

Island Citizens: Environment, Infrastructure, and Belonging in Colonial Gambia, 1816-1965

by

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Dedication

In memory of my father, Kutubo Manneh, and my mother, Aminata Ceesay.

*To my partner, Kristen, my children, Aminata and Njagga, and my parents, Aunty Bin, Kevin,
and Regina.*

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List of Abbreviations

Archival Abbreviations

The National Archives, UK (Kew)

The National Records Service, The Gambia (NRS)

The National Archives of Senegal (ANS)

British Online Archives (BOA)

U.K. Parliamentary Papers Online (PP)

Institutional Abbreviations

Bathurst Urban District Council (BUDC)

Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC)

The Gambia Native's Association (GNA)

The Gambia National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA)

The Gambia National Road Agency (NRS)

Abstract

My dissertation, *Island Citizens: Environment, Infrastructure, and Belonging in Colonial Gambia, 1816-1965*, is a history of the urban environment and diasporic communities in post-emancipation Gambia under British imperial rule. After the British Empire banned participation in the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1807, the newly founded British settlement of St Mary's Island at the mouth of the Gambia River became a place of resettlement for Liberated Africans—Africans rescued from slave ships by British naval squadrons. In the early 19th century, Liberated Africans found their new home on St. Mary's Island to be precarious and dangerous. They were settled on the lowest-lying sections of a flood prone, tidal, mangrove-covered island. In the always partially submerged landscape of St. Mary's Island, which came to be home to Bathurst, the colonial capital, the ownership of dry land was a privilege. Facing mounting demand for dry land from Liberated Africans in the mid-19th century, the colonial government turned to “reclamation,” the creation of new dry land from the mangrove estuaries surrounding Bathurst.

Based on 16 months of archival research and fieldwork in Banjul (formerly Bathurst), The Gambia; Senegal; and the UK, the dissertation argues that, for the community of formerly enslaved Liberated Africans in The Gambia, participation in colonial political life became contingent upon the ownership of property in the form of dry, reclaimed land carved from mangrove estuaries surrounding the island city of Bathurst. Over the course of the 19th century, Liberated African claims as free persons, as *Island Citizens*, became inextricably linked to the ongoing maintenance and creation of dry land. As this dissertation shows, owning dry land at

different points in Bathurst's history marked who could vote in municipal elections, who could be guaranteed British military protection, and who could access financial credit to participate in the colonial economy. Land reclamation and drainage were therefore not only foundational to Liberated African politics and their claims to autochthony, but also to the origins of Gambian municipal politics and African involvement therein.

By the early 20th century, land ownership in Bathurst had become a legal marker of colonial subjecthood in opposition to a protectorate subjecthood. This political, social, and legal division was created through the territorial division of the Gambia Colony into a "colony" that included *only* St. Mary's Island, and a "protectorate" that encompassed all other British-held territory along both the north and south banks of the Gambia River. Invested in the benefits of being colonial subjects, Liberated Africans pushed to maintain their privileged colonial status in the mid-20th century by advocating for more land reclamation in Bathurst and resisting the relocation of people and government institutions from the island to the protectorate mainland.

By centering Liberated Africans and the environmental transformation of mangrove swamps through land reclamation and drainage, this dissertation brings together the literature on British antislavery and abolition, African urban history, and African environmental history. In so doing this dissertation attempts to open a conversation on the environmental history of post-emancipation era societies outside of the Americas. It moves beyond the colonial state as the originator of consequential ecological transformation in modern Africa, pushes beyond the duality of indigenous-colonizer in its examination of the Liberated African community, and deepens our understanding of West African urbanization.



Figure 1 Boundary map showing the location of The Gambia in West Africa, and Banjul (formerly Bathurst) the capital city of The Gambia (Source: Guia Geografico, <http://www.africa-turismo.com/mapas/gambia.htm>)

Introduction

In July of 2022, The Gambia experienced one of its worst flash floods in nearly half a century.¹ The Gambia's National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) recorded that 47,104 people were affected by the floods, 9,965 of them being children under the age of five. Another 6,654 people were internally displaced.² During the two days of flooding, Gambian authorities observed a record-breaking 276 mm of rain fall in two days.³ The floods inundated many parts of the coastal region of The Gambia, affecting most of the country's urban population. The Gambian coast is home to sixty eight percent of the total Gambian population, 1,795,200 people,

¹ Gambia Government, National Disaster Agency, Gambia 2022 Flash Floods Situational Report #4, 19 August 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/gambia/gambia-2022-flash-floods-situational-report-004>.

² Gambia Government, National Disaster Agency, Gambia 2022 Flash Floods Situational Report #5, 25 August 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/gambia/gambia-2022-flash-floods-situational-report-005>.

³ According to the World Meteorological Organization the average rain fall in the Gambia during the whole month of July is usually 232.4 mm.

and is the site of the main urban centers of Banjul and Kombo St. Mary.⁴ The capital city of The Gambia, Banjul (formerly Bathurst), is located on the island of St. Mary's at the mouth of the River Gambia. Kombo St. Mary (commonly known as "Kombo") is adjacent to the island of St. Mary's on the mainland. Banjul was the most affected by flooding. Neighborhoods in the north of the city, also known as "Tobacco Road," were completely under water as visible in the photograph below.⁵



Figure 2 Photograph depicting the 2022 flooding of Tobacco Road neighborhood in Banjul. The green vegetation in the top left of the image are mangroves, which prior to the reclamation of this

⁴ Victoria Flattau and Mam Tut Wadda, The Gambia Digital Masterplan and Capacity Building Program for the Greater Banjul Area- Call for Proposals, African Development Bank, 2019, <https://www.afdb.org/fr/documents/gambia-digital-masterplan-and-capacity-building-program-greater-banjul-area-call-proposals>; also see The Gambia: National Urban Profile, Regional and Technical Cooperation Division, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), 2011.

⁵ Gambia Government, National Disaster Agency, Gambia 2022 Flash Floods Situational Report #4, 19 August 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/gambia/gambia-2022-flash-floods-situational-report-004>.

area covered the entire neighborhood. (Source: Alhagie Manka twitter handle: @ALHAGIEMANKA)

In the days following the devastation left by the floods a public debate ensued in the streets and across the Gambian press over the causes of, and solutions to, flooding. Some commentators blamed the flood victims themselves. Some organizations, including the NDMA cited climate change and sea level rise while simultaneously blaming the residents of Tobacco Road for throwing trash into the public drains and causing blockages.⁶ Gambian politicians have long blamed flood victims for flooding, either pointing to residents' sanitation practices or blaming them for living too close to the mangrove wetlands that cover the entire eastern part of the Gambian Coast. In addition to these discussions in the press, there were public debates over who was responsible for the drains, and who allowed people to build in unsafe wetland areas.

The Department of Physical Planning & Housing (Physical Planning) and the National Road Agency (NRS) were two state actors that residents of both Banjul and Kombo singled out for accountability in the contemporary public discussion of the impact of drains and wetland settlement on the scale of destruction.⁷ Ordinary people accused the NRA of failing to maintain the drains clear of blockages, and constructing new drains, along the main highways, some of which had been freshly tarmacked prior to the July rains. People likewise criticized Physical Planning for allowing people to build their homes in low-lying coastal areas. This event and the

⁶ Gambia Government, National Disaster Agency, Gambia 2022 Flash Floods Situational Report #4, 19 August 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/report/gambia/gambia-2022-flash-floods-situational-report-004>.

⁷ 'NAM partly blames Physical Planning for flood disasters', *The Standard*, Monday April 17, 2022; Good Morning Mr., President: flash flood, climate change and physical planning, *The Point*, August 9, 2022.

conversation that ensued raised numerous questions for the future of urban development in The Gambia, including: who should be responsible for maintaining and building drains? What should the relationship between urban communities and mangrove estuaries look like? Who is responsible for making and enforcing these decisions? These questions are important, yet from a historical perspective what these public conversations *and* governmental agency reports miss is both an account of the long history of these questions and, crucially as this dissertation will demonstrate, the extent to which debates over water management in urban Gambia are also, and have always been, debates over land.

Land is often taken to be something already in existence, but in urban Gambia, land has very often been *created* through the drainage of wetlands and land reclamation. To take the example of the Tobacco Road neighborhood, formerly known as the “Campana Estate,” the land on which this neighborhood was built was the product of colonial-era land reclamation in the 1940s. Prior to the start of the project in 1947, what came to be known as the Campana Estate formed a section of the 70-kilometer stretch of mangrove wetlands that begins at the mouth of the River Gambia. In Figure 2 above, the green vegetation in the upper left-hand corner is what remains of this mangrove forest. This area regularly flooded according to the season and tides prior to the land reclamation project. The British colonial administration “reclaimed” this portion of the wetlands first by cutting down mangroves, then constructing a series of canals, drains, embankments, and pumps, and finally filling in the land with sand, soil, and refuse. These technologies helped to keep water flowing away from the cleared land.

These technologies were often imperfect as flooding continued to occur in this neighborhood even after the end of the project. Nonetheless, the postcolonial Gambian state has done little to maintain and update Banjul's drainage infrastructure.⁸ Although the pumps have been replaced, during the 2022 floods many drains around Tobacco Road were blocked, exacerbating the flooding.⁹ The generalized failure of Banjul's drainage infrastructure casts into relief the significance of these technologies and their maintenance: they can make the difference between life and death. The issue of access to dry land is only increasing as sea levels continue to rise, leaving little hope of there being enough dry land to return to after flood waters recede.

The rising sea levels in The Gambia are a world historical problem. In the same summer months of 2022, Pakistan experienced devastating floods in which 10 to 12 percent of the country was flooded, leaving approximately 2.1 million people homeless. The global scale of the flooding in 2022 alone has produced millions of climate exiles in need of dry land. With so many communities around the world experiencing the devastation of sea level rise and flooding under conditions of global warming, certain types of political belonging and abandonment are increasingly marked by who gets access to dry land in an inundated landscape.

In Banjul, the boundary between the sea and the city remained in flux over the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, the most recent flooding brought renewed attention to the trouble this poses for urban communities. As one of the journalistic accounts from the 2022

⁸ Edi Njie, 'Banjul floods, understanding the genesis of the city's eternal defence against water', *The Standard*, September 19, 2022.

⁹ Infrastructure and Drainage, *The Gambia Floods: Rapid Needs Assessment Report And Response Recommendations 2022*, United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), 50-54.

floods noted, "...it was as if the sea or River Gambia has transferred to Tobacco Road as they could see tilapia fish, commonly called Wass swimming everywhere and even inside their compounds."¹⁰ Tobacco Road residents experience of the flood was a form of disincorporation or detachment from the rest of the city of Banjul, as some people felt themselves sinking into the Gambia River. The debates over water management and settlement that followed the flooding were also debates over which land and which people would continue to be incorporated into the body of the city. For the neighborhood of Tobacco Road to be and remain part of Banjul requires the constant upkeep and management of drains. The extent of the flooding and residents' experiences of being part of the sea point to the Gambian state's gradual withdrawal from aquatic management and its abandonment of communities living in flood-prone areas. From the British colonial period up to the present, the various leaders of Banjul and Bathurst have long incorporated or abandoned their subjects through the maintenance of dry land or lack thereof.

Land reclamation enabled the British colonial state to transform many sections of Bathurst's mangrove swamps into dry land. The maintenance of these dry lands, however, requires constant attention to, and the maintenance of, drainage infrastructure. This has also been true since the founding of the British settlement of Bathurst on St. Mary's Island in 1816. Much of the British colonial state's governance of St Mary's Island and the political organizing of African and European residents who lived there revolved around questions of the creation, access, and maintenance of dry land. As such, land reclamation projects and drainage

¹⁰ The Point Newspaper, *Ex Banjul North Lawmaker visits flood victims*, Aug 26, 2022.

infrastructure were the technological manifestations and sites through which historical actors asserted power and made claims on the state, including citizenship and other forms of political belonging. In turn, the failures of drainage infrastructure, its malfunctions, and repeated flooding represent bad governance and state abandonment for these same actors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The current government's lack of concern with drainage constitutes not only a form of state abandonment, but a kind of historical erasure.¹¹ The historical actors in this dissertation, particularly the Liberated Africans who had to inhabit low-lying areas in Bathurst, were very familiar with this form of state abandonment, and the challenges that flooding posed to their belonging in the colonial city. This dissertation analyses the relationship between Liberated Africans, the colonial state, the land, and the sea to better understand these challenges in their own time, and in ours. To return to the example of Tobacco Road neighborhood, this community represents one among a total of 33,000 residents of Banjul who are unwilling or unable to leave a disappearing—and dangerous—landscape. As a result of global warming and rising sea levels, climatologist estimate that Banjul will be underwater by 2050.¹² Most of Banjul's wealthy and well-connected have long left the floods of Banjul for the Kombo mainland. This exodus has

¹¹ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, "Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning", in Hale, Charles R.. *Engaging Contradictions : Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 31-60.

¹² Jallow, Bubu P., Malang K. A. Barrow, and Stephen P. Leatherman. "Vulnerability of the Coastal Zone of The Gambia to Sea Level Rise and Development of Response Strategies and Adaptation Options." *Climate Research* 6, no. 2 (1996): 165–77; Nfamara K. Dampha, Change detection (1985-2020): Projections on land- use land cover, carbon storage, sequestration, and valuation in Southwestern Gambia, *SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT* 2021, VOL. 7, NO. 1, 8.

resulted in a smaller tax-base and crumbling infrastructure in Banjul.¹³ To make matters worse, increased privatization and sandmining in the area directly around the island of St. Mary's are lowering the shores that are already at or below sea level. These immensely profitable and environmentally disastrous projects are undertaken by private cooperations with the approval and support of the Gambian state.¹⁴

The now decades-long exodus from Banjul to Kombo has created a drive for land grabbing and speculation on the Kombo mainland itself. As a result, the poorest residents of Kombo are increasingly pushed into Kombo's own flood-prone wetland areas, seemingly replaying stories that are now over two hundred years old. A 2011 UN Habitat report which observed the early phase of what is now a rapid form of urban expansion stated, "Uncontrolled urban sprawl and speculative land markets have pushed many marginal settlements into high-risk areas that are flood-prone."¹⁵ The Kombo mainland, much like St. Mary's on which Banjul stands, has many mangrove swamps and low-lying areas that make it equally vulnerable to flooding.¹⁶ As of 2019, mangrove wetlands made up about 16 percent of the Kombo mainland.¹⁷

¹³ 'Rekindling the Banjul energy – A development scheme for an ageing city', *The Standard*, September 22, 2017; 'What happened to Banjul? My story', *The Standard*, March 24, 2014.

¹⁴ Royalties on Sand, Gravel: Over D162M Accrued from Quarry Operations, *Mansa Bano Online*, February 26, 2022; Mustapha K Darboe, Gov't, GACH And Mining For Minerals: Where Are The \$ Millions, Malagen, June 13, 2020.

¹⁵ Joseph Guiebo and Kerstin Sommer, *The GAMBIA: National Urban Profile*, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 2011.

¹⁶ *The Gambia Floods: Rapid Needs Assessment Report And Response Recommendations 2022*, United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC).

¹⁷ Nfamara K. Dampha, Change detection (1985-2020): Projections on land- use land cover, carbon storage, sequestration, and valuation in Southwestern Gambia, *SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT* 2021, VOL. 7, NO. 1, 8.

Those who suffer most from the flooding in Gambia's main urban areas today, are those too poor to purchase—or not well-connected enough—to live on dry land. Access to and the politics of creating and maintaining dry land continue to be salient issues in Gambian urban life and have been from the colonial era up to the present day.

This dissertation tells a history of the creation, maintenance, and politics of dry land in the wetlands of St Mary's Island in the British Gambia Colony as it relates to the political institutions and belonging of communities of formerly enslaved people, especially Liberated Africans. Liberated Africans are Africans who were freed by British anti-slave trade squadrons after the British ban of the Atlantic Slave Trade for its subjects in 1807. These communities of newly freed Africans became known to British officials and in the historiography on antislavery and abolition in the British Empire as Liberated Africans.

This dissertation argues that over the course of the 19th century, Liberated African claims as free persons, as *Island Citizens*, became inextricably linked to the ongoing maintenance and creation of dry land through land reclamation and drainage. Land reclamation and drainage were not only foundational to Liberated African politics and their claims to autochthony, but also to the origins of Gambian municipal politics and African involvement therein. Hence, key questions that this dissertation investigates are: what is the relationship between environmental transformation in colonial Gambia and the abolitionist project that began in the British Empire after 1807? How have land reclamation and drainage shaped Liberated African politics and their relationship to the colonial state and the colonial project more generally? Who got to live on dry land? What forms of political participation and access to state benefits have come with access to

dry land? What has the inability to access dry land in Bathurst meant in different periods of Bathurst's history? When and why does the state become invested in keeping certain places dry and not others? Finally, how have British colonial officials used land reclamation and drainage to fulfill and impose larger imperial policies, objectives, and imperatives?

To answer these questions, this dissertation begins at the end of the slave trade and continues up to the last decades of British colonial rule, following the historical arc of many Black diaspora communities in the Atlantic. The study of Liberated Africans as a Black diaspora rooted in the experience of slavery, emancipation and self-determination within an imperial structure is a relatively recent phenomenon.¹⁸ Liberated Africans in West Africa have typically been studied through the lens of British colonialism and imperialism in Sierra Leone.¹⁹ Sierra Leone is central to the story of Liberated Africans because it was the primary site of “disposal” and resettlement of Africans freed from slave ships by the British. Nonetheless, the British resettled Liberated Africans across the Atlantic World, with Gambia being the only other major site of Liberated African resettlement in British West Africa. The history of Liberated Africans in colonial Gambia is, however, still a marginal topic.²⁰

¹⁸ Richard Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone: Re-Building Lives and Identities in Nineteenth-Century West Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020),3-4; David Northrup, “Becoming African: Identity Formation among Liberated Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone,” *Slavery and Abolition*, 27.1 (April 2006): 3.

¹⁹ Arthur Porter, *Creoledom: A Study of the Development of Freetown Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone, 1787–1870*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1969); Leo Spitzer, *The Creoles of Sierra Leone: Responses to Colonialism, 1870–1945*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974).

