia or elsewhere.

Activities associated with the bush are often evoked to represent a more general condition of hardship characterizing the rural areas. For the same reason, *tanpiye* is often thought to be place-bound: ‘we *tanpi* here’, Sabinko often say. The decline of commercial agriculture and ecological degradation have certainly exacerbated the sense of hardship and fatigue associated with agrarian life. Images of development and modernization, a potent predicament in the Gambia as elsewhere in the world, reinforce the perception of disconnectedness and backwardness of the Gambian countryside (cf. Vigh 2009b). As a European, my presence in the village and the bush was an invitation for reflecting about the ‘here’ in the light of the ‘there’ (Fouquet 2008: 260). While villagers praised my willingness to *suffer* with the hoe, they would often utter

phrases like ‘You see, in Africa we farm by hand’, mimicking the gesture of rooting weeds out with a hoe, and implicitly drawing a contrast with Europe’s highly mechanized agriculture.

For many, the life of the villager is sunk in a world of material constraints and lack of means, including tools for working on the land. Certainly, mechanization, albeit partial, has reduced the workload of farmers, especially the tilling of the soil. Machinery is also used for weeding and harvesting, so that farmers are less prone to staying on their farms from dawn to dusk, as they did in the past. In addition, male labourers focus their energies on the collective field, whereas fewer and fewer young men spend their afternoons cultivating their own individual plots (*saluman tee*), preferring to raise the money for their needs through off-farm activities. In the afternoon, sometimes even before lunchtime (around two o’clock), they head back to their homes. Elders can be heard complaining that ‘today’s youths just rest’. Notwithstanding the improvements in technology and the less pressing labour demands, however, agriculture remains a taxing job. Not all villagers own or have access to machinery, and even when they do, menial work still constitutes a considerable input in farming. Weeding, which is repeatedly performed on cultivated plots during the rainy season, requires farmers to spend long hours bending over the ground, under the sun and the rain. When ploughs or draught animals are not available, the harvesting is done by hand and hoe, as in the case illustrated above. Sorghum and millet are also reaped by hand, cone by cone, and then tied into bundles.

The suffering of the bushman is a burden that weighs down on people, but one that must be borne with a sense of responsibility. Poverty must be overcome and material well-being pursued. At the same time, because of its ambivalent nature, *tanpiye* is something to be known, experienced, and even accepted as an ethical foundation of the self. Earning calloused hands is a necessary step in the more general process of becoming a farmer and a villager, the proof of a certain experience and upbringing. I would argue that this does not contradict the discourse on travel as a way of finding the means to overcome hardship; rather, it qualifies it. In Ibrahima’s presence on his relatives’ farms and in his theatrical performance of agricultural labour I see an attempt not only to demonstrate his attachment to rural life, but also to express an embodied capacity to suffer and strive. Moreover, the evocative power of his actions presumably lies in the way in which the social imagination of rural life permeates his aspiration of a migrant life. I want to suggest that by suffering on the Sabi fields, Ibrahima made a statement about his potential for *hustling* in Europe.

Cultivating an Agrarian Ethos

Parents do not base their judgments of the migratory potential of their sons on how well the latter know about life abroad and how determined they are to leave the land. When asked about how they prepare their sons for travelling, the Sabinko often told me that they must learn the Quran and farm. While becoming a good Muslim is a requirement for any respectable villager, learning the Quran in a traditional Quranic school also involves a lot of farming and manual work for the master. Thus, whether a boy farms for his teacher or for his family, most Sabinko clearly view 'bush work' as a milestone in childrearing. Writing about a Malian Soninke village, Bruce Whitehouse has even likened agriculture to a form of schooling:

Farming ... builds character, teaching children lessons about sacrifice, duty to family, and the merits of suffering. It helps them acquire fiscal discipline and the commitment to look after their parents in their old age. Those who do not farm as children are in danger of becoming lazy spendthrifts, dependent on relatives for their subsistence. (Whitehouse 2012a: 155)

Similar opinions about the pedagogical value of agriculture are widely shared in Sabi as well as in other non-Soninke localities in the Gambia (Kea 2007: 276).⁸ What is interesting to note in Whitehouse's quote is that his informants do not stress technical skills and agronomic knowledge, which are surely indispensable to any farming system. They emphasize subjective qualities and relational attitudes, a general ethics of work and social conduct which is not confined to agriculture but potentially encompasses other off-farm livelihoods. To say that before a young man can travel he must farm is to say that before he acquires an ambition (*hanmi*) to travel, he must go to the fields in order to hone his physical capacities, social competences and ethical orientations, believed to assist him in his future venture abroad. In other words, before he cultivates a culture of migration, a boy must cultivate an agrarian ethos that anchors him to the life-world of his relatives and fellow villagers and prepares him to *hustle* in the future.