²⁰ To date the most work that has been on this topic is Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga: The Gambia's Liberated African Community in The Nineteenth Century*, (Gambia: Baobab Printers, 2006); also see Kyle Prochow, “Perpetual Expatriation: Forced Migration and Liberated African Apprenticeship in the

Approximately 3,000 to 4000 Liberated Africans were settled in the Gambia from Sierra Leone.²¹ The number of Liberated Africans settled in the Gambia may seem insignificant in comparison to the approximately 99,000 settled in Sierra Leone.²² Yet, for the population of colonial Gambia, which for much of the 19th century was between 4,000 and 9,000 people, Liberated Africans formed, at some periods in time, the majority in the colony. For much of the colonial period, Liberated Africans and their descendants worked as low- and high-level bureaucrats, imperial troops, police, politicians, commercial agents, and wealthy merchants. For example, Edward Francis Small was the first elected African representative in the colonial legislature in 1947 and is considered by many to have been the pioneer of Gambian independence. He was a descendant of a Liberated African (Chapter Five). Liberated Africans' political organizing is key to understanding the emergence and evolution of African politics, African participation in government, and the urban culture of Bathurst and Gambia more broadly.

Most importantly for this study, the environment of colonial Gambia which primarily consisted of the Gambia River with its mangroves, mudflats, and other low-lying areas posed a challenge for British colonialist attempting to settle Liberated Africans on dry land. Dry land was itself needed to establish a stable property regime in a mobile watery landscape of colonial Bathurst. Colonial Gambia provides a stark case for thinking about the relationship between the

Gambia” in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896*, edited by Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, (New York: Rochester University Press, 2020).

²¹ Richard Anderson, The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and “Liberation” at Freetown, 1808-1863, *African Economic History*, Vol. 41 (2013), 111-116.

²² Anderson, *The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans*, 101.

environment and emancipated societies post-1807. A key reason why the relationship between environmental transformation and emancipation are linked historically is the importance of land ownership to the formerly enslaved and the British empire through which they sought their freedom.

Across the Atlantic many freed people sought their independence through the ownership of land on which they could independently subsist and built their own wealth.²³ Land also became the promise of the British Empire to the formerly enslaved and the foundations of British capitalism in West Africa.²⁴ From the time when the British abolitionists, philanthropists, and capitalists established the Sierra Leone colony in 1787, land was at the center of the British abolitionist and later imperialist project. British abolitionist such as Granville Sharpe funded and supported the Sierra Leonean settlement as a means of establishing a free Black peasant society on the land in Sierra Leone to challenge the productivity of slave-based plantation societies fed by the slave trade.²⁵ As such, Sierra Leone was an abolitionist experiment with the goals of

²³ Rebecca J. Scott, *Emancipation in Cuba : The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899*, (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Bolland, O. Nigel. "Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies after 1838." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981): 591–619; Jean Besson, "Land, Kinship, and Community in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean: A Regional View of the Leewards." In *Small Islands, Large Questions: Society, Culture, and Resistance in the Post-Emancipation Caribbean*, edited by Karen Fog Olwig, (London: Frank Cass.), 73-99.

²⁴ Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 38-48; Antony G. Hopkins, Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain's Annexation of Lagos, 1861, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1980), 777-798; Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City Lagos, 1760-1900*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007), 5-6; Maeve Ryan, *Humanitarian Governance and the British Antislavery World System*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2022), 63.

²⁵ Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91-94.

proving that free labor could out-match the productivity of slave labor, dispelling a key tenant of pro-slavery arguments. Later, mortgages in land would be the means through which a financial credit system was established for European merchants and Liberated African commercial agents attempting to build a “legitimate trade” distinct from the slave trade system.²⁶ As this dissertation will show in colonial Bathurst, land ownership allowed Liberated Africans access to credit (Chapter Three). Land ownership also did other things. It enabled the owner to participate in emerging municipal governance after 1850 (Chapter One). Owning land in Bathurst especially after 1859 guaranteed the owner British military protection (Chapter Two). Further, by the early 20th century, land ownership in Bathurst became a legal marker of colonial subjecthood in opposition to a protectorate subjecthood (Chapter Five). In contrast to Sierra Leone, land in colonial Bathurst was most often created and maintained through continuous land reclamation and drainage.

By centering Liberated Africans and the environmental transformation of mangrove swamps through land reclamation and drainage, this dissertation brings together the literature on British antislavery and abolition, African urban history, and African environmental history. By doing so, this dissertation attempts to open a conversation on the environmental history of post-emancipation era societies outside of the Americas.

²⁶ Hopkins, *Property Rights and Empire*, 787-788 ; Hopkins describes the use of land as security in financial loan contracts; also see Christopher Fyfe, *The Life and Times of John Ezzidio*, *Sierra Leone Studies* , No.4 (1955), 214; Fyfe discusses how Liberated African merchants like John Ezzidio mainly invested their wealth in land as opposed to other kinds of investments.

1.1 Liberated Africans and the environment in the history of British Antislavery and Abolition

This dissertation builds on the study of Liberated Africans, British antislavery efforts, and the abolition movement. Professional historical and sociological studies of Liberated Africans date to the 1960s. At this time, scholars were primarily concerned with the socio-cultural dimensions of Liberated African life in colonial Sierra Leone. Scholars such as John Peterson (1969) conceived of Liberated Africans as “Afro-Europeans,” whose culture was created through Liberated African adoption of western habits, customs, and Christianity.²⁷ By framing Liberated Africans in this way, scholars focused on questions of ethnic and identity formation, as well as the extent to which Liberated Africans acted as agents for the spread of western culture in West Africa. This trend in 1960s scholarship ultimately centered much older British concerns about their “civilizational” project in Sierra Leone as it related to Liberated Africans. After 1807, the British built institutions that ranged from mission schools, churches, and whole villages whose goal was to “civilize” newly freed Liberated Africans who had been resettled on the Freetown peninsula in Sierra Leone (see Chapter Two). Colonial officials were constantly concerned with the degree to which these institutions were effective in inculcating British habits and ways of being into Liberated African subjects. In privileging questions of identity, this scholarship tended to view Liberated African history through the lens of 20th century struggles over ethnic formation—a project important to the descendants of Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone and The

²⁷ John Peterson, *Province of Freedom; a History of Sierra Leone, 1787-1870*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 13-17.

Gambia—rather than in relation to the abolitionist project of the 19th century.²⁸ In other words, that Liberated Africans were a Black diaspora formed through 19th century British imperial and abolitionist policies, as Anderson (2020) has recently argued, has long been overlooked. While there were and are many Black diasporas throughout the Atlantic world, the particularity of a Black diaspora re-settled in Africa is a new approach to the study of Liberated Africans which this dissertation adopts.

The study of the formerly enslaved and the emancipated societies in which they lived is a relatively more recent trend in the historiography of the antislavery and abolition movements. Much of the 19th century scholarship of these movements focused on abolitionists, their organizing, and their engagements and arguments against pro-slavery activists. A key reason for this was that the early history of the movement had been written by abolitionist themselves.²⁹ These 19th century histories, then, were largely triumphalist narratives of the abolitionist struggle. Nonetheless, abolitionist historians' accounts left important chronological markers on the historiography of antislavery and abolition in the Atlantic. In particular, the abolitionist narrative made 1807 one of the most consequential dates in the anti-slavery narrative. In that year the British abolished the slave trade for its citizens. Abolitionist historians focused on

²⁸ Towards the end of British colonial rule in Sierra Leone there were important debates over the Creole's-descendants of Liberated Africans and other early Black settlers from the Americas- place in independent Sierra Leone; see Michael Crowder, *Pagans and Politicians*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1959), 201-210; Patrick S. Caulker, *The Autochthonous Peoples, British Colonial Policies, And The Creoles In Sierra Leone: The Genesis of The Modern Sierra Leone Dilemma of National Integration*, (Unpublished Diss., Temple University, 1976).

²⁹ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (London, 1808).

explaining how the 1807 legislation came to be, with the main answer being that there had been a moral awakening of the British people which abolitionists were able to propel through struggle. Abolitionists claimed therefore, an innate goodness in British civilization despite its century-long run as the world's primary slave trader. Over the 19th century, this date became a marker of British abolitionist achievements and the culmination of the movement's activities.

By the late 19th century, historians and sociologists had grown skeptical of this triumphalist narrative that centered the actions of British abolitionists. In his 1896 dissertation, *The Suppression of The African Slave Trade*, W.E.B. Dubois argued that it was the Haitian revolution more than the abolitionist movement that was responsible for the temporary halts to the slave trade in the early American nation.³⁰ The fear of a Haitian-style slave revolt led many American slave and non-slave states to ban the movement of Black people into and within their territories. In 1938 C.L.R. James's *Black Jacobins* would take up and elaborate on Dubois's assertion that it was the specter of revolutionary Haiti that dealt the Atlantic slave system its first major blow.³¹ James centered the activities of Black leaders and slaves in Haiti as the actualization of abolitionist objectives and ideals espoused by French and British white abolitionist.

At the end of the Second World War, the study of the history of the abolition of the slave trade shifted to consider structural and economic questions. Eric Williams's 1944 *Slavery and*

³⁰ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Suppression of The African Slave-Trade To the United States Of America 1638-1870*, (University Press: John Wilson and Son, Cambridge, U.S.A, 1896), 70-86.

³¹ C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins; Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

Capitalism returned to Britain, its abolitionists, and the old question of “why 1807?,” yet he offered a new interpretation.³² Rather than a moral awakening, Williams argued that the rise of industrial capitalism, increased competition by other sugar-producing empires, and British industrial capitalist’s growing opposition to monopolies killed the political and economic power of the British West Indian slave islands.³³ With West Indian planters in a weak position at the end of the 18th century, abolitionists were in a better position to push for the ban on the slave trade. This favored British industrial capitalists who were looking to break West Indian mercantilist monopoly. In 1977 Seymour Drescher challenged this argument in *Econocide*, showing that the abolition of the slave trade came at a time when the West Indian slave system was expanding, and when Britain led the world in sugar production.³⁴ Both sides of the Williams-Drescher debate heavily concentrated on British politicians, abolitionists, and the space of the British metropole as the central locus of the abolition and emancipation. The formerly enslaved and their lives as free persons did not feature in this debate as they did not offer answers to the question of why it was Britain, and not another empire, that abolished the slave trade.

Since the 1970s, work on antislavery and abolition has moved away from the British question in important ways. For one, there has been a move to think about other places and institutions that emerged out of the abolition of the slave trade. Some of these institutions

³² Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson (ed.), *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896*, (New York: Rochester University Press, 2020), 4.

³³ Eric Eustace Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1961).

³⁴ Seymour Drescher, *Econocide : British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977)

included the Admiralty Court and Court of Mixed Commissions in which so many rescued Africans were formally freed.³⁵ The study of these courts has been important for scholars who view the history of antislavery and abolition as foundational for modern humanitarian governance.³⁶ What this newer work has also shown is how abolitionism became the basis upon which a new imperial and social system was created.³⁷ Further, scholarly analysis has gone beyond the 1807 moment to think about labor, citizenship, and politics in emancipated societies.³⁸ By doing so, scholars have shown how communities of enslaved and freed people were involved in the entire chain of events that have dominated antislavery and abolitionist historiography. This includes the origins of the British abolitionist movement in the 1770s through to the rise of formal colonialism at the end of the 19th century. Scholars studying Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone have followed suit, showing the role of Liberated Africans in antislavery struggles in West Africa, as well as their roles as the bureaucrats, foot soldiers, and commercial agents of British Empire in West Africa.³⁹

³⁵ Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, “Introduction: “Liberated Africans” and Early International Courts of Humanitarian Effort” in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896*, edited by Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, (New York: Rochester University Press, 2020).

³⁶ Maeve Ryan, *Humanitarian Governance and the British Antislavery World System*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2022).

³⁷ *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, edited by Derek Peterson, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

³⁸ Cooper Frederick, Thomas C. Holt and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Everill Browen, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Padraic X. Scanlan, *Freedom’s Debtors : British Antislavery in Sierra Leone in the Age of Revolution*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

³⁹ Everill Browen, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

This study takes up the growing concern with formerly enslaved people and communities, and their social and political evolution in the context of the abolitionist movement and antislavery policies. Yet, this dissertation also concerns itself with an often ignored and marginal question of the relationship between abolition and the environment. The environmental impact of abolitionist policies has been the purview of geographers. In 1956 H. Reginald Jarrett wrote about the impact of the physical environment on the settlement of Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone. Jarrett was a geography teacher in colonial Bathurst who later came to head the Department of Geography at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Jarrett was also an advocate for land reclamation in colonial development plans for Bathurst in the post-World War II period (see Chapter Five). In Jarrett's 1956 article on Freetown's urban geography, he explained how the existence of lateritic crust shaped the settlement pattern of the city.⁴⁰ Lateritic crust is a rock and soil type that is impermeable and waterlogged during the rainy season, making it unsuitable for crop production. According to Jarrett, the settlements that comprised Freetown were in places where the lateritic crust was absent or packed under many layers of fertile topsoil.⁴¹

⁴⁰ H. Reginald Jarrett, Some Aspects of the Urban Geography of Freetown, Sierra Leone, *Geographical Review* 46, no. 3 (1956): 334–54.

⁴¹ Jarrett, *Some Aspects of*, 340-342.

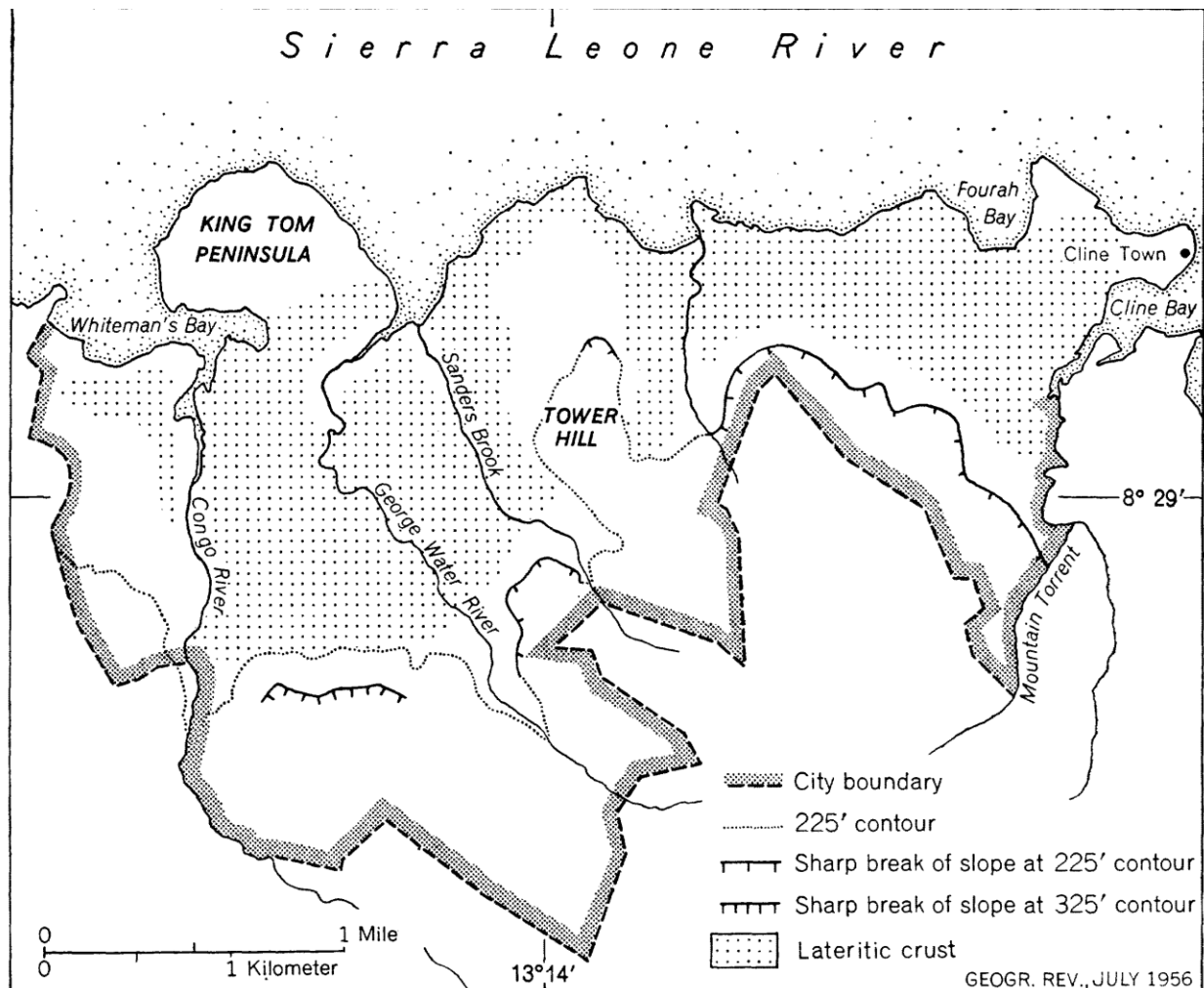


Figure 3 Map showing the lateritic crust within the Freetown city limits. From *H. Reginald Jarrett, Some Aspects of the Urban Geography of Freetown, Sierra Leone, Geographical Review* 46, no. 3 (1956): 334–54.

Figure 3 shows that lateritic crust covered large parts of Freetown, leaving small islands of laterite free soil on which settlements were established. The large area covered by laterite crust explains part of colonial officials' frustration with the soil in the Freetown peninsula. The fertility of the soil was extremely important to colonial officials because the main policy for resettling Liberated African in Sierra Leone was to put them in English-style villages where in

they would be self-sufficient. This agrarian resettlement policy was known as the Parish Model, initiated by Governor Charles MacCarthy in 1816, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.⁴² With much of the land in Freetown ill-suited for cultivation, many Liberated African villages were established in the mountains where settlers also encountered poor soil. In 1826 the Governor of Sierra Leone asked the Secretary of State if he could transfer some Liberated Africans to The Gambia. He wrote:

Under the arrangements hitherto prevailing they have been distributed amongst the villages, where they have been for years supported in idleness by the government; but the villages and the poor land of the mountains where they are situated, already begin to refuse to them a scanty subsistence, and they have begun to wander in search of better soil and easier sustenance; and the evident tendency of this is, that they will retrograde in the woods into a state of nature and barbarism, or become vagrants about Freetown and the more populous, villages.⁴³

The excerpt above indicates the importance of the environment as a factor that impacted how abolitionist policies were implemented in Sierra Leone, and their connection to The Gambia. For colonial officials tasked with managing communities of formerly enslaved people, they saw farming as the key moralizing or “civilizing” activity. The Governor saw the lack of arable land in Freetown as a danger to the abolitionist project—that without it Liberated Africans would “retrograde into the woods” and return to “barbarism.” The Governor also used Freetown’s poor soils to make an argument that there was a limit to how many more Liberated Africans could be settled in Sierra Leone. It is important to note that the plan to turn Liberated

⁴² Padraic X Scanlan, The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone, 1815-1824, *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (2016): 1095–1099.

⁴³ *Parliamentary Papers* (PP), 1829, Return to an Address of the Honorable House of Commons, Dispatch from Major General Turner to Earl Bathurst, Sierra Leone, 25th January 1826, Sierra Leone,.

Africans into self-sufficient peasants was not only framed as a moral issue, but there were underlying economic concerns as well. Funding for Liberated African rations came from the British treasury through the parliament, which meant that British politicians had to justify the use of these monies for Liberated Africans to the British public. The excerpt illustrates some dimensions of the discord between British abolitionist policies about what freedom would look like, and the physical environment and place in which it was supposed to happen.

Nowhere was the abolitionist imagination of a Christian village filled with Liberated African peasants in more tension with the environmental realities of place than in 19th century colonial Gambia. For most of the 19th century (1816-1888), The Gambia colony was composed of low-lying mangrove-covered islands in the middle of the Gambia River, mangrove-covered shorelines, mud flats, and flood plains. By the mid-19th century, The Gambia colony officially included St. Mary's Island, or Bathurst (now Banjul) at the mouth of the River Gambia, the shoreline of the Ceded Mile that also began at the mouth of the river, the northernmost tip of Kombo mainland, and McCarthy's Island. In other words, for most of the 19th century, the entirety of the British colony in The Gambia was soggy, waterlogged, and regularly inundated by rain and high river tide. Temporally, the size of the colony varied every day, every month, and every season. Liberated Africans settled in farming villages on the island of St. Mary's found it almost impossible to farm. In response to the lack of dry land, both British officials and Liberated Africans supported the construction of drainage infrastructure and large-scale land reclamation projects throughout the 19th century and into the 20th.

Not only is The Gambia an important site for studying liberated Africans it is also important for studying the political dynamics between different Liberated African groups in British West Africa. The Gambia was a dependency of Sierra Leone for over 60 years from 1821-1843 and then again from 1865-1888. The Gambia had its own government from 1816 when it was made a crown colony until 1821. In 1821 the Commandant of The Gambia became a Lieutenant Governor under the authority of the Governor of Sierra Leone. In 1843 Gambia gained its independence from Sierra Leone, forming its own legislative and executive council, and with its own Governor. When the British colonies in West Africa were reorganized into the British West African Settlements in 1865, the Gold Coast, the Lagos Colony, and Gambia all became dependencies of Sierra Leone with a Governor-in-Chief headquartered in Freetown. Whereas the Gold Coast and Lagos became independent of Sierra Leone in 1873, The Gambia continued to be a dependency until 1888. Being ruled by Governors of Sierra Leone created a significant political dynamic between Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans and Gambians that has been overlooked in the historiography. For example, Sierra Leoneans were often picked for bureaucratic post over their Gambian counterparts, with much resentment (see Chapter Three). This dissertation is not only focused on Liberated African institutions and the role they played in the empire, it also views Liberated Africans as important environmental actors.

By documenting British interventions in the watery landscape of The Gambia Colony and specifically in the colonial capital at Bathurst, this dissertation argues that land reclamation and aquatic management became important tools of governance and sites of politics in colonial Gambia. Not only were aquatic management and land reclamation tools for the construction of

the British state, but they were also important for Liberated Africans and other formerly enslaved people in The Gambia who needed and desired dry land. Dry land could be used for building homes, as collateral for commercial credit, and was required for participation in the governance of Bathurst. While Liberated Africans may not have been able to grow much food on their land, their land was central to their ability to feed their families and stay free. This dissertation broadens our understanding of the history of abolitionism and antislavery by interrogating the environmental impact and consequences of British imperial abolitionist policies and programs in West Africa.

1.2 Urbanization in watery landscapes: colonial urban history and the urban environment

The Island of St Mary’—known indigenously as *Banjoul* prior to British settlement in 1816—sits at the mouth of the Gambia River and is part of a mangrove ecosystem that stretches all the way to the Saloum River Delta in Senegal. Within the Gambia River basin the mangrove ecosystem begins at the mouth of the Gambia River and extends upriver for about 70 kilometers. Mangroves are not found beyond the 70 km distance because at that point the saltwater turns into fresh (sweet) water.⁴⁴ Mangroves (*Rhizophora* and *Avicenna*) are evergreen trees and shrubs that grow in brackish or salty water. They are found in tropical and subtropical coastlines, growing in intertidal zones of these coastlines—that is, between land and water. Mangroves act as important barriers in their intermediary position between land and water, stopping soil erosion and

⁴⁴ Judith Ann Carney, *The social history of Gambian rice production: An analysis of food security strategies* (Unpublished Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1986), 20, 39-41.

flooding. Most importantly for the indigenous communities in Senegambia, the mangrove's massive root system which appears almost to stand out of the water, slows down tidal waters allowing silt coming down the Gambia River to settle. As such, mangroves enable the accumulation of silt which creates soil, along with peat formation from the mangroves.⁴⁵ The soil in which mangroves are found, is however brackish, meaning it is low in oxygen and full of sulfates that are toxic to crops. Jola and Balanta-speaking communities in Senegambia who have sought refuge in mangrove ecosystem have long been able to thrive on the mangrove's soils through innovative techniques of land reclamation and desalination.⁴⁶

Senegambian settlers of the mangrove used their innovative land reclamation and desalination techniques to cultivate wetland rice. As Carney (2001) describes, Jola and other mangrove wetland rice farmers would first clear a section of the mangrove and after which they would build an embankment along its river side. The rice farmers then created a series of dykes, canals, and sluice gates within the embanked area. This drainage infrastructure in the rice field then used rainwater to gradually desalinate the soil, while simultaneously keeping the salty river water from entering the fields. Rice farmers would also use the rainwater to keep the land wet for

⁴⁵ Lee, Shing Yip, Jurgene H. Primavera, Farid Dahdouh-Guebas, Karen McKee, Jared O. Bosire, Stefano Cannicci, Karen Diele, et al, Ecological Role and Services of Tropical Mangrove Ecosystems: A Reassessment, *Global Ecology and Biogeography* 23, no. 7/8 (2014): 726–43.

⁴⁶ Olga F. Linares, *Power, Prayer, and Production : The Jola of Casamance*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Judith Ann Carney, *Black Rice the African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2001); Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves : Transformations along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900*, (Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann, 2003); Edda L. Fields-Black, *Deep Roots : Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008)

rice cultivation.⁴⁷ Importantly, the mangrove regions of The Gambia have long been sites wherein people have constructed dikes, embankments, and sluice gates—all technologies designed explicitly for the control of water. The water management technology and wetland rice farming enabled Jola people to seek refuge in the mangroves during the 18th and 19th century when their communities were assaulted by slave raiders engaged in the Atlantic Slave Trade.⁴⁸

The centuries-long existence of Jola and Balanta land reclamation technologies and techniques remind us that it is important not to view British land reclamation in the mangrove ecosystem of St. Mary’s Island as a new phenomenon in Senegambia. One of the major differences, however, between British and indigenous land reclamation was that the British primarily used this technique to allow for the island’s urbanization. Despite this fact, the literature on the history of land reclamation in West Africa remains focused on rural communities and agricultural production. By contrast, this dissertation asks how can we better understand the process of colonial urbanization when we recognize its origins in land reclamation? Further, how does such an account of colonial urbanization differ from other accounts of the history of colonial urbanization from across the continent?

There is a long urban planning and architectural tradition in the scholarship on colonial urbanization in Africa. This literature tends to view urban planning schemes and the structural

⁴⁷ Carney, *Black Rice*, 53-67.

⁴⁸ Olga F. Linares, *Deferring to Trade in Slaves: The Jola of Casamance, Senegal in Historical Perspective*, *History in Africa*, Vol. 14 (1987), 113-139; Judith Carney, “The mangrove preserves life”: Habitat of African survival in the Atlantic world, *Geographical Review*, 107:3, 433-451; for new literature on swamps and the enslaved see Marcus P. Nevius, *City of Refuge Slavery and Petit Marronage in the Great Dismal Swamp, 1763–1856*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2020)

and architectural transformations that came with European colonialism as the creation and expansion of a type of space imbued with colonial social dynamics and imperialist objectives.⁴⁹ According to this literature, the urban space created by European powers in Africa attempted to project European power and impose European or imperialist cultural and political forms through the morphology, architecture, zoning, and other aspects of the colonial city.⁵⁰ Further as some scholars note, these European spatial impositions and projections often began with the erasure of “native” spatial formations, or at least the containment and relegation of these formations to designated parts of the colonial city.⁵¹ For some scholars however, it is important to remember that the colonizers’ project in urban space was never complete or totalizing. From this vantage point, the colonial city and urbanization therein were always sites of contestation and negotiation.⁵²

From this materialist view, the colonial landscape is one in which colonialism and the resistance or assimilation towards it are physical, and hence become visible in the process of

⁴⁹ Janet Abu-Lughod, “Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7 (1965): 429-457; Gwendolyn Wright, *The Politics of Design in French Colonial Urbanism*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Zeynep Celik, *Urban Forms and Colonial Confrontations: Algiers under French Rule* (UC Press, Berkeley, 1997); Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban African* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Ambe J. Njoh, *Planning Power: Town Planning and Social Control in Colonial Africa*, (New York: UCL Press, 2007); Liora Bigon, *A History of Urban Planning in Two West African Colonial Capitals: Residential Segregation in British Lagos and French Dakar (1850-1930)* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2009).

⁵¹ Janet Abu-Lughod “Tale of Two Cities”, Moussa Dembele, “French Colonization and Urban Evolution in Djenne and Bamako” in Falola Toyin and Salm (eds) *Globalization and Urbanization in Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004), Zeynep Celik, *Urban Forms*.

⁵² William Cunningham Bissell, *Urban Design, Chaos, and Colonial Power in Zanzibar*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); also see Brenda Yeoh, *Contesting Space in Colonial Singapore: Power Relations in the Urban Built Environment* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2003).

urbanization. Studying the planning and early conceptualization of land reclamation projects in Bathurst supports these arguments that colonialist power projects were attempts at controlling Africans through specific kinds of spatial formations. Chapter five, for example, discusses how the colonial government tried to increase its control over land in Bathurst through a 1930s land reclamation project. This project sought to move African families from their lands in Bathurst, which were under a freehold land tenure, onto reclaimed land with a twenty-one-year leasehold tenure. The Governor's plan was to give the colonial government more control over how the land in Bathurst could be used and who could be on it, as the property owners who moved to reclaimed land would have to renew their lease every twenty-one years. As the Chapter shows, this plan ultimately never came to pass due to African opposition and the start of World War II. Nonetheless, in the hands of British colonial officials' land reclamation was a tool that they tried to use for imposing their ideological and political projects, often with repeated failure.

Despite the contributions of this scholarship, framing colonial urbanization as a project of spatial domination (even if failed) is unable to fully account for the complex relationship between a group like Liberated Africans and colonialist urbanization projects. Although Liberated Africans sometimes opposed land reclamation as was the case in the 1930s, for much of Bathurst's history they were the strongest advocates and supporters of it (Chapter Two). The literature on colonial urbanization as spatial dominance primarily centers around the relationship between indigenous and settler, showing the dispossession and disempowerment of indigenous communities. Although Liberated Africans were Africans, they were generally not indigenous to

Senegambia.⁵³ Importantly, their investment in the project of Bathurst's urbanization was not with the aim to project the triumph of European colonialism, support power projects, or increase state control. Rather, Liberated Africans' investment in land reclamation and drainage was a product of their own dispossession, vulnerability, and experience of slavery. In their quest for political belonging, land reclamation and the ownership of land therein afforded Liberated Africans opportunities to improve their social, economic, and political relations within the Gambian colonial state and society (Chapter Two). It is for this reason that this dissertation engages the question of Liberated Africans *becoming autochthonous*, which is distinct from being either indigenous or settler.

Turning to the socio-political and economic dimensions of colonial urbanization, scholars of social and labor history have tended to view colonial urbanization as leading to the creation of new types of social, political, and labor relationships. Frederick Cooper (1987) showed how urbanization in late colonial Tanganyika reflected the changing labor relations between British colonialist and Africans workers. Cooper argued that British commercial firms and the colonial state attempted to create a stable and permanent labor force in the city. To achieve their economic objectives, colonists imagined that they had to de-Africanize the urban African to make them better workers. Colonial urbanization therefore introduced new temporal regimes and sought the transformation of Africans into a "proper" urban working class. Otherwise, they were

⁵³ Anderson, *Abolition in Sierra Leone*, 31.

among a set of dangerous classes that posed a threat to the colonial city.⁵⁴ Looking at rumors and the ways Africans talked about urban life, Luis White (2000) demonstrated how new social relations that Africans experienced in colonial urban space were discussed through different imaginaries.⁵⁵ White uses these imaginaries as evidence of the changing social relations that come with colonial urbanization in East African colonial spaces. This literature provides important insight into how Africans lived and experienced changing colonial cities but does not allow for a deep understanding of the changing nature of cities and how those transformations created opportunities for socio-political and economic relations to transform as well.

Conceiving of land reclamation as part of colonial urbanization allows just this. From the mid-19th century up to the end of British colonial rule, land reclamation allowed colonial Bathurst to extend into the Box Bar and Half Die swamps on the northwest and southeastern parts of St Mary's Island respectively. The colonial administrations did not, however, turn these swamps into dry land only for expansion's sake; these projects were often in response to financial, political, and social crises. As this dissertation will show, the expansion into these wetlands were often colonial attempts to maintain order for the sake of the state. Liberated Africans often supported these expansions because they provided more opportunities for land

⁵⁴ Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); also see Andrew Burton's *African Underclass: Urbanisation, Crime and Colonial Order in Dar es Salaam* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵ Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, (Berkeley, CA : University of California Press, 2000)

ownership, which gave them access to different things at different times in Bathurst's history, as described above.

Importantly, each subsequent land reclamation project signaled a changing social and political relationship which the colonial state was trying to control. For example, drawing on the emerging mosquito theory of malaria, land reclamation projects under the Board of Health (1902-1920s), were used to fully segregate Bathurst along racial lines (Chapter Four). In the colonial medical deployment of mosquito theory, infected African children were spreading yellow fever and malarial to their un-immune European neighbors through the mosquito. Yet as the white colonial elite were attempting to isolate and concentrate power among themselves in a racially segregated Bathurst, the most consequential labor strike in The Gambia's colonial history occurred. The 1929 strike resulted in the colonial abolition of the Board of Health and the extension of the franchise for property owners in municipal elections—a franchise which the Liberated African and other property owners previously held and then lost in 1855 (see Chapter One).

Without attempting to oversimplify the significant contributions of the literature on colonial urbanization in Africa, urban ecology has largely been left to the side. As Debjani Battacharyya (2014) wrote concerning South Asian colonial urban historiography, this literature generally ignores “the dynamic nature of urban ecology and its interaction with colonial capitalist town planning.”⁵⁶ To this end Battacharyya asks, “Where is the ‘Land’ in Colonial

⁵⁶ Debjani Battacharyya, *Fictions of Possession: Land, Property and Capital in Colonial Calcutta c. 1820 to c.1920*, (Unpublished Dissertation, Emory University, 2014), 12.

Urban History?”⁵⁷ As a historian of land reclamation and land markets in colonial Calcutta, Bhattacharyya’s work is a reminder to foreground the landscape upon which colonial urbanization happened. Disappeared landscapes, as in the case of the mangroves of Bathurst, and new forms of land—reclaimed land—also produce new kinds of social and economic relationships. As in African studies, Bhattacharyya points to scholarship on colonial urban history in South Asia as generally concerned with rural to urban transitions, morphology, and metropole-periphery dynamics—not the environment. When the environment is taken seriously, it has typically been in epidemiological terms.

In Bathurst it is true that colonial administrators always justified land reclamation projects as sanitary or epidemiological projects (see Chapter Two and Chapter Four). Yet, as Bhattacharyya has shown in the case of Calcutta, land reclamation has also been a form of urbanization that turns wetlands into speculative property. By creating new land, the colonial state created new opportunities for revenue generation, and for making public works profitable. By connecting urban land markets with colonial infrastructural regimes, the colonial state was able to create a new horizon for capitalist accumulation in Calcutta.⁵⁸ As Bhattacharya notes, this process simultaneously resulted in a kind of amnesia about the watery nature of the landscapes as all swamps became property-in-waiting. Ultimately, even the risk of flooding and the erosion that resulted through the transformation of wetland landscapes itself became instrumentalized

⁵⁷ Bhattacharyya, *Fictions of Possession*, 12.

⁵⁸ Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta : The Making of Calcutta*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 148.

through new market practices.⁵⁹ This British colonial market-driven regime lives on in post-colonial Kolkata despite the water that continues to form on the surface of the landscape.⁶⁰ Like in Bathurst, seasonal and lunar temporalities mean that the land is ever-changing, growing or shrinking depending on tides and other factors. Nonetheless, colonial and post-colonial *legal fictions* undergird the financial speculation that drives a property market for the exchange of such wetlands, even if they are not yet dry.

In conversation with Bhattacharya's work, this dissertation emphasizes the importance of drainage technologies to the evolution of politics and political institutions in coastal, tidal West Africa. Unlike Calcutta, The Gambia was a backwater in the British Empire. The amount of capital that made land speculation possible in Calcutta was absent from colonial Gambia. Land reclamation in The Gambia was carried out by the colonial state primarily with funds from the taxation of property owners in Bathurst and grants from the British imperial parliament. There was little collaboration between the state and private financiers. The European merchants who lived in Bathurst were typically absent during the rainy season when flooding was the worst. They also lived on the highest and driest land in the city (Chapter One). In contrast to Calcutta, European merchants avoided land reclamation whenever possible, viewing it as an additional tax burden. It was Liberated Africans in Bathurst who were the primary beneficiaries, and hence the primary supporters, of land reclamation. They formed the community that was to live in the lowest-lying parts of town, and it was drainage infrastructure that protected their homes and

⁵⁹ Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology*, 141.

⁶⁰ Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology*, 161.

lives. Aquatic management was so important for Liberated Africans that it was around issues of drainage and land reclamation that Liberated African politics was organized in the 19th and first half of the 20th century. They organized and argued for the maintenance of infrastructure that would keep the colony's land fixed and dry. From a Liberated African perspective, good governance in colonial, urban Bathurst hinged upon effective drainage infrastructure.