In what follows I provide an overview of the virtues associated with farming, and the work of cultivation required of young men in order to acquire and perfect them. A focus on virtue as an ethical value allows me to concentrate on the qualities that the Soninke deem so essential to an ethically sound and prosperous life, and in particular to acquiring economic valuables for both individual and collective purposes. In his work on South India, Anand Pandian has suggested that:

Virtues ought to be understood not only as abstract ideals and principles of a good life but also more particularly as habits of self-conduct – as cultivable tendencies to act, think, and feel in a worthy manner, as practical elements in the ethical work of becoming a certain kind of being. (Pandian 2009: 223)

For Pandian (2009: 5), cultivation is ‘a twofold enterprise: a labor on the nature of the self, and a work of improvement exercised upon the agrarian landscape’. This double meaning of cultivation is useful for describing agriculture as education in the Gambia as well. Here, growing up is metaphorically likened to maturation in the Soninke language: children are supposed to proceed from a situation of lack of self-knowledge to one in which they are ‘ripe’ or mature (*munyi*), namely, capable of performing work and of making moral judgements.

At the theoretical level, the twofold notion of cultivation as used by Pandian chimes with numerous approaches to the study of subjectivity and ethics inspired by Foucault’s work (1990) as well as by Aristotle’s philosophy (Lambek 2008; Faubion 2011). I acknowledge the influence of such perspectives in my analysis, but for the sake of epistemological clarity I would like to offer two considerations. In the first place, Foucault was acutely aware of the relational nature of the subjects he described, and he was indeed interested in the emergence of the idea of the autonomous individual in Europe (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1986: 54–56). Nonetheless, he at times seemed to reify subjects as autonomous selves who respond to the predicaments of power by working on their *own* bodies or ethical substance (Alter 1993: 50; Turner 1995). In employing his inquiries to shed light on other contexts it is important not to assume that cultivation produces individuals in the Eurocentric sense of the term. Although individuality is present in specific forms in the Soninke milieu, selves are deeply relational, parts of a larger whole. As we shall see, one outcome of agrarian training is to create interdependence and ‘mutuality of being’ (Sahlins 2011).

Secondly and related to the above, the attractiveness of the term cultivation arguably lies in its evoking the image of work on subjective terrain geared to producing particular sensibilities, and thus recalls a technical operation reminiscent of Foucault’s (1988) notion of ‘technologies of the self’. As in any pedagogy, Soninke agrarian training does involve a set of instructions for eliciting particular dispositions, both physical and ethical. Among the Soninke, upbringing is premised on a ‘logic of being immersed in daily practices of apprenticeship, the repetition of which trains the child’ (Razy 2007a: 34, my translation). I would nonetheless stress that immersion in rural life is as important as routines and

techniques in the process of subjectivation (Jackson 1983). According to Heidegger (1993: 361), technology in the sense of the ancient Greek term *technē* is not simply a disembodied craft practised on an external substance, a means to an end, but an act that emerges from a capacity to inhabit or simply to be in the world. Heidegger (1993: 349) recalls the Latin root (*cultura*) of cultivation, whence the English terms culture and agriculture both stem; in contrast to building (as construction), cultivation implies participation or co-presence, nourishment, preservation; in a word, dwelling in that which is being cultivated. In Sabi, while severe disciplinary methods and even corporal punishment are employed to train young men (Perry 2009), participation and free exploration in daily activities and work play a central role in the process of maturation (Polak 2012). Through 'sitting'-dwelling, children are also believed to come to a progressive state of awareness (*wulliye*) by bearing witness to, and being part of, the existential condition of their fellow villagers. This is where the discourse on rural suffering is crucial to understanding the formation of men in Sabi. From a condition of existential oppression, the *tanpiye* of the peasant assumes a poietic function in the sense that it moulds immature beings not considered to be fully fledged persons into resilient men (cf. Scheper-Hughes 2008).

'His Blood Has Arrived': Strength and Toil

Between the age of five and seven, children start going to the farms with their household members. At this stage, their bodies are too underdeveloped to perform major tasks; they mainly fetch items and plants for their fathers and brothers. They nonetheless familiarize themselves with the environment, with crops and weeds, and observe adults. As they grow older, children begin to handle a hoe, transport heavier items and engage in a more focused manner in farming. Eventually, boys will become acquainted with handling draught animals and the machinery used for ploughing, seeding, weeding and harvesting. As becoming a fully fledged farmer implies acquiring a capacity to work and use all the implements involved in agriculture, the ability to perform given tasks may be taken as a measurement of the physical maturation of a boy. When he becomes fully productive and autonomous, people may say that 'his blood has come/arrived' (*a hooro ri*). As Fairhead, Leach and Small (2006: 1114) have observed, '[in the Gambia] red blood is associated with personal strength ... It is the stuff of life – the vital force of living things'. The blood fills and energizes the body of the boy, making it able to work. In turn, hard work and training make his body strong and tough (*kendo*) so as to endure long working hours in the sun and rain.