1.3 African environmental history and municipal governance

From 1816 to 1846, the town of colonial Bathurst was built primarily on the driest, highest part of St. Mary's Island, also known as Bathurst Point in the northeastern end of the island. The rest of the island was covered in mangroves, with streams that crossed the island and at times formed mini-islands and pools of water. By the 1820s colonial officials and medical personnel viewed Bathurst as the least healthy British colonial settlement in West Africa.⁶¹ In early 19th century British medicine, mangroves had become associated with the spread of fevers and malaria, thought to be caused by miasma.⁶² Colonial medical officers thought that the mangroves trapped decomposing "vegetable and animal matter," which under the influence of the "vertical African sun" produced dangerous gases or miasma which was especially deadly for Europeans.⁶³ An 1827 parliamentary report on the British settlements in West Africa proposed

⁶¹ National Record Service of The Gambia (NRS), CSO 1/ Medical Commissioners (Naval) to R.W. Hay, Esq, 9 December 1826.

⁶² *Parliamentary Papers (PP)*, 1842, Report from The Select Committee on The West Coast of Africa, Climate and its Influence on Health, Appendix, No. 21, 414-415.

⁶³ *Parliamentary Papers (PP)*, 1842, Report from The Select Committee on The West Coast of Africa, Climate and its Influence on Health, Appendix, No. 21.

that for Bathurst to be healthy it would require “continuous drainage” of the mangroves.⁶⁴ Colonial administrators in The Gambia seized on this medical framing of Bathurst as unhealthy to justify their British Treasury-funded land reclamation projects in the mangrove wetlands. For colonial administrators in The Gambia, a core part of governing over Bathurst was the continuous drainage and land reclamation in and around the town. The kind of environmental governance that took place in colonial Bathurst in an urban setting and at the municipal level is rarely the focus of African environmental histories of the colonial period.

As a field, African environmental history is overwhelmingly focused on the rural, and on dry land. There has been little attention paid to wetlands, or to urban environments. By contrast “fortress conservation,” forestry, and colonial misunderstandings of African environments form key themes in the literature. For example, Fairhead and Leach (1996) interrogate colonial ideas of savannahs as degraded landscapes created through African’s destructive environmental practices.⁶⁵ They show that this colonial gaze constructed Africans as the key problematic actors damaging the environment, which was not the case. Sunseri (2009) has shown that how colonial officials deployed scientific forestry as a tool for controlling rural populations and countering the actions and desires of African environmental actors.⁶⁶ As Giblin (1992) had already shown, the deployment of these kinds of colonial environmental management techniques disrupted

⁶⁴ *Parliamentary Papers (PP)*, 1827, Report of The Commissioners of Inquiry Into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, I. Dependencies in the Gambia, 5.

⁶⁵ James Fairhead and Melissa Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape : Society and Ecology in a Forest-Savanna Mosaic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ Thaddeus Raymond Sunseri, *Wielding the Ax : State Forestry and Social Conflict in Tanzania, 1820-2000*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009).

indigenous environmental management strategies, ultimately leading to worse outcomes for the environment and the people who lived there.⁶⁷ More recently Jacob Dlamini (2020) has acknowledged the contributions made by this wave of scholarship for its critique of fortress conservation, while also pointing out that the emphasis on dispossession sees African actors as more passive than they were. Focusing on Kruger National Park, Dlamini points to the stories of African *possession*, in contradistinction to dispossession, to show how Africans have always been continuous actors in their environment despite colonial attempts to restrict African environments for white and colonial benefit.⁶⁸ Dlamini's *Safari Nation* tells a more complicated story of Africans' interaction with their environments which range from conservation, exploitation, to the enjoyment of the environment. These contributions notwithstanding, there is a bias in the literature on African environmental history toward national parks and conservation areas which became protected under colonial rule or in the post-colonial period. There has been markedly less focus on environments outside of such special zones.

Several scholars have sought to examine the history of wetlands, flooding, and the relationships with such changeable landscapes and African coastal or riverine communities. Harms (1987) examines the question of political power among the Nunu in the context of their watery landscape in the middle Zaire River in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He argued that Nunu political power was constructed through the strategic settlement and exploitation of the

⁶⁷ James Leonard Giblin, *The Politics of Environmental Control in Northeastern Tanzania, 1840-1940*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992)

⁶⁸ Jacob S. T. Dlamini, *Safari Nation: A Social History of the Kruger National Park*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2020), 7.

watery landscape. The Nunu “cleared forest patches, dug ponds, built dams, strung fish fences and created artificial islands of floating grasses.”⁶⁹ Harms shows how these tactics for exploiting the landscape created vested interests in certain plots of ground, food surpluses, the distribution of such surplus, in addition to labor inequalities, becoming sites of power. Sandra Greene (2002) examined how Anlo people living in the lagoons of the Volta River between Ghana and Togo conceptualized their watery landscape, which included everything from water bodies to burial grounds and the human body itself.⁷⁰ In so doing, Greene argues that Anlo conceptualizations of their landscape changed because of European colonialism. For example, permanent potable water bodies gradually became spiritually meaningless, which was a stark contrast from the precolonial era. The same was not true of oceans, which continued to cause problematic soil erosion and therefore still carried spiritual significance for the Anlo. Another historian, Emmanuel Akyeampong, also took up the question of Anlo history in the urban settlement of colonial Kieta.

Akyeampong’s (2001) *Between the sea and the lagoon* historicizes land reclamation and water management in an urban context, showing how the Anlo continued to find new strategies for survival in an increasingly submerged Kieta.⁷¹ Like in The Gambia, the British carried out land reclamation projects in Kieta to increase and preserve land that suffered from soil erosion

⁶⁹ Robert Harms, *Games against Nature: An Eco-Cultural History of the Nunu of Equatorial Africa*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 55.

⁷⁰ Sandra E. Greene, *Sacred Sites and the Colonial Encounter : A History of Meaning and Memory in Ghana*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002).

⁷¹ Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Between the Sea & the Lagoon : An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana : C. 1850 to Recent Times*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001).

due to violent waves from the Gulf of Guinea. Anlo leaders became important advocates for land reclamation in the 1930s—a period during which soil erosion had reached new heights (and colonial consciousness), and the colonial government proposed relocating the population of Keita.⁷² When land reclamation was carried out in Keita, however, it was most often organized by community members themselves. These attempts were generally failures insofar as frequent, heavy rains made them futile.⁷³ In colonial Keita, Akyeampong shows land reclamation to have been the kind of project carried out in desperation, and one that signaled colonial abandonment rather than purposeful, directed engineering over long periods of time. In Bathurst, land reclamation projects were repeatedly carried out over a period of more than one hundred years from 1846 to 1952. The land in Bathurst ebbed and flowed, as land was reclaimed other pieces were lost to the river and sea. Yet, it was systematically undertaken to ensure the survival of the colonial project (Chapter Two) and, later, to maintain colonial political, racial, and legal divisions (Chapter Four and Five). In so doing, this dissertation demonstrates the importance of land reclamation and water management to the formation and functions of not only colonial government and Liberated African politics, but also municipal government.

Despite the relative dearth of studies on the relationship between the aquatic management of watery landscapes and the evolution of governance structures in African environmental history, this has been an important focus in the historiography of English state formation. In *The Draining of the Fens*, Eric Ash (2017) considers the question of the formation of the modern

⁷² Akyeampong, *Between the Sea & the Lagoon*, 128-129.

⁷³ Akyeampong, *Between the Sea & the Lagoon*, 130.

English state through land reclamation projects in the vast wetlands of The Fens on the eastern coast of England. The English Crown's land reclamation projects gradually took power away from local governing bodies that had originally been set up for the purpose of managing drainage infrastructure and the flow of water in The Fens.⁷⁴ Over time, land reclamation projects centralized power in the Crown as wetlands were turned into productive agricultural lands and the people of The Fens—the Fenmen—were displaced and proletarianized. English elites saw The Fens as disease-ridden and filled with unruly people. Both the people and the landscape represented the limits of the Crown's spatial and moral power in England, which land reclamation helped to overcome. As this dissertation will show, land reclamation was not only an important feature of governance structures in England, but in British West Africa as well. For example, the Rate Payers' Council established in 1850 was the first democratic body in colonial Bathurst in which Africans could vote (see Chapter One). It emerged out of Liberated African calls for the removal of an ineffective colonial Governor following a devastating flood in 1849. Tasked with managing embankments, drains, bridges, footpaths, sluice gates, and other urban, drainage infrastructure, the Rate Payers' Council which lasted only from 1850 to 1855 nonetheless represented an important win for the Liberated African community in Bathurst which sought a say in how their taxes were being spent.

⁷⁴ Eric H. Ash, *The Draining of the Fens Projectors, Popular Politics, and State Building in Early Modern England*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); for a discussion on class and state formation as it relates to drainage in Spanish colonies see Vera S. Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land : Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020)

African environmental history tends to portray colonialism as an era during which an older, patron-client model of governance of the environment is taken over by a scientific colonial governance framework. Historians have productively shown contests between these models, but they are often presented as two dueling sides. The history of the emergence of municipal government in Bathurst shows instead the colonial failure to effectively manage watery landscapes and attempts to maintain legitimacy in the face of such failure by devolving governance powers to African elites. While the forms of governance discussed in this dissertation were elite, they were also democratic.

1.4 Drainage versus land reclamation

To tell the story of land reclamation and aquatic management in Bathurst it is important to define and distinguish between land reclamation and drainage, both of which are used throughout this work. Historical actors often used the word “drainage” when they were referring to both major land reclamation projects that increased the size of the city, as well as minor works that sought to enhance the flow of water in a specific location within the city. While *drainage* is an all-encompassing category for the actors in this dissertation, I distinguish the two along the lines set out by Christopher Taylor (1999). Drainage, then, is defined as the “creation of channels and embankments, the construction of sluices and the erection of water-lifting machines, all of which enable unwanted water to be removed from land.”⁷⁵ This definition focuses on the

⁷⁵ Christopher Taylor, “Post-medieval drainage of marsh and fen”, in *Water Management in the English Landscape Field, Marsh and Meadow*, edited by Hadrian F Cook and Tom Williamson, (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 142.

technologies of drainage and the goal of drainage, which is the removal of unwanted water. Land reclamation, on the other hand, is defined as, “the creation of fields and the improvement of soils and vegetation in order to begin or increase agricultural by cultivation or grazing. Reclamation usually succeeded the initial drainage...”⁷⁶ This definition of land reclamation emerges from a focus on land reclamation for rural agriculture, whose *goals* differ from land reclamation in colonial Bathurst. It is useful nonetheless because it emphasizes that land reclamation is a transformative process that creates “fields” or parcels of dry land first by draining the water and then filling in the drained land with sand and other materials such as soil or refuse that can stabilize the new land. Importantly, while all colonial governments in Bathurst drained, not all reclaimed. Further, most land reclamation projects in The Gambia were in response to Liberated African demands and crises in the colony.

1.5 Dissertation sources and method

This dissertation involved 12 months of archival research at the National Record Services of The Gambia (NRS). I also conducted oral history interviews in Mandinka and Wolof in Banjul, and along the northern and southern banks of the Gambia River. Short trips to The National Archives in the UK (KEW) and Senegal (ANS) allowed me to extend the focus of my research beyond the Gambia colony to the British metropole, and better situate developments in West African land reclamation in a wider imperial context. This research has been supported by

⁷⁶ Taylor, “Post-medieval drainage”, 142.

the ACLS/Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellowship and the University of Michigan Rackham Humanities Dissertation Fellowship.

In the NRS I have focused on petitions written by Liberated Africans to the colonial Governors and administrators in the Gambia Colony, the Governor in Chief in Sierra Leone, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies in England. The petitions were usually written by Liberated African political groups such as the “Principle Black Inhabitants” in the early period of the 19th century and later in the period by the Gambia Native’s Association (GNA). These Liberated African political groups were composed of the heads of the Friendly Societies in Bathurst. Friendly Societies as described earlier in the introduction were a combination of burial societies, mutual aid associations, ethnic cultural associations, and labor associations. Some Friendly Societies performed the four stated roles simultaneously or performed one of the roles more than others. But the societies all participated and paid for the funeral and burial rights of their members and had many of the same organizational features such as a head man, treasurer, queen, and king of robes. The Friendly Societies were important political institutions through which Liberated Africans could organize labor strikes and petition drives.

From very early in The Gambia’s colonial history Liberated Africans saw themselves as British subjects and exercised this right through petitions to the Crown and her governments. As Brown (2006) argued in the post-slave trade moment the British imperial government became an

important arbiter of social relations within her colonies.⁷⁷ Liberated Africans saw the crown as a recourse for dealing with the oppression and discrimination from European elites in colonial society. As such Liberated Africans have left a large paper trail in the archives with many documents written by Liberated Africans themselves. Many of the petitions by Liberated Africans were written after major floods and drainage issues. As such they provide important insight into Liberated African views on drainage, land reclamation, and the colonial state's involvement therein. I use these petitions to understand what Liberated Africans wanted out of drainage and land reclamation projects and how they felt about these projects. From looking at many of these petitions it becomes clear that a dominant view among the Liberated African elite was that good governments drained effectively. Liberated Africans used drainage and their assessment of it as mode of political discourse to assess the performance of the colonial regime and to justify their demands or claims on how things should be.

Wolof speakers in Bathurst were perhaps the most important African group demographically for most of Bathurst's history except from the 1830s to 1880s when Liberated Africans were the majority. Wolof residents were often—although not always—signatories of petitions from the “Principle Black Inhabitants” and the GNA. In fact, organizing against the colonial state was most impressive when it involved both Liberated Africans and members of the Wolof community. Yet, archival constraints shape the way Wolof-speakers appear in this

⁷⁷ Christopher L. Brown, “From Slaves to Subjects: Envisioning an Empire without Slavery, 1772–1834”, in *Black Experience and the Empire*, edited by Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

dissertation. They play a larger part of the story from the late 19th and early 20th century, in large part because many Wolof people who were living in Bathurst were slaves until the 1840s and were also French subjects. Although the Gambian colonial state was established as an anti-slavery society, most of the Wolof artisans that came to Bathurst from Goree and who helped build the early colonial economy were enslaved. Further, most Wolof people in Bathurst were Muslims, and therefore posed a problem for the British who sought to “civilize” Christianity. The colonial state in The Gambia often disavowed accusations of slavery in its territory and the unfree forms of labor in Bathurst. Exploring these tensions are of course fruitful and enriching, but when it came to writing petitions in the early 19th century, it was largely Liberated Africans who saw it as their right as British subjects.

From an imperial-level perspective, these petitions were very conservative pieces of writing despite their critique of colonial officials and their activities. To legitimize their petitions, Liberated Africans would state their undeterred loyalty and obedience to the British Crown. As Isaac Land (2013) notes “If promises of bold, confrontational, collective action are to be the litmus test for an authentic voice from below, petitions fail on many counts.”⁷⁸ Only rarely do the 19th century petitions found in the NRS make bold demands such as when the “Principle Black Inhabitants” asked that Governor MacDonnell be removed from office in 1849 (Chapter One). Most importantly, petitions had to first go through the colonial Governor’s office before being

⁷⁸Isaac Land “Patriotic Complaints: Sailors Performing Petition in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain”, in *Critical Perspectives on Colonialism: Writing the Empire from Below*, edited by Fiona Paisley, Kirsty Reid, (New York: Routledge, 2013)

sent to Sierra Leone or to England. We can only imagine how many petitions were thrown out because they were too radical for the colonial state. The more radical sorts of statements and demands made by Liberated Africans were printed in the press.

West African and metropolitan based newspapers were important avenues through which Liberated Africans launched critiques and made demands on the colonial state. Sierra Leone was the birthplace of many of the first West African newspapers in British West Africa. These newspapers generally relied on Liberated African correspondents in colonial Bathurst for their information. Throughout this dissertation I use newspapers to analyze the counter narratives and positions held by Liberated Africans that are obscured in official colonial documents. Colonial officials tended to portray their drainage and reclamation projects as successful, even when they exacerbated flooding and devastation. At the same time, the newspapers had a strong Christian, capitalist, and imperialist bent. Most of the correspondents for newspapers were missionary-educated Liberated Africans engaged in commerce and who were reliant on the imperial military for protection in the 19th century. Financially, the newspapers relied on revenue from commercial agents. *The African Times*, for example, relied on commissions from trading African imports in the metropole (Chapter Three). It is not unsurprising to find articles written by Liberated Africans that would in turn degrade other, more marginal communities both inside and outside of Bathurst who they saw as not conforming to the norms of colonial society. West African and metropolitan-based newspapers represent elite views on colonial affairs, that both reflect Liberated African commitments to anti-slavery and to capitalism.

This dissertation also draws on oral histories that I conducted with Banjul elders, and elders throughout both the North and South banks of the River Gambia. Yet, with most interlocutors having been born in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s when the landscape had already been significantly transformed through land reclamation, it is difficult to use these interviews to access disappeared landscapes in the colonial city. At the same time, these interviews brought up memories that do help prize open social dynamics in colonial Bathurst. For example, questions about sanitation in the city brought to the fore a much-remembered children's taunt discussed in Chapter Five.

The main approach that I have taken in this dissertation has been to first construct the politics around land reclamation projects before and after the project has occurred. Secondly, I have done my best to recover African-authored accounts of these land reclamation and drainage projects. These texts reveal the extent to which land reclamation projects were never just about sanitation or epidemiological concerns. Finally, I have approached these questions from a municipal perspective, focusing on the debate over how resources are managed and decisions about the city are made.

1.6 Dissertation outline

Chapter One, "In search of *Terra Firma*: Drainage, participatory democracy and the origins of Liberated African politics, 1816-1855," charts the transformation of the indigenous island settlement of *Banjoul* into the British colonial town of Bathurst through wetland drainage. Drawing on previously unexamined early colonial maps, petitions, and ordinances, this chapter

demonstrates that over the course of the early colonial period from 1816 to the 1850s drainage infrastructure became key to British social and environmental control over Bathurst. The persistent flooding of the fledgling town necessitated extensive water and land management. As a result, and as the population of the town grew, drainage infrastructure became a key site for both the construction of colonial power and African challenges to that power. Focusing on the community of Liberated Africans, this chapter argues that their establishment of a firm political position in The Gambia Colony was tied up with the establishment of firm, dry ground on which to stand in the form of stable plots of privately owned property. Water management was therefore central to the development of political institutions in mid-19th century Gambia, including the emergence of a form of participatory democracy in which some land-owning Africans could participate for the first time.

By examining early drainage projects this chapter shows that the projects and their results are an important means for understanding the early development of Liberated African politics as tied to aquatic management. Drainage in early 19th century Bathurst was only possible through Liberated African labor, first in the form of the King's Boys and then through the forced resettlement of Liberated Africans in the 1830s. Further, because Liberated Africans were among the later arrivals to Bathurst, they came to occupy the lowest-lying land which suffered the most from flooding and relied the most on robust drainage infrastructure. In demanding that the colonial governor, be removed in 1849 because of flooding, Liberated Africans displayed the importance of proper drainage to their community. The first truly democratic municipal body in colonial Gambia which was the Rates Payer's Council, came out of Liberated African demands

and beliefs about proper governance and drainage. The creation of the Ratepayer's Council by the colonial governor, however, gave landed property a new political value in that it gave residence with property a political voice. The political power that came with landownership, was none-the-less restricted and eventually degraded with the abolition of the Ratepayers Council in 1855. From 1853 to 1860 there would be a major pause on drainage as the colonial state attempted to expand the colonial territory through conquest and war on the mainland.

Whereas Chapter One is focus almost entirely on Bathurst, Chapter Two looks at the broader colonial landscape outside of Bathurst on St Mary's Island. Chapter Two, "From the Mainland to the Mangroves: The shifting colonial frontier, 1819-1866" uses military reports and colonial correspondence to explore the relationship between Liberated African resettlement in the Gambia after 1831 and colonial expansion through land reclamation and territorial conquest. The British colony of the Gambia went through a significant amount of territorial expansion in the mid-19th century. In 1853, the Gambia colony expanded into large parts of mainland Kombo, creating the British colonial territory known as Kombo St. Mary. During the same period, the colonial government also began its first major land reclamation projects on the Island of St. Mary's (Bathurst) in 1846 and 1860.

The Gambia colony just prior to this expansionist moment was composed of the Gambia River, its flood prone islands and mangrove covered shorelines. The watery landscape of the colony made it almost impossible for the British to transfer the Parish Model of Liberated African resettlement. The Parish Model came out of Abolitionist policies which aimed to settle Liberated African as Christian peasants who could provide for their own subsistence and

demonstrate the productivity of free labor and the morality of Black freedom. This model which saw agriculture as a disciplining and moralizing force met its ecological limits in the Gambia Colony as composed in the early to mid-19th century. The failure of the agricultural project was dampened by the rations that continued to be provided by the Liberated African Department. The closure of the Liberated African Department after 1842 signaled a crisis for the colonial state that now had to deal with Liberated Africans who found it hard to subsist on flood prone land. Colonial officials decided to ensure that Liberated Africans would survive in the Gambia colony and continue to be good Christian peasants through colonial expansion onto the mainland. The expansion, however, was precarious leading the colonial state to enact the first land reclamation project in Bathurst in 1846.

I argue that as colonial officials attempted to preserve the colonial social order through land reclamation and territorial conquest, they changed the form of the imagined Liberated African village as well as the purpose of land reclamation in the Gambia colony. The Liberated African village became militarized as the British expanded into the frontiers of Northern Kombo. While land reclamation changed from being about creating fertile ground and solving drainage to creating land that the British could protect, in contrast to the vulnerable settlements in Kombo. Land reclamation as a result became a means through which British officials could be responsive to Liberated Africans in a period of crisis and tie them further to the colonial project.

Chapter Three, “Children of the Soil: The fight for debtor protections in colonial Gambia under the British West African Settlements, 1866-1888,” examines the fight against debt imprisonment in colonial Gambia in the context of the administrative, juridical, and military

reorganization of Gambia from a Crown Colony into a dependency in the British West African Settlements (1866-1888). Drawing on newspaper articles, court cases, petitions, and administrative correspondence, it argues that the closer contact between Liberated Africans in The Gambia and Sierra Leone ultimately created new opportunities for solidarity that allowed Liberated Africans in The Gambia to better protect themselves and their land from the predatory credit system controlled by European merchants. Whereas Chapter One and Chapter Two explored the process of Liberated Africans moving from a place of precarity within the colony to an established position in which access to dry land enabled them to own property and participate in the political life of the colony from 1816 to 1865, this chapter focuses on Liberated African organizing to further secure these economic and political positions in the 1870s and 1880s.

The commercial arrangements that organized the Gambian colonial economy put Liberated Africans at great risk. Liberated African traders took European manufactured goods on credit from European import/export merchants stationed in Bathurst. Like in most British West African colonies in the 19th century, their commercial credit was securitized with land as the collateral for the loans. Traders then attempted to barter these goods for commercial crop cultivated along the banks of the Gambia River. This required Liberated Africans to negotiate with and pay local chiefs to gain permission to trade in their territories; transport and store goods in depots upriver; and maintain the products in good condition. In addition to these challenges, frequent upheavals in the region resulted in the theft and damage of trade goods. Bad harvests and changing tastes and preferences could leave Liberated Africans with nothing to trade for or with. European merchants dominated this credit-based system by controlling prices and

monopolizing the import and export of manufactured goods and produce in the colony. Taken together with astronomical interest rates, it was nearly impossible for Liberated African traders to repay their debts. This predatory system resulted in Liberated Africans being in perpetual debt, imprisoned for debt, and in some cases having their land seized by creditors. Liberated Africans used the new political and legal arrangements created by the British West African Settlements to win a ban on debt imprisonment. Unfortunately for the Liberated African community despite securing their lands through new progressive laws, the colonial government worked to eliminate Liberated Africans as middlemen traders and transformed the Gambian credit system into one that favored European monopolies. The ban on debt imprisonment was never extended to the Gambia Protectorate after its formation in 1889, and by 1900 Liberated Africans had lost their positions as the primary traders between Bathurst and African communities on the Gambia River.

Chapter Four, “Medicalized urban governance: Bathurst under the Board of Health, 1866-1930,” charts the gradual medicalization of municipal governance in Bathurst in response to epidemics and outbreaks of yellow fever, cholera, and malaria over the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Drawing on medical reports, scientific articles, colonial correspondence, and oral histories, this chapter traces out the gradual formation of the Board of Health which was the only municipal governing institution in Bathurst from 1887-1930. The chapter continues the discussion on municipal governance after the abolition of the Ratepayer’s Council in 1855. The chapter shows what the gradual medicalization of municipal government looked like on the ground. From 1866, when the first Public Health Ordinance was passed to the creation of the

Board of Health in 1887 the colonial state became increasingly more intrusive in the lives of Bathurst residents and more microscope in its view. Microscope, because the colonial state became more concerned with how residents managed their household to the level of the contents in their household water jugs. The state's adoption of mosquito theory at the beginning of the 20th century heightened the colonial state's intrusiveness and geared it towards controlling certain types of bodies and microbes.

This transformation in the colonial state was reflected in the land reclamation projects that took place under the Board of Health. Where in land reclamation during the 19th century was justified by colonial officials to make Bathurst ecologically healthier and add space, in the 20th century land reclamation was justified as means of separating and excluding certain types of bodies in Bathurst. chapter argues however, that Liberated African elites were able to demand and fill increasing numbers of prominent political positions in colonial Bathurst as municipal governance became more medicalized. Despite increased elite African political participation during this era, land reclamation projects were increasingly and overtly defended on a faulty, xenophobic racial science that posited Africans, migrants, and sanitary workers as Bathurst's main disease vectors. Reclaimed land was used to facilitate the racial segregation of Bathurst and the isolation of migrant, sanitation workers on the edges of town. While property owners for the first time began to enjoy municipal services such as trash and sewage collection by the same migrant workers that were increasingly isolated and seen as unsanitary. The alliance between the Board of Health and Liberated African and Wolof elites broke down when the medical professionals that headed the Board wanted more control without the input of those African

elites. African elites consequently focused their energies on the rise labor movement which resulted in the long strike in Gambia colonial history in 1929. After the strike the Board of Health was disbanded leading to the creation of the Bathurst Urban District Council in which property owners could vote for the first time since 1855.

Chapter Five, “Developing the divide between colony and protectorate, 1943-1965,” starts in the middle of World War II during which British colonial governments were tasked with drawing up new development plans for their colonies in response to a call by the Imperial government in Britain. In 1943 the colonial government of the Gambia drew up such a plan. The most interesting aspect of the development plans for Bathurst was the proposal to abandon land reclamation. Instead of land reclamation the colonial government planned to move to the mainland in Kombo and build a new colonial capital. Drawing on development plans, maps, and town council minutes to examine the debates over mid-century plans to build colonial settlements on mainland Kombo. This chapter argues that the descendants of Liberated Africans (Akus) opposed these proposals because they feared losing their privileged colonial status. Since an expansion of the colony onto the mainland also meant an extension of colonial jurisdiction and rights to mainland peoples, Liberated Africans saw the incorporation of parts of Kombo into the colony as leading to their political and ethnic minoritization. In response, Liberated Africans called for more land reclamation in Bathurst. This proposal was met, resulting in the continued concentration of resources in Bathurst to the detriment protectorate peoples, as well as the exacerbation of the impact of flooding. It was this colonial land reclamation in the last decades of British colonial rule which created the Campama Estate today known as the Tobacco Road

neighborhood. The colonial administration's 1943 break with land reclamation policy and Liberated African descendants' opposition to it reveals that land reclamation had become cement to Liberated African privilege and position within the colony. And most importantly land reclamation enabled a continued division of the Gambia into a colony encompassed by an island and a protectorate that was everything else.

Chapter 1

In Search of *Terra Firma*: Drainage, Participatory Democracy, and the Origins of Liberated African Politics in The Gambia, 1816-1855

1.1 Introduction

On August 17th, 1849, the main embankment in colonial Bathurst broke and half of the town flooded.⁷⁹ According to Liberated African survivors, the water reached between fifteen and twenty-four inches above ground. Survivors' accounts also mention boats moving on waterways that had formerly been streets. Much of the water entered and destroyed homes, gardens, and all the furniture and belongings of Bathurst's poorest residents.⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the 1849 flood, a group of African residents comprised primarily of Liberated Africans and a few Wolof residents wrote a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies demanding that the Governor of the Gambia Colony be removed. The petitioners argued that the governor had neglected to repair the embankment which the petitioners referred to as "the bulwark of our safety."⁸¹ Despite the political mobilization that followed the 1849 flood, it was neither the first nor the worst flood in Bathurst's history. Bathurst had always been a place that flooded during the rains and spring tides of August.

⁷⁹ National Archives U.K. (Kew), CO87/47, Petition from the Principle Black Inhabitants to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 24, 1849.

⁸⁰ Kew, CO87/47, Petition from the Principle Black Inhabitants to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 24, 1849.

⁸¹ Kew, CO87/47, Petition from the Principle Black Inhabitants to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, August 24 1849.

The town of Bathurst was so susceptible to inundation because it sat on an island composed mainly of mangrove swamps and meandering creeks. The swamps and creeks would periodically overflow with water during the rainy season, high tides, and spring tides. Indigenously known as *Banjoul* and renamed “St. Mary’s Island” by the British, the island has always been a watery place.⁸² The water from the tides that rose from the Gambia River and the Atlantic Ocean constantly threatened to engulf what little dry land there was on Banjoul. After building a settlement on Banjoul in 1816, the British constantly had to fight back tidal and rain waters to keep Bathurst dry. To achieve this, colonial officials oversaw the construction of drains, sluiceways, and embankments. This drainage infrastructure failed repeatedly. Floods, malfunctions, and broken infrastructure mobilized Bathurst’s African residents to make demands on the colonial state, ask for new political institutions, and offer critiques and proposals for improving Bathurst’s infrastructure.

In response to pressure from African residents over the 1849 flood, the Governor of the Gambia created a new institution in 1850 known as the Ratepayer’s Council. The Ratepayer’s Council was an institution in which ratepayers (property owners) could vote to use their rates (property taxes) to improve drainage and other infrastructure in Bathurst. This was the first institution in colonial Gambia in which Africans could vote. Facing mounting critiques from Liberated Africans and Wolof residents in particular, the Governor attempted to maintain the

⁸² Discuss the meaning of *Banjoul* in Mandinka. In this chapter, I use the name “Bathurst” to refer to the colonial town, and St. Mary’s Island, to refer to the island on which the town was built. I use the name *Banjoul* in relation to the island’s history pre-1816.

legitimacy of the colonial state through the establishment of this municipal governance institution. As this chapter will show, African residents were invested in demanding for better drainage and participation in Bathurst's urban affairs because they lived in the lowest-lying flood-prone areas of St. Mary's Island and often provided the labor for the construction of drainage infrastructure.

This chapter demonstrates that over the course of the early colonial period from 1816 to the 1850s drainage infrastructure became key to British social and environmental control over Bathurst. The persistent flooding of the fledgling town necessitated extensive water and land management. As a result, and as the population of the town grew, drainage infrastructure became a key site for both the construction of colonial power and African challenges to that power. Focusing on the community of Liberated Africans, this chapter argues that their establishment of a firm political position in The Gambia Colony was tied up with the establishment of firm, dry ground on which to stand in the form of stable plots of privately owned property. Water management was therefore central to the development of political institutions in mid-19th century Gambia, including the emergence of a form of participatory democracy in which some land-owning Africans could participate for the first time.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the watery origins of Bathurst, which colonial officials attempted to erase in early colonial descriptions and maps. Regular inundation was part of Banjoul's ecological cycle that the region's African residents long knew how to harness for their benefit, as described in the introduction. In pursuit of dry land on which to build a permanent settlement, colonial officials positioned the surrounding water as offensive, in turn

requiring defensive drainage infrastructure to protect that dry land. The second section shows how Liberated African people, newly arrived in The Gambia, labored to build Bathurst's first drains. Housed in those parts of Bathurst that experienced the worst flooding and reliant on effective drains to protect their residences, Liberated Africans became some of the keenest advocates for drainage in early colonial Gambia. The third section examines drainage during the rule of the Lieutenant Governors (1821-1843), and residents' critiques of this form of colonial government that centered drainage as a main subject of concern. By the 1840s, discussions of effective or ineffective drainage had become an important part of African political discourse and a way of making demands on the state. The final section elaborates on the emergence of the Rate Payers' Council after the 1849 flood, demonstrating the extent of Liberated African involvement in the formation of this political, municipal institution. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the abolition of the Rate Payers' council in 1855. In 1855 the Governor of the Gambia abolished the Rate Payers' council to restrict decision making over how collected rates would be spent to himself and the European dominated legislative council.

1.2 From *Banjoul* to Bathurst: the cartographic erasure of wetland *Banjoul*, 1816

Captain Alexander Grant founded Bathurst in 1816 under orders from the Governor of Sierra Leone, Charles MacCarthy.⁸³ Grant's founding of Bathurst is retold here with an attention to the mangrove landscape and aquatic environment in which the town was founded. The main objective of this section is describe the watery nature of the landscape that Grant encountered in

⁸³ NRS, CSO 1/1, Letter from Lt. Colonel Brereton to Earl Bathurst, May 18th, 1816.

the early 19th century, and to show how early colonial figures sought to present Banjoul as relatively dry and suitable for British settlement. Early colonial maps and descriptions erased and omitted information about the extent of the mangrove forests, the rains, and the tidal variation that together meant that Banjoul's sands were ever-shifting. Colonial Bathurst was built on an erasure of Banjoul, with consequences that the colonial government and African residents would grapple with for decades to come.

In 1816 MacCarthy told Grant to search for a place that “afforded a facility of preventing vessels for slaves from entering the river and would at the same time be advantageous as a commercial establishment.”⁸⁴ MacCarthy's order was a product of the reorganization of British territories at the end of the Napoleonic wars. The Paris Treaty of 1814 signed at the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars, reordered French and British power in West Africa.⁸⁵ The settlements of Goree and St. Louis that had been part of the British Senegambia Colony were given back to the French, while the British retained James Island, a small trading outpost on the Gambia River. In exchange for the British withdrawal from Senegal, the French recognized exclusive British rights to trade on the Gambia River. As part of this reorganization, the administrative center of the Gambian settlements was moved from Fort James on the tiny James Island in the middle of the Gambia River to Bathurst on the island of Banjoul at the mouth of the river. The primary

⁸⁴ NRS, CSO 1/1, Letter from Captain Grant to Governor Charles MacCarthy, June 24th, 1816.

⁸⁵ Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga: The Gambia's Liberated African Community in the Nineteenth Century*, (Gambia: Baobab Printers, 2006), 26-27.

argument British officials gave for these administrative changes was to stop slave trading on major water ways, but it was also to strengthen their commercial rights over the river.⁸⁶

In 1816 Grant would have had few options for deciding where to establish a settlement that met McCarthy's orders. The two coastal banks of the Gambia River were controlled by the kingdoms of Kombo and Niumi.⁸⁷ The north bank shore of the Niumi Kingdom was used for Niumi's control of the entry and exist of ships between the river and the Atlantic Ocean. Niumi officials stationed at it shore charged customs on every ship entering or leaving the river making the shore an important source of its revenue.⁸⁸ As the major source of revenue for the Niumi state, the British would not have been able to take this territory without major conflict. This did eventually occur, but not until 1831.⁸⁹ Meanwhile the southern Kombo shore thickly covered in mangroves was an important site for rice production.⁹⁰ Kombo elites carefully guarded these rice producing areas, typically allowing only their families and close clients to settle or claim land there.⁹¹ In this way, both shorelines at the mouth of the Gambia River were strategic territories that belonged to two powerful African states who were unlikely to cede any land to the British. Niumi and Kombo had both grown wealthy and militaristic through their long engagement in the

⁸⁶ NRS, CSO 1/1. Letter from Captain Grant to Governor Charles MacCarthy, June 24th, 1816.

⁸⁷ NRS, CSO 1/1. Letter from Captain Grant to Governor Charles MacCarthy, June 24th, 1816.

⁸⁸ Donald Wright, *The World and A Very Small Place In Africa: A History of Globalization in Niumi, The Gambia*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 98-99.

⁸⁹ P. M. Mbaeyi, The Barra-British War Of 1831: A Reconsideration of Its Origins And importance, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (June 1967), 617-631; The British would use Liberated Africans introduced into the colony in 1830/31 as soldiers in the war against Niumi. The 1831 war helped the British solidify their claims over Niumi's shore, which became known as the ceded mile.