At stake in the physical maturation of the farmer, therefore, is not mere muscularity but the ability to work. The Soninke understand work (*golle*) as an ontological principle of human life, a foundational and necessary input in all activities in which physical and/or intellectual effort is involved. With reference to the Mande area,⁹ to which the Soninke belong, Mamadou Diawara (2003: 72) has shown that this broad notion of work ultimately derives from agricultural labour: ‘Everything has to be prepared, caused, or at least catalysed through work, which, because of this, becomes an imperative need’ (my translation). The capacity to provoke, transform and catalyse is usually described as *senbe* in the Soninke language. *Senbe* can be translated as ‘force’ or ‘strength’ and is attributed to entities of different kinds, like fertile soil, a heavy rain, a powerful vehicle and so on (see also Graw 2009: 98; Kea 2013: 109). In the context of menial work, *senbe* refers to a capacity to transform matter or to acquire something deemed useful for the individual who performs work, such as food crops and money. Ibrahima’s theatrical performance of agricultural labour can be read, I think, along these lines as a display of force. ‘I am able to work, I have *senbe* [*n ra wa gollini, senbe wa in maxa*]’, young men often say, clenching their fists and raising their elbows to indicate bodily strength.

Being so central to the Soninke sense of self, hard work is held in high repute. While hard work in the fields is directly responsible for *tanpiye* or fatigue, toil is also the means through which hardship can be overcome and progress can be catalysed. When we were harvesting sorghum in the Sumbunu fields near the road to Basse, vehicles driving by tooted and people shouted ‘*Xa nuwari*’ (thank you) or ‘*Xa do golle*’ (lit. you and work), customary expressions comparable to ‘*Xa do tanpiye*’ mentioned earlier, which acknowledge the effort of producing something useful for the (collective) well-being (Diawara 2003: 68–69); in this case, food. Both men and women toil, and it is widely acknowledged that women bear the brunt of hard work in rural communities. But men are additionally expected to embody a proactive disposition, even an entrepreneurial spirit: a successful man is not simply someone who is able to perform and endure heavy duties, but someone who actually does work hard. This also transpires from the images that consistently punctuate commentaries on people’s working life. ‘*A ke nta taaxunu*’, he does not sit, people may say, drawing on the metaphor of physical movement to emphasize his dynamism.

Living by the Sweat of One’s Brow: Autonomy and Endurance

In addition to tempering their bodies, toil contributes to the moral edification of young males. Through work, the young man learns to live by

the sweat (*futte*) of his brow. As a bodily substance, sweat indexes hard work, but additionally, the nobility of having earned an honest living by relying on one's own strengths. During casual conversations on the topic, people may be seen moving their index finger across their forehead as if wiping off sweat. One of the greatest threats to masculinity is to 'hang on others', that is, to depend on other people for one's own subsistence. Willingness to work hard is indispensable for emancipation from others and complements the ability to discern licit from illicit working activities in the pursuit of autonomy. In a context where lack of means and abundance of wants are common, for most men dependency is far from being an uncommon experience; yet to be suspected of lacking a drive for self-reliance can make this experience utterly shameful. This is felt strongly, especially among the noble classes, where autonomy is praised and dependency-prone behaviour such as begging – which is typical, in their view, of the lower classes, and in particular of the former slaves – is discouraged (Sommerfelt 1999).

The appreciation of agrarian living as a lesson of self-reliance is also achieved through hardship and frugality. Lest they should be accused of spoiling them, many parents are careful not to make life too easy for their children. Once I asked an elder who had numerous sons in Sabi and abroad how he made sure that his children would be fit for *hustling*; his answer was: 'if they ask for ten, you give them five, so they have to struggle for the rest'. In numerous areas of West Africa, ideas and practices of upbringing oscillate between, on the one hand, ensuring care and nourishment for the child and, on the other, exposing him or her to some hardship. Coping with hardship reinforces the child's character, making it resilient enough for the challenges that await it in life (Bledsoe 1990; Last 2000; Porcelli 2011).

The pedagogic value of frugality and hardship is clearly highlighted in Quranic education (Perry 2004: 54–58). Children either reside with their family and attend classes in a Quranic teacher's family compound, or take up residence there. In the latter case, they are lodged and fed by the teacher and his family; in exchange they farm, perform some domestic chores and fetch firewood from the bush in order to light the fire in the hearth around which teaching and memorization of the verses take place with the aid of wooden slates (*walla*). Learning is compressed into the hours around dawn and dusk, while children work during the central hours of the day. Their living conditions are rather Spartan: their huts may not have proper bedding, children are often dressed in tatters, and sometimes they must roam the village to beg for extra food. Older pupils, especially in the secondary cycle of Quranic education (*maisi*), are expected to acquire their own material belongings themselves, should

they wish to improve their living conditions. These bare conditions are thought to be conducive to learning both religion and social conduct. Steadfastness and forbearance (*munyuye*, also *sabari*, from the Arabic *sabr*) under conditions of adversity are elements of an Islamic ethic, and in this particular context they sanction a capacity to endure which has not only a religious value but also practical implications.¹⁰ Being prone to sacrifice, keeping up with harsh working environments, and contentment are the preconditions to obtaining something to end the hardship which young men and their families typically endure in Sabi.