⁹⁰ Assan Sarr, *Islam, Power, and Dependency in the Gambia River Basin: The Politics of Land Control, 1790-1940*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2016), 19.

⁹¹ Sarr, *Islam, Power and Dependency*, 35-36.

Atlantic Slave.⁹² For Grant to have attempted to settle either the Niumi or Kombo shoreline he would have also had to make a case for the British to go to war over territory to Governor McCarthy and the Colonial Office. Any such costly proposal would have failed at this time in large part because the British had just concluded an expensive war against Napoleon.

There was, however, the small, mangrove-covered island of Banjoul of little value to the Kombo King adjacent to the Kombo mainland. As Assan Sarr (2016) notes, islands in the Gambia River were typically not sites of settlement but instead were home to important shrines. They were places where indigenous Senegambian communities collected wood and sought refuge in times of need.⁹³ Islands in the river were also usually unstable, regularly flooding from June to October, and sometimes disappearing altogether. Perhaps the transitory and unstable nature of these islands was part of their association with powerful and dangerous spirits. Cognizant of the impossibility of the British settling on the shoreline of Niumi or Kombo without a war, Grant asked the Kombo King for Banjoul. In 1816, the king of Kombo ceded Banjoul to the British for the annual payment of 113 bars of iron or €25.6.8d.⁹⁴

In an 1816 letter to Governor MacCarthy, Grant described Banjoul:

Its situation being airy will I trust prove healthy...The soil though light and sandy has every appearance of being good, the Natives who inhabited the Island some years ago cultivated rice and cotton. Some vestiges of the cotton still remain, and I am assured by them that the ground is fertile and well calculated for raising all the ordinary productions of the country...Good water may be had in abundance by digging for it...There are on the island a few palm trees, a number of monkey head trees, some wild fig trees and

⁹² See Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁹³ Sarr, *Islam, Power, and Dependency*, 18.

⁹⁴ NRS, CSO 1/1. Letter Captain Grant to Governor Charles MacCarthy, June 24th, 1816.

several other kinds of hard wood well calculated for building small craft and other purposes.⁹⁵

In this letter, Grant argued for the viability of Banjoul as a place for British settlement. His description emphasized the healthiness of the island, specifically how windy or “airy” it was. At the time, this was an important indicator of health within the dominant miasma theory, which attributed fevers to inhalation of poisonous gases emanating from decomposing vegetable and animal matter, swamps, stagnant pools, cemeteries.⁹⁶ Turning to the potential productivity of the land, Grant mentioned that the soils might be suitable for growing the region’s regular produce, in addition to rice and cotton. Central to other colonial economies in British West Africa and British manufacturing, mention of cotton hinted at Banjoul’s potential economic viability. Meanwhile rice was an important trade good for British merchants in Goree, Senegal who Grant was hoping to attract to a new British settlement on Banjoul. For commerce, Grant also mentioned the large trees on Banjoul that could be used to build boats. Noticeably absent from Grant’s description of Banjoul was arguably the island’s most important feature: mangroves. In attempting to portray Banjoul as a good location for a commercial settlement, Grant intentionally omitted mention of mangroves and wetlands. At least in part this was because within the miasma theory mangroves were seen as particularly threatening to good health.

⁹⁵ NRS, CSO 1/1. Letter Captain Grant to Governor Charles MacCarthy, June 24th, 1816.

⁹⁶ Philip D. Curtin, *Death by Migration: Europe’s Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 60, 68-76; Kalala Ngalamulume, Keeping the City Totally Clean: Yellow Fever and the Politics of Prevention in Colonial Saint-Louis-du-Sénégal, 1850-1914, *The Journal of African History*, 2004, Vol. 45, No. 2 (2004), 189.

Banjoul sat at the very edge of a mangrove ecosystem that spanned about 70 km along the Gambia River.⁹⁷ This ecosystem is represented in Figure 4 below with a bold, black line starting in the far west at the island of Banjoul (labelled Bathurst on the map) and snaking east upriver. With waters flowing toward the Atlantic Ocean, the mangroves at Banjoul formed the end of the mangrove forests and the island itself was a transitional place of mangrove forests with marshy wetlands and Atlantic beaches. Banjoul owes its existence to the mangroves, as it was essentially a sandbank formed over centuries of silt accumulation made possible by the presence of mangroves. The mangrove's aerial roots that appear to suspend out of the water catch silt and alluvia as they move downstream. As described in the introduction in more detail, mangroves can sediment and create soil, making possible the formation of entire islands over centuries. Mangrove ecologists have found that mangroves rely on the undulating movement of the tides for their survival.⁹⁸ As such, mangrove ecosystems are tidal ecosystems that rely on changing water levels over the course of the day, months, and years. This also means that in mangrove ecosystems, land is often muddy, and partially or fully submerged at different times of the year, sometimes even moving, appearing, and disappearing altogether. On Banjoul, mangroves covered most of the western, eastern, and southern parts of the island, along the shore of the Gambia River. By contrast the northeastern portion of Banjoul was on higher elevation

⁹⁷ Judith Ann Carney, *The social history of Gambian rice production: An analysis of food security strategies* (Unpublished Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1986), 39-4.

⁹⁸Robert Twilley, *An Analysis of Mangrove Forests Along the Gambia River Estuary: Implications For the Management Of Estuarine Resources*, (Great Lakes and Marine Waters Center, The University of Michigan International Programs Report No.6., 1985),24.

with sandy beaches facing the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the island was (and remains) at or below sea-level.

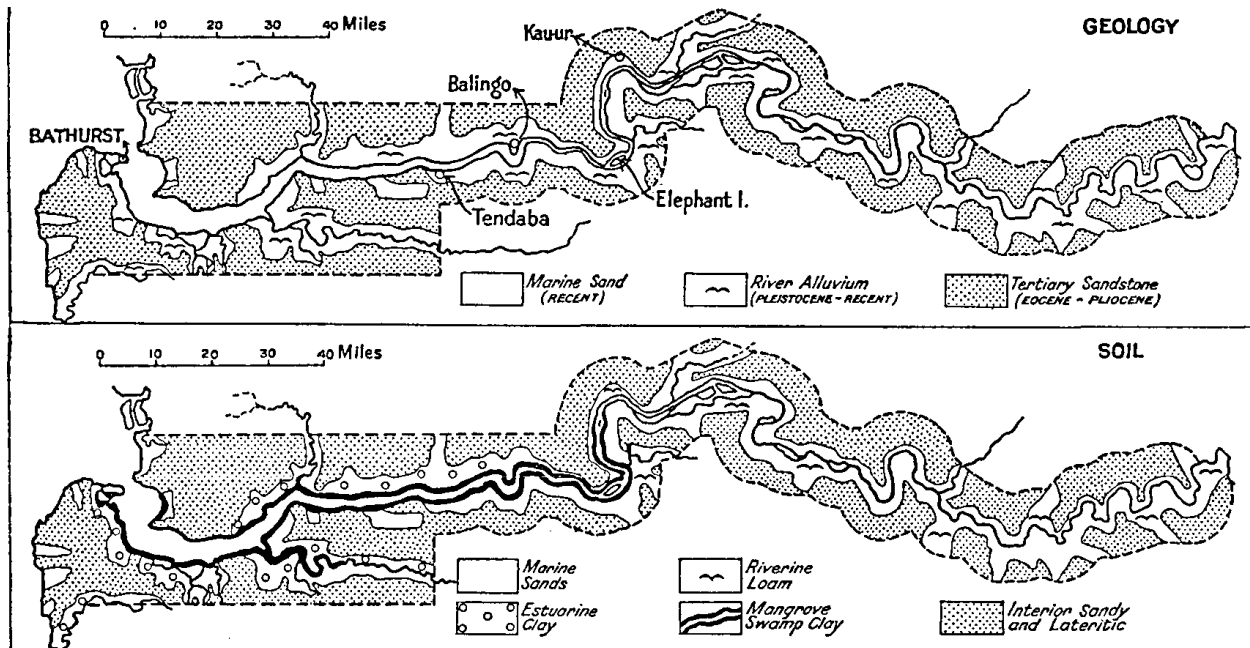


Figure 4 1949 map showing the Gambia River and the location of Bathurst (top image). The bold lines on the lower map illustrate the reach of the mangroves from Bathurst upriver, and the different geological and soil types. (Source: Reproduced from H. Reginald Jarrett, Major natural regions of the Gambia, *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 1949, 65:3, 140-144.)

There are other early descriptions of Banjoul—now St. Mary’s Island—that paint a different picture of the island’s landscape from Grant’s 1816 description. William Gray’s account provides a glimpse of what St. Mary’s might have looked like before Bathurst’s expansion. Gray, a major in the British army, served in West Africa from 1818 to 1821 and

visited the island of St. Mary's twice, once in 1818 and later in 1821.⁹⁹ Gray wrote the following about the island:

The surface of the island is a low plain, with a slight descent from the north and east sides towards the centre, where during the season of the rains, it is much inundated. Its north-east shore, on which stands a part of the town, is not more than twelve or fourteen feet above the level of high water mark... The edges of the creeks which intersect the island, and the low grounds about them, are thickly covered with mangroves... The palm tree, the monkey-bread, or baobab, and several other kinds of large trees, are thickly scattered all over the high grounds, and with an abundance of shrubs and ever-greens give the place a cool, refreshing, though wild appearance.¹⁰⁰

Gray's description provides a more accurate portrayal of early 19th century Banjoul's low-lying landscape, intersected as it was by meandering creeks and streams. During the rains and spring tides known indigenously as *wamees*, the creeks on Banjoul would swell, flooding most of the island's land. Gray also described the mangroves that thickly covered the lowlands. Further it was on the highest ground, the northeastern shore, that Bathurst was first established. Yet still, this was only 12 to 14 feet above sea level in Gray's estimation. Gray's account of Banjoul is significant because it contrasts with that of Captain Alexander Grant and describes the regular inundations of the island and the mangrove trees. These important details were omitted from Grant's 1816 description of the island. While the omission of knowledge about the island's tidal patterns could have been because Grant was not aware of them, the same cannot be argued

⁹⁹ Major William Gray, *Travels in Africa in the Years 1818, 19,20, And 21 From the River Gambia, Through Woolli, Bondoo, Galam, Kasson, Kaarta and Foolidoo to the River Niger*, (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1824). 43-46.

¹⁰⁰ Gray, *Travels in Africa*, Appendix, Article I, 365-366.

in relation to the presence of mangrove trees and the watery conditions of much of the island's land.

Grant's omissions were also memorialized in the first British map of St. Mary's produced in 1816 by Captain Campbell. In 1816, Grant worked with Captain Campbell of the Royal Staff Corps to survey Banjoul with the purpose of giving Governor MacCarthy, "an idea of the extent of the Island."¹⁰¹ The map they produced, Figure 5 below, is notable for what it shows and what it does not, especially considering the season in which the surveying work was completed.

¹⁰¹ NRS, CSO 1/1, a letter from Alexander Grant to Governor MacCarthy, 24th June 1816.

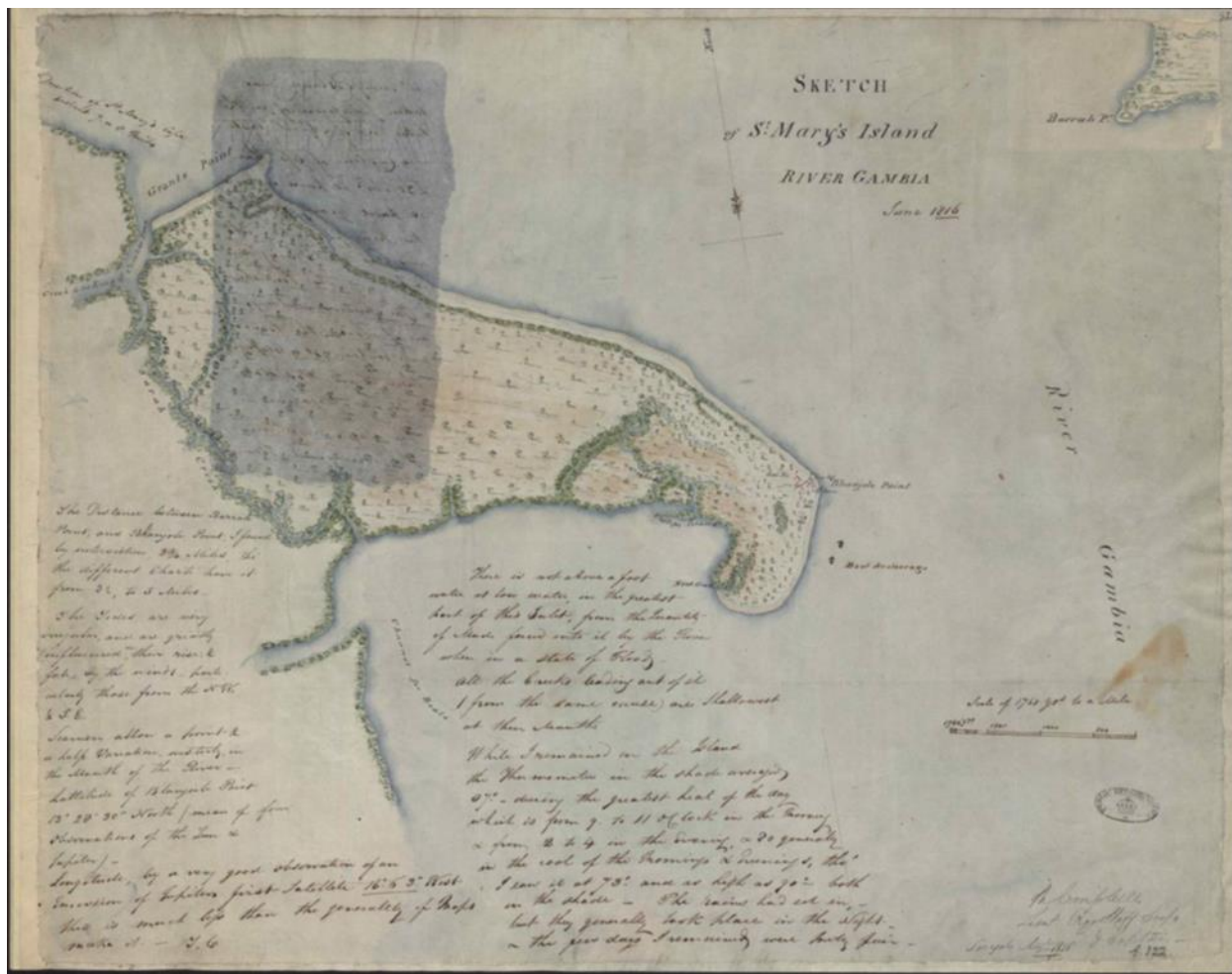


Figure 5 Sketch of the first survey of St. Mary's Island by Captain Campbell in 1816 (Source: Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Frontier Life: Borderlands, Settlement & Colonial Encounters)

It is likely that the work of surveying Banjoul was carried out during the rainy season of 1816. According to Grant, the signing of the treaty with the King of Kombo for the island of Banjoul took place on the 23 of April 1816.¹⁰² During this period, the dry season ended in April

¹⁰² NRS, CSO 1/1, a letter from Alexander Grant to Governor MacCarthy, 24th June 1816.

and the rains typically began in late May/early June.¹⁰³ Since the surveying work followed the treaty as the survey is dated “June 1816” in Figure 5, it was likely carried out during the middle of the rainy season. Nonetheless, Campbell’s map shows a significant amount of dry land on the island. The map shows large tracts of cleared, dry land sparsely dotted with trees. While the map does picture one significant creek reaching into the island from the southeastern (riverine) shore, it does not illustrate the many creeks and wetlands that covered most of the land. Campbell’s map also depicts the presence of mangroves, yet these are represented by neat, green rows of shrubs that trace a similarly neat and defined shoreline. Yet, much of the land in Campbell’s map would have been underwater as the rains progressed in May and June. Campbell’s map relates more to Grant’s written description of the island than to the likely reality they were witnessing and experiencing at the time of the map’s production.

Archival sources from this period are thin. A description of the rainy season from a decade later demonstrates not only how submerged the island became during the rains of 1826, but also serves as a better representation of what Banjoul may have looked like in the rainy season of 1816:

It appears that he considers St. Mary’s in the River Gambia from its peculiar locality to be more generative of Fever than either of the other British Settlements; being formed upon a small Island 15 or 20 miles up the River, and of this Island 2/3 rds of its surface is covered with thick black mud, studded with Mangroves and other shrubs-and this mud, composing, as it does, so great a portion of the surface of the Island, is in the rainy season overflowed, and thus becomes a depository, on the retirement of the waters, of an immense quantity of animal and vegetable matter, which when exposed to a state of decomposition to

¹⁰³ Carney, *The social history*, 25.

the rays of an almost vertical Sun, cannot fail to produce disease of the most fatal nature.¹⁰⁴

Dramatic as this description of St. Mary's was in its deployment of miasma theory, that most of the land on the island was wet, muddy, and submerged by overflowing waters in the rainy season more closely matches Gray's 1821 description of the island and the lived reality of many of Bathurst's early 19th century residents. The British navy medical commissioner who wrote this letter in 1826 was attempting to explain the large number deaths of European soldiers in 1825, an incident that will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.¹⁰⁵ As this description and the events of 1825 show, by the mid-1820s St. Mary's was considered a watery, unhealthy, and even deadly place.

By projecting an ideal of neat, dry land with a distinct shore dividing land from sea and river, Campbell's 1816 map accomplished political work. This map, together with Grant's descriptions, were used to make claims about where water should and should not be on the island of St. Mary's. They depicted dry land and water as distinct entities that were kept apart naturally. In so doing, these representations promoted an idea that there was an island, composed of dry land, suitable for British settlement. As conflicting accounts have shown, this idea was not a reality. For the idea to become a

¹⁰⁴ NRS, CSO 1/2, Extract from letter from Medical Commissioners (Naval) to R.W. Hays. Esq, 9 December, 1826.

¹⁰⁵ The medical commissioner believed that the wet soils and mangrove forests of Bathurst were the problem. According to the commissioner, and miasma theory, the thick soils trapped dead animal and vegetable matter, which when decomposing produced "miasma," or deadly gases; NRS, CSO 1/2, Extract from letter from Medical Commissioners (Naval) to R.W. Hays. Esq, 9 December, 1826.

reality, as this dissertation will argue over the following chapters, significant amounts of political and infrastructural work were continuously required over the course of the 19th and early 20th century in the form of drainage and land reclamation.