'He Is a Man Now': Responsibility and Empathy

To grow up as a man is to become entangled in a bundle of relations of kinship and domestic production. The first day I went to the fields to harvest sorghum for my host family, the eyes of the men in the work company were glued to me. Knowing I was not used to this kind of work, from time to time my work-mates suggested I could return home or rest in the shade of a tree. Partly because the task was not too demanding, and partly out of pride, I stubbornly continued to work alongside them. After some hours, we managed to stack up thirty-seven bundles of sorghum onto a donkey cart and decided to head back. Our arrival at home was greeted with jubilee by the women. Comments on the good yield of that year were shared and my companions began to praise my contribution and my determination. Sama, Tamba's mother, was excited at my endeavour, and commended me by repeatedly saying 'he is a man now' (*a ni yugo ya yi*); smiling, Ibrahim Sumbunu also congratulated me on being a man. 'Why?' I asked. 'Because you can work now' (*an ra wa gollini sasa*), he replied. Clearly, keeping up with farm work had raised my reputation as a worker, and bringing home crops had also proven my worth as someone willing to shed sweat for the sake of the family's subsistence (*biraado*). The fields we harvested were collectively owned by the household and the produce was stocked in the granary under the tutelage of the household head for the whole family to subsist on until the next harvest.

By farming on the communal land of the household, boys are embedded into relations of seniority. Historically, domestic groups in the Western Sahel and Senegambia have relied upon, and exploited, the work of junior household members and other subordinated subjects (slaves, clients, etc.) to produce subsistence food and surplus for trade (Meillassoux 1981). It is often said that young men farm for their *kagume*, the most senior genealogical male of the household, the person in charge of managing the fields and other communal resources. Young men farm on the collective field (*furuban tee* or *tee xoore*) in order to produce staples

for the family, but do not own the product of their labour. This arrangement, which is common in West Africa, stems from the hierarchical reciprocities that regulate domestic production. In brief, an 'intergenerational contract' (Kabeer 2000) binds children to returning the nourishment and care they received from their parents and other senior householders while they were growing up; this will ensure that parents are fed when they reach old age and are unable to provide for themselves.

In this logic, agricultural work represents an act of responsibility towards the parents. For a boy, or even for a mature man, the stakes of going to the field are rather high, for what is measured is not simply his capacity to work, but his willingness to fulfil his family obligations. Most villagers with whom I talked, including the young men, make no secret of the disciplinary function of farming in inculcating in boys obedience and devotion to figures of authority in the family. A number of economic exchanges, social mechanisms and ideological constructions cement this unequal relationship. Far from being solely constraining, however, subordination is thought to be enabling. Devotion (material, social, affective) is rewarded with *barake* (from the Arabic *baraka*), a blessing channelled from God via the parents or accrued by the elders when they supplicate God (*duwa*) for a youth. *Barake* also emanates from the state of satisfaction induced in parents, and is an essential endowment to achieve and retain well-being.

Although the disciplinary nature of farming is evident, responsibility vis-à-vis the family also stems from a more mundane experience of conviviality. Taking part in farm work is one among other activities – from sharing food, a hut, play, etc. – in which one makes others familiar and part of one's existence (Carsten 2000; Sahlin 2011). It is in this sense that immersion in the rural life-world and its complex landscape of *tanpiye* creates an experiential and existential linkage, which then crystallizes as an ethical orientation. For instance, redistributing resources in a family was often described to me not simply as an obligation, but also as the result of a compelling drive for empathy vis-à-vis relatives who stayed in the village. As a young man put it: 'When I have money, I cannot sit here and enjoy it all by myself, if I know my family are there in *tanpiye*'.

Thinking of agriculture as cultivation of botanical as well as subjective and relational matter allows us, in sum, to better understand the way young men like Ibrahima have been brought up in the Upper River in order to be able to cope with the asperities of earning a living at home as well as abroad. Once again, why would a young man running a business leave a comfortable mansion and lavish meals in his home village to go and sleep in a rundown, crowded hut with other boys and work in the dusty fields of another family? One answer was offered by his namesake,

Ibrahima Sumbunu: ‘he came to look for *barake*’. Indeed, a long-standing practice for young men who wish to travel or find money in other ways is to make a tour of their extended families and look for the blessing of the elders (Pollet and Winter 1971: 135). With his transport business at a standstill, and his plans for future travelling on hold, Ibrahima decided to visit his mother’s elder sister (his ‘elder mother’) and offered his work to her in ‘exchange’ for prayers and blessings for him to succeed in his endeavours. He thus joined his relatives in the fields and made sure he did not come across as a slack young boy in need of external guidance. He knew farming – he stressed – and was fit for it. Besides generating laughter and dispelling doubts about his capacity to endure hard work (possibly called into question by his keenness on Reggae culture, which is viewed by some elders as a form of moral depravation and an epitome of laziness), his theatrical performance of agricultural labour conveyed his readiness for greater ventures than farming. In this way, Ibrahima certified not simply his ability as a farmer, but his general capacity to *hustle*, including labouring in Europe, his desired destination.

From Bush to Travel-bush

The exportability of agrarian training to other non-farm, migratory livelihoods is effected in more ways than one. Travelling itself is often represented as a metaphorical extension of farming, as in the expression ‘going to the *terenden-gunne*’, the travel-bush. This compound word conjures up some of the typical images associated with travelling (*terende*) to a foreign land or ‘exile’ (*tunja*) (Dantioko 2003), comparing it to the bush, that is, a place that lies outside the (civilized) space of the village (cf. Alpes 2013). My friend and assistant Bakauru once described the meaning of *terenden-gunne* in the following way: ‘travelling is like going to the bush to look for something [*fo muniye*]. You go and look for firewood, or to farm your crops, but you don’t know what you might find: a snake, a wild beast...’ Both farmers and migrants go to the bush to find something. Farmers sweat over the fields and harvest crops, while migrants endure hard work in order to receive a salary or business profit. The yields of both types of missions to the bush materialize in the granary of the household, where bundles of millet and sorghum stand next to the bags of rice bought with the money sent by migrants. Interestingly, Wolof-speaking migrants from Senegal depict their sojourn abroad as ‘cultivating the big (household) field’ (Fouquet 2008: 249).

Like the farmers, so the migrants have a duty to provide for their families. Migrants are, however, away from the village and from their

household heads. Although those who stay behind adopt several strategies to ensure the loyalty of their expatriate household members,¹¹ the most important assurance that the young men will comply with their obligations is the sense of responsibility and empathy cultivated during childhood. I often asked my adult interlocutors how they could be so sure that their sons would remit money to them once they left the village. A typical answer was: ‘he will not forget us – he knows the [living] conditions we are in’. Indeed, during telephone conversations with migrants, in order to elicit assistance household members often make reference to *tanpiye* and similar tropes of rural suffering.

Upon their return from abroad, migrants often go to the bush with their household members in order to deflect accusations of having ‘exited poverty’ (*bogu do misikinaaxu*) and ‘made themselves big’. Once I asked a traveller on holiday in Sabi whom I saw returning from the fields whether he had not come home to rest; he replied: ‘Maybe you rest for a week, then you get up and work on the farm ... If I hadn’t known how to do this kind of job [farming], when I went to Europe I would have been a drug dealer because I would not have known what is to sweat. This way I know how to work hard for my money’. Drug dealing epitomizes a mode of acquiring fast money, yet one that is considered illicit and not conducive to blessing (Gaibazzi 2012a: 130–31). Going abroad requires moral vigilance and discipline: when leaving home (*kaara*), one is exposed to the perils of strangerhood (Whitehouse 2012b). In Bakauru’s depiction, the bush is a place of potential material abundance and at the same time potential dangers (see Gaibazzi 2010). Whilst abroad, migrants may be tempted by different lifestyles and immoral behaviours, a risk often associated with the West: once seduced by the bright lights of Europe and America, the traveller will forget about his home and family.

It is important to stress that the linkages between farming and travelling are not merely metaphorical and normative. Men explicitly construct their subjectivity as *hustlers* on the basis of the dispositions and skills cultivated in the village bush. During a casual conversation, Tamba, one of the leading farmers in my host family, began to narrate his boyhood years. Tamba attended the upper Quranic school (*maisi*) in Kumbija, a neighbouring village, until the age of seventeen. He vividly recalled those years as a time of hardship and bravery. Back then, boys spent the whole day in the bush, from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. Once they returned to their teacher’s residence, they fetched water and prepared the fireplace. Meals were consumed rapidly, and they often left the communal bowl still feeling hungry. And finally, the sleeping huts were often too crowded for everyone to fit in; inevitably someone had to sleep on the veranda, with his teeth chattering all night during the coldest months.

Only after some years was Tamba able to impose his seniority on the newcomers, and sleep in a proper bed. He sighed and then concluded: 'Eh, my friend, we suffered. But it's good. Now that my body has become stronger [*kendo*], I am fit for *hustling*. I can go and find money. I can work hard, I fear no job'. In these few unsolicited words, Tamba promoted himself as a *hustler* by linking past to future, farming to travelling. Throughout his narration, he used a slightly rhetorical tone of language, bemoaning the hardship he had endured but then regarding it as the foundation of his upbringing and as evidence of his readiness to adapt to any job and living condition in order to find money abroad.