Cartography was an important colonial tool for fixing land in wetland environments such as that of Banjoul, where land and water were in constant flux. In British India, Bhattacharya (2018) demonstrates the centrality of colonial cartography in the creation of a stable—but fictive—property market in the swampy landscape of Calcutta. The cartographic register, as Bhattacharya reminds, fixes time and space and in so doing represses “the temporality of land in the tidal swamp.”¹⁰⁶ The cartographic and descriptive erasure of the wateriness and seasonality of Banjoul’s landscape are, of course, immaterial ideas. Nonetheless, they had significant political, legal, and material consequences over the long term. Colonial officials in The Gambia confronted with inundation and overflowing creeks used infrastructure and Liberated African labor to close the gap between the cartographical ideal on paper and the watery landscape that surrounded them.

¹⁰⁶ Debjani Battacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7; also see Christopher J. Gray, *Territoriality, Ethnicity, and Colonial Rule in Southern Gabon, 1850-1960*, (Unpublished Dissertation, Indiana University, 1995); As Gray notes the power of cartographical images lays in their ability to deny the existence of locally created space and social constructions.

1.3 The Early Settlement of Bathurst: slavery in a post-slavery society, 1816-1825

Although the idealistic description and map discussed above erased the wetland environment on paper, British colonial officials nonetheless had to confront the watery reality of St. Mary's to settle and build the town of Bathurst. Lord Bathurst, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, approved Grant's proposal to settle Banjoul. On receiving the approval, Grant moved the Royal African Corps under his command from James Island to Banjoul, which Grant renamed St. Mary Island.¹⁰⁷ Grant then ordered his troops to build a fort at the eastern end of St. Mary's directly facing the mouth of the Gambia River called Banyon Point (now known as Half Die).¹⁰⁸ From this position Grant and his troops could monitor, stop, and search slave ships entering the Gambia River. Grant's new settlement was, after all, meant to be anti-slavery settlement that aligned with the British Empire's new abolitionist posture. On the northeastern point of St. Mary's Island known as Bathurst Point, Grant began the construction of Bathurst by surveying and planning out lots.¹⁰⁹ This section begins by discussing the different groups of people who came to Bathurst after its founding in 1816. Then discusses the settlement patterns of Bathurst, wherein European merchants were given the highest, driest land. Early Bathurst, like the slave trading forts that preceded it, was mainly a military and merchant settlement. The difference between this new settlement and those, however, was the ecology and large free

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion on the origins of the name Banjoul see Matthew James Park, *Heart Of Banjoul: The History Of Banjoul, The Gambia, 1816 -1965*, (Unpublished Dissertation, Michigan State University, 2016), 4.

¹⁰⁸ NRS, CSO 1/1, Alexander Grant to Governor MacCarthy, 24th June 1816.

¹⁰⁹ NRS, CSO 1/1, Governor MacCarthy to Earl Bathurst, 20th July 1816.

African population that it would have to incorporate as it expanded to build a post-slavery society.

Following Grant's signing of the treaty with the King of Kombo on April 23, 1816, St. Mary's Island was only occupied by Grant and his men in the Royal African Corps. The first non-military residents of Bathurst were British and African merchants from Goree in the then British Senegambian colony. British merchants from Goree and St. Louis were important traders in gum arabic (acacia gum) from northern Senegal for textile printing in the European clothing industry.¹¹⁰ After the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1814 and the British withdrawal from Senegal, British commercial interests in the former British Senegambia Colony were threatened. Eager to ensure Bathurst's commercial success, Grant had invited these traders to leave Goree and set up shop on the island of St. Mary's.¹¹¹ British and African merchants from Goree accepted this invitation and moved their trading enterprises to the fledgling Bathurst.

¹¹⁰ James L. A. Webb Jr. The Trade in Gum Arabic: Prelude to French Conquest in Senegal. *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 26, No.2 (1986), 160-161.

¹¹¹ Florence Mahoney, *Government and Opinion In The Gambia 1816-1901*, (Unpublished Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1963), 32-35; According to Mahoney the British Merchants left Goree with "their Mulatto mistresses and wives (the Senoras) and children, with household property, domestic slaves, many of whom were skilled mechanics and artisans, together with large herds of livestock, set out to build a new trading community on the Island of St. Mary's."

When they arrived in Bathurst, these merchant elites were given the highest and driest land on the island furthest from the mangrove wetlands. Grant as the commandant and first military ruler of Colonial Gambia gave British merchants and a few other wealthy African merchants from Goree free grants of land provided “they built substantial homes.”¹¹² The merchants did build such substantial, expensive stone houses on the northeastern corner of St. Mary’s, visible in Figure 6 below, an 1820 plan for the town of Bathurst:



Figure 6 1820 Plan of Bathurst town’s gridded streets on the eastern corner of the island, and Oyster Creek in the northwestern corner of St. Mary’s Island created by F. Castille (Reproduced

¹¹² NRS, CSO 1/1, Letter from Lt. Colonel Brereton to Earl Bathurst, June 12th, 1816.

here from Jacques Souhillo (ed.), *Rives Coloniales: Architectures, De Saint-Louis A Douala*, France: Paris, Editions Parentheses/Editions de l'ORSTOM, 1993, 73)

This 1820 plan depicts more gridded streets than were in existence at the time but is nevertheless useful for understanding the general settlement pattern of early colonial Bathurst. The street closest to the shore labelled Gambia River that runs North-South was Wellington Street, which grew to become the center of Bathurst's commercial district and home to colonial Gambia's wealthiest merchants. Yet, these merchants did not come alone. They brought with them considerable numbers of enslaved and free Wolof people.

These Wolof people formed the first African community in colonial Bathurst. Some came as slaves of the Goree merchants, and others as sailors and "mechanics" who worked between Goree and Bathurst.¹¹³ Many of these Wolof people, slave and free, were highly skilled artisans who worked as carpenters building boats, blacksmiths making tools and nails, and navigating ships as pilots and sailors. In essence, they brought with them the skills required to establish and build a new settlement. Not only were they central to the founding of Bathurst, but their knowledge of the region and language abilities enabled European and African merchants to move, restart, and extend their businesses from Goree to Bathurst. There were other enslaved Wolof people who worked in Bathurst and remitted their earnings back to their "masters" in Goree. Others, whose status as free or enslaved is unclear, worked between St. Mary's, Goree,

¹¹³ At this time, "mechanic" stood for many professions, including masons and carpenters, among others; NRS, CSO 1/2 1824 Annual Report by George Rendall; See also Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 44-46.

and St. Louis. In an 1829 exchange, Alexander Findlay, the Commandant of The Gambia colony after Alexander Grant, described the community as follows:

A great portion of the inhabitants of St. Mary's in the Gambia are composed of slaves belonging to the French of Goree and Senegal, who resort to the British settlement for employment; and although many of them have resided on the settlement for years, they are strongly attached to their owner and regularly remit to them the produce of their labours, which draws a large sum of money out of the settlement annually.¹¹⁴

The presence of mobile, enslaved Wolof people with close ties to French Senegal caused concern among British officials in Gambia throughout the 1820s. On the one hand, slavery was illegal on St. Mary's. When questioned by a parliamentary commission about slavery in Bathurst, British officials responded that, while on the island, the slaves were completely free.¹¹⁵ Yet, the British colonial government continued to tolerate a system in which Wolof slaves would buy their freedom while in Bathurst.¹¹⁶ This community of Wolof people, who formed a large portion of the town's urban labor, continued to operate in a slavery grey zone until 1833 when slavery was abolished throughout the British empire.

A second reason colonial officials were concerned about this Wolof community was that they sent money back to their French "masters" in Senegal. This was a serious concern for

¹¹⁴PP, 1830, Sierra Leone, Return to an Address of the Honorable House of Commons, No. 41, Letter from R.W.Hay to Major Ricketts, (Enclosure No. 43), Letter from Alexander Findlay to R.W.Hay, May 1, 1829.

¹¹⁵ PP, 1836, Select Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements, Minutes of Evidence, D. Coates Esq, Rev. John Beccham and Rev. William Ellis, 6 June 1836, 493-494.

¹¹⁶ PP, 1836, Select Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements, Minutes of Evidence, D. Coates Esq, Rev. John Beccham and Rev. William Ellis, 6 June 1836, 493-494.

British officials because of the scarcity of currency in early colonial Bathurst.¹¹⁷ The outflow of any currency in The Gambia put more pressure on the limited supply. Finally, colonial officials were uneasy with the mobility of this Wolof community. Not only was a mobile community hard to control, but in early colonial Bathurst the British needed a large force to defend the colony in the event of an attack. The British could not be sure that this Wolof community, with loyalties across French, British, and African territories, would provide this security. This is one of the

¹¹⁷ PP, 1830, Sierra Leone, Return to an Address of the Honorable House of Commons, No. 41, Letter from R.W.Hay to Major Ricketts, (Enclosure No. 43), Letter from Alexander Findlay to R.W.Hay, May 1, 1829.

reasons the British continually sought to bring in more Liberated Africans from Sierra Leone into Bathurst, which will be discussed in more detail below and in Chapter Two.



Figure 7 Image by Sarah Bowdich from *Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo During the Autumn of 1823*. (Thomas Edward Bowdich, Mrs. R. Lee, *Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo: During the Autumn of 1823, While on His Third Voyage to Africa*, United Kingdom: G.B. Whittaker, 1825.)

The first drawing of Bathurst composed in 1823, Figure 7 above, provides some insight into the organization of early colonial Bathurst. While the first construction on St. Mary's had been the fort at Banyon Point, the high rates of mortality of the troops stationed there led Grant to consider other locations for the construction of Bathurst town. Already by 1821, as noted in Gray's description of Bathurst and Figure 6 above, some portions of the town were already constructed at Bathurst Point, the northeastern corner of St. Mary's. The settlement was built in this location to take advantage of the northeasterly winds, which were believed to remove the

dangerous miasma produced from the island's lowlands and wetlands. By 1823 when this drawing was produced, the barracks had also been moved to the new center of Bathurst town.

Sarah Bowdich drew this image of Bathurst sometime in early 1823. She had been in town with her husband, Thomas Edward Bowdich, most famous for his painting, "The first Day of the Yam Custom."¹¹⁸ Thomas Bowdich died in Bathurst of a fever, and Sarah stayed on to complete editing his work, *Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo During the Autumn of 1823*. Her drawing is the first image of life in early colonial Bathurst and depicts some of the main features of the settlement. Departing from the top-down colonialist gaze, Sarah's image was nonetheless drawn from a perspective of power: the veranda of the Government House located at the most northeastern point of Bathurst. As such, the view is facing south.

The drawing shows a small town, with all its constituent communities on enclosed and fortified lots. The barracks, recently moved to this new location from Banyon point, are in the foreground, surrounded by loopholes for defense. The main settlement is in the background behind the barracks, also enclosed by a wall. The merchant houses are shown to have been made of stone and are large, with some of them having two stories, the backs of which are surrounded by sails indicating merchant activity. Tucked inside the merchant enclosure is a group of tightly packed circular houses with thatched roofs, only visible upon close inspection. These would have been the homes of Wolof people, attached to the merchants as slaves, servants, and general urban

¹¹⁸ An almost eleven meters wide painting depicting Asantehene Osei Bonsu of Kumasi during a procession 1818.

labor for the town. On the left of the image is the prison which would be impossible to identify without Bowdich's description, as it is simpler and smaller than the barracks.¹¹⁹

The only people depicted in Sarah's image are a mulatto woman—most likely a merchant herself or a merchant's wife—carrying a parasol and her entourage of darker-skinned women who walk behind her as a mark of their servility to her.¹²⁰ At a short distance behind this group are two men in turbans, indications of their Muslimness, watching over grazing cattle. What is missing from Bowdich's idyllic image of Bathurst are the free African communities around the central town of Bathurst and, of course, the mangroves that would have been right outside the frame.

The third group of people to arrive in Bathurst soon after its founding were Liberated Africans from Sierra Leone. Liberated Africans were a category of person created through British antislavery policies. After the British banned its subjects from engaging in the Atlantic Slave Trade in 1807, British anti-slavery squadrons were stationed on the West African Coast to stop and search slave-ships.¹²¹ The British first referred to the Africans rescued from these slaves as Captured Negros. The term Captured Negro marked rescued Africans more as contraband or

¹¹⁹ Thomas Edward Bowdich, Mrs. R. Lee, *Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo: During the Autumn of 1823, While on His Third Voyage to Africa*, (United Kingdom: G.B. Whittaker, 1825), 204-205.

¹²⁰ See Mahoney, *Government and Opinion*, 23; According to Mahoney many of the British merchants who settled in Goree were married to property owning "Mulatto" women known as Senoras. These women moved with the British husbands and slaves to Bathurst; also see Mahoney, F, Notes on Mulattoes of The Gambia before the mid-nineteenth century, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 8 (1965): 120–29.

¹²¹ Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, "Introduction: "Liberated Africans" and Early International Courts of Humanitarian Effort" in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896*, edited by Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, (New York: Rochester University Press, 2020).

property seized by the British Crown than as free people with rights themselves. By 1812 British officials began referring to rescued Africans as Liberated Africans. The official use of Liberated Africans signaled an improvement in the position and rights of those rescued from slave ships vis-a-vis the Crown. Yet Liberated Africans were still not exactly “free” as they became tools of British imperial expansion in West Africa. Liberated Africans involuntarily provided the labor, commercial, and military needs of the British Empire. As Brown (2006) argues the success of the British abolitionist project became hinged and tied to justifications for British commercial and imperial gains in Africa.¹²²

In 1816, the Governor of Sierra Leone, Charles MacCarthy, began systematically settling Liberated Africans freed from slave ships intercepted by the British navy into Liberated African villages in Sierra Leone.¹²³ To be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, these villages were intended to resemble English parishes wherein a small agricultural community was organized around a church. In Sierra Leone, the church official was a government representative who managed all aspects of life in the community.¹²⁴ Colonial officials in Gambia sought to replicate this model on St. Mary’s Island following the announcement in April 1819 of Governor MacCarthy’s plans to send Liberated Africans to Bathurst.¹²⁵ These Liberated Africans were from the recently disbanded 3rd West Indian Regiment and the first group of soldiers arrived on

¹²² Brown, *Moral Capital*, 279-282.

¹²³ Padraic X Scanlan, “The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone”, 1815-1824, *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (2016), 1096-1098

¹²⁴ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery* 1095-1096; Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone*, 34-37.

¹²⁵ NRS, CSO 1/1, Letter from MacCarthy to Earl Bathurst, 22 April, 1819.

St. Mary's in 1820.¹²⁶ They had previously been between the Caribbean and British West Africa fighting imperial wars for the British Empire and putting down rebellions within British colonies. At the end of their service, these Liberated African were rewarded with land for their loyalty to the Crown.

Colonial officials gave these Liberated African soldiers free grants of land in the far west of St. Mary's Island known as Oyster Creek.¹²⁷ In the 1820 town plan above, Figure 6, Oyster Creek is the river depicted in the northwest corner of the island. These soldiers also received farming implements and a few months rations with the intention that they would establish a self-sustaining agricultural community there.¹²⁸ Figure 6 also shows, on the northern edge of the creek, a small box labelled "Farm," referring to this agricultural community. A church was also established here by the Wesleyan Church to manage this community, not depicted on the 1820 plan. Faintly visible in Figure 6 are footpaths leading from Oyster Creek all the way to Bathurst town. This community of disbanded soldiers did not stay in the Oyster Creek settlement for long. The soldiers quickly found that the soil on St. Mary's Island was inadequate for growing food and instead took the footpaths to Bathurst to look for work as day laborers for merchants and the colonial administration.¹²⁹ By the mid-1820s Oyster Creek had been abandoned for a part of Bathurst that came to be known—and is still known—as Soldier Town. The land that became Soldier Town, however, was originally marshland, an island within the larger island of St.

¹²⁶ NRS,CSO 1/1, Letter from MacCarthy to Earl Bathurst, 22 April, 1819.

¹²⁷ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 53.

¹²⁸ NRS, CSO 1/1, Letter from MacCarthy to Earl Bathurst, 22 April, 1819.

¹²⁹ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 54.

Mary's. The creation of dry land for the settlement of Soldier Town was the first drainage project in colonial Bathurst. The drainage project was carried out by a different group of Liberated Africans, "the King's Boys," who finished the large-scale public work before 1820.

Early Bathurst was a diverse community of Europeans and Africans. The first Africans to settled Bathurst occupied different states of freedom and servitude, with a large number living in slavery. Uncomfortable with slavery in its midst but dependent on slave labor, the colonial government attempted to remedy the situation by settling Liberated Africans in Bathurst. After the failure of the state-designed agricultural community in Oyster Creek, the colonial state had to drain some of the marshlands at the southwestern edge of Bathurst to incorporate these Liberated Africans into the town. This work was carried out by "The King's Boys," another group of Liberated Africans whose state of "freedom" hardly different from the many enslaved African people who lived in early colonial Bathurst.

1.4 The King's Boys, Drainage, and the Creation of Soldier Town, 1821-1825

Liberated Africans and their labor were central to colonial attempts to manage the water on St. Mary's Island. Although it is almost imperceptible, Figure 6 above depicts an important feature of early colonial Bathurst: the dike and sluice gate. After leaving the farm at Oyster Creek and following the footpath to Bathurst town, just south of the footpath and right outside Bathurst town is a straight line, circled in the image above. This was the sluice gate and dike that together formed the first colonial drainage infrastructure in Bathurst. This sluice gate and dike were built by "the King's boys," a group of Liberated Africans who were brought to Bathurst

under the administration of the Settlement Courts. Although there is little archival material that describes the process of construction of Bathurst's first drainage infrastructure which included a sluice gate, dike, drains, and canals, it is an important chapter in Bathurst's history that made possible the construction of Soldier Town.

The Settlement Court which existed from 1818-1821 was the first mixed civilian and military government of colonial Gambia. The Settlement Court was composed of the Commandant of the military and a council of five prominent British merchants. Governor MacCarthy had commissioned the Settlement Court in 1818 and gave it the responsibility for general administration of the colony, writing laws, and conducting trials.¹³⁰ The commandant in this early period was Alexander Grant and the merchants were British merchants from Goree. A huge task of this early government was settling a labor force within Bathurst. Given that most of the dry land was already taken up by the merchants themselves, the only way to open space for settlement was through drainage. To undertake the early drainage projects the Settlement Court asked Sierra Leone to supply the Gambia with Liberated African labor.