I would argue that the international political economy of labour migration has reinforced the perception that the virtues of agricultural work are transferrable to off-farm occupations. The shift towards Western destinations over the last thirty years has made social reproduction in Sabi dependent on European and North American labour markets. The post-Fordist transition in these countries has funnelled the autochthones towards technical and knowledge-based occupations, while unskilled positions have been filled by cheap immigrant workforces (Sassen 1991). Mahmet Timera (1996: 221) has shown that when the French automobile industry retrenched in the 1980s, Soninke factory workers moved to unskilled jobs in the service sector (cleaning, restaurants, etc.) characterized by flexible working hours, occupational mobility and precarious contractual conditions. The integration of Soninke workers into the lower strata of the job market probably reinforced the idea that, as Timera remarks, a migrant's project is not linked to a specific professional career. In France, Soninke migrants are willing to accept *any* job in order to earn a salary: the type of job is secondary to the amount on their payslip at the end of the month. Gambian Soninke migrants occupy a similar stratum of the job market in other Western countries. In Sabi, young men are familiar with Spanish words like *campo* (field, farm) and *paleta* (construction worker), two of the most widespread occupations of migrants before 2008, when Spain was hit heavily by economic recession (Kaplan 1998: 98). But while young men know that these jobs are demanding, they rarely discuss the actual content of the jobs. Similarly, all that some parents know about their sons' occupations in Europe is that they work for a salary. What matters most to them is whether and how much they remit.

During their home visits, Sabi travellers in the West tend to emphasize that earning money means hard work. Migrants do not solely empathize with the situation of many youths who, like them before leaving the country, sit jobless in the Gambia; they also distinguish themselves from the local crowds by recalling the relentless rhythms of work that they endure in Europe or in the United States. In some circumstances,

this hard-work ethic of labour migration feeds back directly into the agrarian one. I once met a Sabinke based in Spain who during his holidays decided to bring his younger brothers with him to the fields from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M., as in the old days. As he explained: 'I'm working ten, eleven hours a day in Spain. Every day. I wake up at 6 [A.M.] and come back at 7 [P.M.], sometimes 8 [P.M.]. I'm working hard, while here people are sitting [idly]'.

Last but not least, migrants actively contribute to reproducing the rural upbringing model by sending their children to be fostered in their rural households. A good number of migrants migrate on their own, leaving their wives and children in their father's household; others take their wife along, but still send their children back home for varying periods of time. Analysing the demography of the Upper River Region Soninke, YWAM (2006: 21) has shown that the age group pyramid shows an expansion in the 5–9 age group, the age at which migrant parents usually send their children back to the village. Farjas Bonet (2002) has found that almost one third of Gambian parents in Catalonia send their children home for varying lengths of time. Transnational and urban–rural childrearing builds on the widespread institution of child fosterage in West Africa (Goody 1982), and it is meant to enable children to 'know the culture' and 'know the family' by being immersed in the life-world of their relatives (Razy 2007a: 27). The sense of danger and moral laxity that characterizes the image as well as the lived experience of exile (*tunŋa*) further motivates many parents to repatriate their children in order to shield them from the negative influences of the host society (see Whitehouse 2009). The stern discipline of agrarian upbringing is used as a cure and preventive measure to tackle any incipient deviancy (Bledsoe and Sow 2011). 'I was stubborn [i.e., rebellious], so my father brought me here', explained Musa, a man of thirty-seven who was born, raised and schooled in Sierra Leone before being repatriated to Sabi when he was a teenager. Today, he is a successful *hustler* in Angola.

However, if migration has contributed to the reproduction of the agrarian ethos, it has also facilitated the advent of other models of education that compete with farms and Quranic schools. In the Gambia, the Soninke have earned a reputation for shunning Western education. Soninke villages have rather been strongholds of Quranic education, and many noble households in Sabi run basic Quranic schools (*xaranyimbe*). Jawara-kunda hosts one of the most prestigious upper Quranic schools in the Upper River area. According to some Sabinko, the PPP regime was adamant about maintaining good relations with the village dignitaries and Islamic scholars, and thus did not push formal education further. A secular Basic and an Upper Basic school in Sabi became operative

only during the second half of the 1990s, when the Jammeh government revived the developmental agenda of the Gambian state and constructed numerous schools in the rural areas. In the 2000s, the rate of schooling in Sabi, around 20 per cent, was still half of the national average (YWAM 2006). While this would seem to underscore the anti-education fame of the Soninke, it should be noted that the Basic School in Sabi was built by the Sabi hometown association in Sweden, and only later staffed with teachers by the government. What is more, the Serekunda-based association of Sabinko, which includes several prominent businessmen, has won over the resistance of Quranic scholars and in 2006 it began to lay the foundations of a *madrasa*, which was inaugurated in 2011. In the meantime, during my fieldwork at least one household with numerous children hired a trained Islamic teacher to hold private classes.

The availability of educational facilities in Sabi reflects a growing demand for formal schooling. Not all children of migrants have been raised in the village; a number of them attended schools and *madrasas* in Serekunda, while several others remained with their families abroad or were sent to other countries, like Mali, in order to receive their education, especially an Islamic one. Some wealthy migrants also send their sons (more rarely daughters) to universities in Europe, the U.S. and, in particular, in Egypt, Sudan and the Gulf states. The drive for formal education as a new foundation of Soninke identity is particularly evident in Serekunda, where the growing, permanently settled urban community strives to maintain its cultural roots while at the same time ensuring that the future generations adapt to a 'modern', urban lifestyle. 'The world is changing', many urbanites point out, and children must spend more time on books than on crops. At the Imam Malick Islamic Institute in Serekunda, the *madrasa* built by the Soninke association Sunpo do Xati, a member of the teaching staff estimated the children of migrants to make up 40 per cent of the student body. This suggests that transnational childrearing is increasingly gravitating around the city. As the urban community grows, migrant parents entrust their children to urban relatives or move their nuclear family to the city to take advantage of better educational facilities, including the Imam Malick institute.

The urban polarization of migrant transnationalism and, more specifically, of social reproduction, constitutes a threat to villages like Sabi that have long functioned as the moral and cultural homes of the diaspora. Luis Brenner (2001) has argued that an epistemological shift from an experiential to a rational form of knowledge has accompanied the rise of *madrasa* schooling in Mali. This shift also applies to the pedagogical value of agrarian life as an experience of shared hardship, work and sociality. A prominent trader from Sabi whose first son attended a college

in the U.S. before returning to the Gambia to join his father's firm in Serekunda, once told me: 'People were saying that my children will grow rebellious if they did not farm; instead, here they are, working side by side with their father'. The Sabinko often accuse such wealthy villagers of having 'exited poverty', that is, of having withdrawn from the convivial condition of scarcity that creates hardship and also from the bonds of solidarity among equals. It is an accusation that reveals a sense of anxiety vis-à-vis exclusion from the redistribution of resources and of bitterness vis-à-vis the lack of recognition for the work of cultivation that villagers perform for the sake of the future generations.

However, the rupture between diaspora and village should not be exaggerated. Many villagers combine upbringing strategies in creative ways. As Bledsoe and Sow (2011: 752) have argued, the training and discipline provided by the family environment has been conceived as a necessary complement to formal schooling 'which continues to be regarded in West Africa as necessary but insufficient for lasting success'. Parents often diversify the educational careers of their children, sending some to school and some to the village, while those who solely opt for formal education often make sure that their children spend some time in Sabi, anything between a season and several years. Sending children to *madrasas* and secular schools does not prevent many businessmen in Serekunda, and even in the diaspora, from driving them back to their home villages during the summer vacations (which deliberately coincide with the rainy season) in order to help their families out in the fields. On their part, even those villagers most keen on agrarian education are not necessarily opposed to other forms of skills training, and often encourage their children to attend schooling.

The Alienation of the Farmer?

The shifting geographies of childrearing may undermine the social and cultural foundations of agriculture and rural dwelling in the future. For the current generation of young men, however, growing up in Sabi has involved acquiring not only a sense of belonging, but also a sense of being on and with the land, an experiential understanding of the onus of 'sitting'. By 'sitting' in Sabi, they cultivate physical, social and ethical habits in order to succeed in the travel-bush, should they emigrate in the future. This complicates the widely held view that modernity and migration cultures will inevitably draw youths away from the fields in pursuit of Eldorado dreams. The way in which agrarian sedentariness pervades the imaginary and practical logic of migrant *hustling* further problematizes

the notions we use to understand the processes of (im)mobility. Whereas scholars of migration have shown how the meanings and materiality of mobility shape local imaginaries and lives, a narrow focus on movement and on the elsewhere fails to acknowledge the encompassing character of the agrarian ethos of Soninke migration. Through the lens of agri-culture, this chapter has shown the significance of dwelling practices in shaping migration as well as the ways in which mobility has imbued stillness with meaning.

A corollary of the foregoing observations is that promoting a romantic return of youths to the land by unravelling their migratory fantasies may not lead to a settled life. Youths do not stay on the land in spite of the lure of international travel but because of it. The agrarian ethos is certainly the product of a long-standing agrarian civilization that predates contemporary migrations. In Sabi, parents do raise their children along the ‘fathers’ path’ (*faabanun kille*), emphasising tradition (*laada*) and the morality of agrarian living (see also Kea 2013: 109–10). It would be misleading, however, to attribute this to traditionalism. The agrarian ethos is also the outcome of modernity, particularly of participating in international circuits of labour. Far from being dupes of inter- and post-industrial capitalism, Soninke migrants must nonetheless come to terms with the specific demands and constraints of the labour market in the West. Leading a migrant life requires flexibility, hard work and discipline and other virtues that prospective travellers cultivate in their families’ fields.

However, if the articulation between bush and travel-bush, between domestic and capitalistic modes of production, confers meaning on the experience of being-on-the-land, it also links agrarian upbringing to a teleology of progress that paradoxically narrows down the meaning of cultivation and simultaneously downgrades it. Consider, for instance, how Ibrahima Sumbunu once discussed the possibility of remaining on the land:

We don’t have good machines here. We just use our *senbe*, under the rain and the sun. If you do this for long, when you’re fifty [years old], you will be short of *senbe* and you’ll have nothing ... If you are in Europe, you can do odd jobs, like bricklaying; you can even work weekends, you’ll struggle. But at least the salary is good, 900 or even more than €1,000.

Ibrahima dreads the prospect of an agricultural future, he sees his capacity to *hustle* and catalyse progress disempowered by continued work in the bush through his adulthood. This is not because, as the Gambian government has it, he wants to avoid backbreaking jobs, but because he

wishes to experience progress through such occupations. The cause of this form of alienation is not the commoditization of farm work and its product, as in Marx's (2000: xxii) conceptualization of factory work, for male agricultural production in Sabi has become largely de-commercialized. As signalled by his reference to salaried labour, it is paradoxically an expectation of capitalist objectification and valorization of labour that informs Ibrahima's narrative of estrangement from farming. According to Diawara (2003: 70), in the Mande world it is understood that 'work must be useful to the person who performs it' (my translation). Clearly, in his statement Ibrahima assesses the usefulness of his work, which as a junior he performs gratuitously, by comparing it to waged labour, an activity deemed equivalent to farming in terms of inputs of strength but different in terms of economic outputs. Ibrahima calls into question neither agriculture per se nor his agrarian training, which is so vividly evoked by his namesake's performance of agricultural prowess. He is rather preoccupied with anchoring his dispositions to an actual financial purpose.

Were it for economic value alone, however, farming would have faded and perhaps yielded to the onslaught of the culture of migration in Sabi. This chapter has revealed ways in which cultivation produces qualities that cannot be reduced to monetary quantity (Lambek 2008). Although young men venture into the bush to bring back 'something', they concomitantly produce and reproduce forms of relatedness, age hierarchies and principles of ethical conduct that are bound up with notions of respectable personhood (Davidson 2009: 120). This surplus of social value is usually appropriated by senior householders. For Ibrahima's elder brothers, this surplus value of farming and rural dwelling is of paramount importance because they strive to become established not solely as farmers or *hustlers* but as household 'sitters', a process to which we will return in Chapter 5. In contrast, like his namesake and age mate, 19-year-old Ibrahima achieves respectability primarily by *hustling*. It is this preoccupation with economic value that displaces agriculture from his horizon of desirable livelihood options and sets young men like him on a quest for money outside the village.

Acknowledgement

This chapter is an extended version of my article published in 2013 as 'Cultivating Hustlers: the Agrarian Ethos of Soninke Migration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39(2): 259–75, copyright © Journal of the CEMES and Migration Studies, reprinted here by permission

of Taylor & Francis Ltd, www.tandfonline.com, on behalf of *The Journal of the CEMES and Migration Studies*.

Notes

1. Stephen Wooten (2009) employs the term 'agri-culture' to draw attention to the expressive forms of cultivation.
2. This is not a new policy approach in postcolonial West Africa: in the 1960s Modibo Keita, Mali's first president, specifically promoted similar initiatives to the Gambian ones as an antidote to emigration from the countryside (Gary-Toukara 2008: ch. 6).
3. President Jammeh's speech at the Opening Ceremony of the National Assembly on 30 March 2008, broadcast by GRTS TV.
4. Whereas the term *hustler* describes a hard-working traveller, the label *semester* (possibly adapted from the imagery associated with international students) applies to migrants displaying accessories, lifestyle and sophistication acquired in Europe and North America, and it can express contempt for those who have gone too 'Western'.
5. 'The "Nerves" Syndrome', *The Daily Observer*, 19 October 2007.
6. Though women farm groundnut fields and own the harvest, they are usually entitled to male labour for harvesting.
7. The role of agriculture for the household economy is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.
8. Bourdillon and Spittler (2012: 11) have argued that 'the widespread view in African cultures is that work is essential to rearing children and preparing them for constructive adult life. According to this view, work provides necessary discipline and experience of responsibility'.
9. Mande (also Manden) refers to a group of related languages and people distributed over a large area of Sahelian West Africa (the centre being Mali).
10. Forbearance is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.
11. By virtue of migratory chains, village and family members tend to cluster in the same areas. This favours forms of control by kinsmen and senior acquaintances. In the case of a reticent migrant, people often contact relatives and friends living in the same place as the migrant and ask them to persuade him.