"The King's Boys" were mainly young men whose labor the Settlement Court used for government infrastructure projects and public works.¹³¹ After Liberated Africans were rescued from slave ships and then processed in Sierra Leone, British officials in Sierra Leone "disposed" of them by apprenticing some of them to the colonial elite, enlisting some in the imperial

¹³⁰ PP, 1827, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, Second Part, I. Dependencies in the Gambia, 14-15.

¹³¹ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 55.

military, settling others in “Liberated African villages” in Sierra Leone, and signing up the rest as labor for the state, including in The Gambia.¹³² Once in The Gambia, “the King’s Boys” were fed and housed in the government yard.

The early colonial drainage infrastructure built by the King’s Boys sought to prevent water from overflowing creeks from entering Bathurst. After building the sluice gate, dike, and other buildings in Bathurst town, many of the King’s Boys were returned to Sierra Leone in 1825. This is described in the 1827 Rowan report as follows:

A number of liberated Africans had formerly been sent from Sierra Leone and employed upon the buildings then in progress at St. Mary’s. They were again removed to the former place by General Turner, in 1825; but some of them afterwards returned to the Gambia, and form part of the number now residing there.¹³³

General Turner assumed the Governorship of Sierra Leone and British West Africa in 1824. It is not entirely clear why Turner removed the King’s Boys, but Mahoney (2006) speculates that it was due to crime.¹³⁴ According to Mahoney, many of the King’s Boys sent to The Gambia from Sierra Leone had been convicted of offences in Sierra Leone and “had been removed to the Gambia on commuted sentences.”¹³⁵ Mahoney assumes that after the King’s Boys were done with their public works, they engaged in criminal activities which made them a burden to early Bathurst society. It is also possible that laboring in The Gambia was a sentence

¹³² Richard Anderson, ‘The Diaspora of Sierra Leone’s Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and “Liberation” at Freetown, 1808-1863, *African Economic History*, Vol.41 (2012), 112-113.

¹³³ PP, 1827, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, Second Part, I. Dependencies in the Gambia, 8.

¹³⁴ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 55.

¹³⁵ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 55.

for their “criminal” activities in Sierra Leone. In either case, it seems unlikely that the King’s Boys were such a burden to Bathurst society, otherwise colonial administrators in The Gambia would have been unlikely to let them back into the colony.

The most likely reason for the King’s Boys’ removal from The Gambia was the demand for labor in Sierra Leone. According to Fyfe (1962), Turner stopped all public works when he became Governor and directed the entire labor force of the colony towards building barracks.¹³⁶ Turner followed a more militaristic and expansionist approach towards stopping the slave trade, which involved military interventions, invasions, and annexation of slave trading regions.¹³⁷ Turner thus militarized colonial society in Sierra Leone and the labor of the Kings Boy’s was necessary for building military structures. The increasingly violent atmosphere under Turner may also explain why many of the King’s Boys decided to resettle in Bathurst. The important point for the purposes of this study is that among the early settlers in Bathurst were Liberated Africans who had built the drains, sluice gate, and dike that kept Bathurst drier than it had previously been. Hence, in this early period of Bathurst’s history a relationship was formed between Liberated African labor, drainage, and the demand for land which would continue for decades to come.

The early drainage works of the King’s Boys allowed for the settlement of Soldier Town by the disbanded Liberated African soldiers discussed above. To understand this point it is necessary to compare the 1820 map (Figure 6) with the 1816 map (Figure 5). The 1820 map is

¹³⁶ Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone*, (England, Gregg Revivals 1993), 154.

¹³⁷ Fyfe, *A History*, 157-159.

significantly different from the map produced in 1816. The most prominent difference is the amount of vegetation depicted in the 1820 map, absent from the 1816 map. Whereas the 1816 map shows St. Mary's Island to be a cleared space with a few creeks and neat lines of mangroves bordering the shoreline, the 1820 map shows the mangroves to have been dispersed throughout the landscape. This map also labels certain parts of the island as "Marsh," marking those areas as low-lying wetlands, and shows numerous creeks that crosscut the entire island. These creeks would overflow at high tide, inundating large parts of St. Mary's islands that turned what the British imagined to be "one island" into a series of miniature islands. These came to be known by the British as "the birds."

That part of St. Mary's that became Soldier Town had been a small island prior to the work of the King's Boys. A later source, itself composed based upon the review of records from the early 19th century, describes this situation in greater detail:

I see by the records of the colony, that originally Soldier Town was an Island, a creek running at high tide right through from Half Die to the Poutine marsh, forming Saint Mary's into two islands, and it was seriously in contemplation at one time to form a canal, admitting boats laden with produce...the early settlers observing the set of the tides, found it the best plan when they relinquished their proposed canal to follow the natural highway, only converting the creek into a drain, by importing earth from the main land, to wall up the creek, confining the water to a narrow deep space, instead of allowing it gently to ebb over a large space.¹³⁸

Another contemporary observer described the relation of Soldier Town to the center of Bathurst in 1827 as follows:

¹³⁸ Kew, CO 879/2, Dispatches and Reports in 1864, on the Finances of the Settlements on the Coast of West Africa No. 3, Enclosure 3. Report by Governor D'Arcy.

The town is regularly laid out, and the streets wide; but much inconvenience is experienced from the glare reflected by the sand, which is so loose that the foot sinks in it nearly to the ankle. This is particularly felt in what is called Wellington-street; a row, containing nearly all the stone houses, and immediately close to the water. This is the most elevated situation, as the land sinks gradually to the rear, where the native inhabitants have fixed their residence.¹³⁹

These accounts offer important insights into the settlement patterns of early colonial Bathurst. For one, while there is little fine-grained documentary evidence about the work that went into the creation of this first drainage infrastructure, we learn that prior to the construction of the sluice gate and dike by the King's Boys that the land at Soldier Town had been an island formed by a creek. That this land was described as "sinking" even after the construction of the drainage infrastructure further points to the low elevation of that part of town where African communities lived, prone to flooding. That Liberated Africans built this part of town and became the primary residents of it help to explain why Liberated Africans in Soldier Town became so sensitive to issues of drainage in Bathurst and over the decades continuously mobilized around issues of drainage and land reclamation. They understood that the continued dryness of their neighborhood was reliant on the proper functioning and maintenance of drainage infrastructure that could keep the waters of the Gambia River at bay.

Drainage was the means through which colonial officials in Bathurst confronted the watery reality of St. Mary's Island, which colonial instruments such as the 1816 map had originally sought to obfuscate for strategic purposes. The failure of projects such as the farming

¹³⁹ PP, 1827, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, Second Part, I. Dependencies in the Gambia, 7.

settlement for Liberated Africans at Oyster Creek and the movement of Liberated Africans into Bathurst town led colonial officials to turn to the construction of drainage infrastructure as a means to open up more space for people to live near the higher and drier land that formed the commercial center of the colony. Liberated Africans were the primary builders of the early drainage infrastructure, and the primary inhabitants of the new, drained land. In sum, Liberated African labor, settlement, and politics in Bathurst were already organized around issues of drainage from the early 19th century.

Dike and sluice gate notwithstanding, flooding continued to be a challenging reality for most of Bathurst's residents, especially its African residents. During the era of the Lieutenant Governors that followed the Settlement Court, each subsequent Lieutenant Governor proposed a new drainage project. These projects sometimes improved the work of their predecessors, and at other times overhauled old systems with disastrous effects. These drainage failures would form the basis for Liberated African arguments for new forms of governance at the level of the municipality and the colony.

1.5 Systematic drainage failure and the rule of the Lieutenant Governors, 1821-1843

In 1821 the Colonial Office abolished the Settlement Court, which had governed Bathurst since 1818 and oversaw the construction of the town's first drainage infrastructure.¹⁴⁰ From 1821 The Gambia colony was governed directly by the Governor and Legislative Council in Sierra

¹⁴⁰ PP, 1827, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, Second Part, I. Dependencies in the Gambia, 14-15.

Leone. From 1829 onwards, the Colonial Office appointed Lieutenant Governors for The Gambia who, while under the command of the Governor of Sierra Leone, had some ability to direct and manage affairs in The Gambia.¹⁴¹ In other words, from 1821, The Gambia colony at Bathurst became a dependency of Sierra Leone.

As a dependency of Sierra Leone, The Gambia did not have legislative independence. This meant that laws enacted in The Gambia had to be passed in Sierra Leone.¹⁴² Once the Lieutenant Governors were appointed to The Gambia from 1829, they could pass laws, proclamations, and regulations that met the specific circumstances of The Gambia. Yet, any law or proclamation when questioned was only upheld with the approval of the Governor of Sierra Leone.¹⁴³ In an era when government communications and mail circulated by sail, the Lieutenant Governors could introduce laws in The Gambia that would eventually be rejected by Sierra Leone a few weeks or months later. In short, The Gambia colony's dependence on Sierra Leone meant legislative chaos.

With regards to drainage, on their appointment Lieutenant became the sole executives responsible for overseeing, managing, expanding, and keeping up drainage in Bathurst. This

¹⁴¹ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report.

¹⁴² PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty's Settlements in the River Gambia.

¹⁴³ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty's Settlements in the River Gambia.

period, which lasted until 1843, was also the most chaotic period in the history of Gambia's drainage and land reclamation. Each subsequent Lieutenant Governor—seven in total—attempted to devise a new system of drainage under their tenure that would be better than that of their predecessor. Over the course of this approximately twenty-year period, drainage emerged as an important issue around which residents would critique colonial governance and make political claims. To illustrate this point, this section analyzes an 1842 petition from elite African and European residents of Bathurst that demanded independence from Sierra Leone.¹⁴⁴ The petitioners used the poor state of drainage in Bathurst—poor aquatic management—to critique the state of colonial governance under the Lieutenant Governors and to make specific demands. These demands ranged from having a legislative council and a chief magistrate to having a governor who could independently certify title deeds on land without a signature from Sierra Leone (see Chapter Three for more on this last point).

While the issues and demands discussed in the petition were broad, the petition shows the emergence of a political tactic in which petitioner's assessment of drainage and its effectiveness was used to critique the entire governance institution and political regime. The 1842 petitions used the state of infrastructure as a mode of critique. As Antina Von Schnitzler (2016) notes, within neoliberal and humanitarian projects in which the belief of collective knowledge and radical social transformation are given up as answers to political problems i.e., structural

¹⁴⁴ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty's Settlements in the River Gambia.

problems. And instead problems are believed to be resolvable by small scale and temporary techno-political fixes, the infrastructure produced to resolve problems will itself become a political terrain.¹⁴⁵ In other words, with little space in the public sphere to discuss larger possibilities for political change and how those changes are necessary to resolve existing problems, the oppressed launch targeted attacks on the infrastructure they come into contact with the most often. These attacks, then, are indexical of attempts to critique and change larger, seemingly intractable systems.¹⁴⁶

The 1826 parliamentary report cited drainage as the main solution to Bathurst's problem. It is true that materially, drainage was a real problem for Liberated Africans. Yet, the larger structural problem was that the British Empire was trying to profit from its own abolition of the slave trade, even if this meant creating a settlement with Liberated African labor on a flood-prone island.¹⁴⁷ This situation enabled a few British merchants who had financially survived the abolition of the slave trade to establish a new market and site of capitalist accumulation with Liberated African labor. This capitalist accumulation in The Gambia was made even more profitable through the lowering of the colony's administrative cost, which is what the legislative and judicial centralization in Sierra Leone amounted to.¹⁴⁸ The colonial administration by

¹⁴⁵ Anita Von Schinitzler, *Democracy's Infrastructure: Techno-Politics & Protest after Apartheid*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 10-11.

¹⁴⁶ Schnitzler, *Democracy's Infrastructure*, 4.

¹⁴⁷ See Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2006); For a discussion on British imperialism in West African and its relationship to abolition and capitalism.

¹⁴⁸ PP, 1827, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, Second Part, I. Dependencies in the Gambia,

making little space in public discourse for questioning the settlement of Liberated Africans on a flood prone island, enabled the centering of political discourse on the infrastructure that was meant to prevent flooding.

In 1842, the Secretary of State for the Colonies in England received a petition from Bathurst's African and European elites who were fed up with the constant changing of Lieutenant Governors and their projects. The petitioners included all the main British merchants in Bathurst such as Thomas Chown and Thomas Brown, as well as important Liberated African and Wolof leaders including Daniel Prophet, John Cupidon, and Jacque Macumba. Prophet was a Liberated African merchant, while Cupidon and Macumba were lay preachers in the Wesleyan Church, the primary missionary institution in early colonial Gambia.¹⁴⁹ Much of the 1842 petition described the failures of the Lieutenant Governors in properly governing the colony. The petitioners described the problem of having so many different Lieutenant Governors as follows:

Your petitioners have also to complain of the misapplication of colonial revenue, as before intimated, each succeeding governor, regardless of necessary improvements contemplated by his predecessors, and actually in progress, has expended the revenue of the colony on imaginary improvements and for personal gratification.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 46.

¹⁵⁰ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty's Settlements in the River Gambia.

The “imaginary improvements” mentioned in this excerpt refer to the various drainage projects. The petitioners sought to impress upon the Secretary of State for the Colonies that there was a lack of oversight of the Lieutenant Governors, who were able to spend funds and carry out activities with little say from members of the Bathurst community. They pointed to the vanity of the Lieutenant Governors, suggesting that these infrastructural projects were not carried out with the good of the town in mind, but for their own “gratification.” The major demand of the petitioners was that the Colonial Office give The Gambia colony its own legislative council and executive council in addition to its own Governor. If The Gambia had its own legislative and executive councils, any governor would at least be required to win the votes of his council to undertake a project.

This stands in contrast to, for example, the Lieutenant Governorship of Major William Mackie (1838-1839). Mackie’s drainage project was, according to the petitioners, a disaster.

They wrote:

Draining the island of St. Mary’s, an object of paramount importance as affecting the health of the inhabitants, had been proceeded with since the establishment of the settlement, and is partly effected at the public expense; but so erroneous were the views taken of it by the late Lieutenant-governor Mackie, that soon after his arrival, in 1839, he ordered the sluiceways, by which the water is drawn off behind the town, to be taken up and the embankment filled in, and then went to considerable expense in attempting to drain the island in front of the town; but so complete was the failure that, after allowing the town to remain three days in a state of actual inundation, he had to order the embankment to be cut through to admit of the water running off; your petitioners most sincerely regret that his own life was the forfeit to this injudicious policy.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty’s Settlements in the River Gambia.

Newly arrived in The Gambia, in 1838 Mackie sought to completely change the direction of drainage which had been in place from the previous administrations. He attempted to drain the water towards the ocean only, as opposed to the Gambia River. As the petitioners describe, Mackie ordered the sluiceways close to the mangrove forests to be blocked—the infrastructure built by the King’s boys. After this, Mackie attempted to direct the water towards the ocean using a series of newly constructed drains built by Liberated Africans who had been resettled in The Gambia from Sierra Leone during the early to mid-1830s. This failed project flooded Bathurst for three days, leading to an outbreak of fever which killed Lieutenant Governor Mackie.¹⁵² Mackie’s successor Lieutenant Governor Huntly arrived in The Gambia in 1840 and reversed much of the drainage work that Mackie had undertaken.

The 1842 petitioners used the story of Mackie because it highlighted all their major points and illustrated the serious consequences of poor drainage for colonial governance. It also helped to emphasize the importance of local and accumulated knowledge about the terrain of Bathurst and how drains needed to flow to keep the town dry. New Lieutenant Governors arriving every couple of years with little knowledge or oversight were bound to continue making the same costly mistakes. If The Gambia gained independence from Sierra Leone, and had its own legislative and executive councils, the petitioners believed that such grave disasters could be prevented. The system of Lieutenant Governors and legislative dependence on Sierra Leone, the

¹⁵² PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty’s Settlements in the River Gambia.

petitioners argued, “ have been the cause of great anxiety and grievance to the community at large; and the too frequent changes of administration have always been attended with changes in those regulations, there being nothing to control the will or caprice of the officer administering the government”¹⁵³ Finally, the petitioners sought to emphasize the absurdity of wasting money on such projects. Arguing for their enfranchisement, Bathurst residents hoped that they would be able to gain more control over the expenditure of money in the colony. ¹⁵⁴

The 1842 petitioners did not only concentrate on failed drainage projects to criticize the rule of Lieutenant Governors, but they also talked about successful drainage projects as examples of good governance. The petitioners wrote that under the Settlement Court, “Clearing and draining the island of St. Mary’s was not merely commenced but carried to a considerable extent.”¹⁵⁵ Under the Settlement Court, The Gambia colony was an independent colony under merchant rule. For the petitioners, many of whom were merchants themselves, this was a more desirable form of government. In pointing to the achievements of the Settlement Court in

¹⁵³ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty’s Settlements in the River Gambia.

¹⁵⁴ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty’s Settlements in the River Gambia.

¹⁵⁵ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia, T.L. Ingram to Lord Stanley, April 2 1842, The memorial and Petition of the undersigned British Subjects, Inhabitants of Her Majesty’s Settlements in the River Gambia.

successfully draining Bathurst, the petitioners were attempting to argue to the Secretary of State that this was a better form of government.

In 1843, The Gambia Colony became independent of Sierra Leone, and many of the British merchants who signed on to the 1842 petition became members of the newly created legislative and executive councils.¹⁵⁶ According to Arnold Hughes and David Perfect (2006), an 1842 report on the state of British West African Colonies written by Dr. Robert Madden and commissioned by the parliament was the main driver for independence.¹⁵⁷ The 1842 petition was compiled by Madden as part of his report and evidence for why the Gambia Colony should be made independent from Sierra Leone.¹⁵⁸ In that way the critique and voice of the petitioners both European and African were consequential for Gambian independence from Sierra Leone.

For a cross-section of the African and European elite in Bathurst in the 1840s, good governance had come to be defined as maintaining Bathurst's drains and keeping the town as dry as possible. Bathurst residents did not write about ineffective drainage as merely a form of political rhetoric or a euphemism. When the drainage infrastructure in Bathurst failed, it led to the outbreak of diseases, fevers, and deaths—and not just of Lieutenant Governors. Flooding had further material consequences for the buildings and storehouses in town, all of which amounted to costly repairs and reconstructions. For Liberated Africans, a good government in colonial Bathurst was one that drained well. This relationship between governance and drainage

¹⁵⁶ Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of the Gambia*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press 2006), 60.

¹⁵⁷ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 58-59.

¹⁵⁸ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.13, Gambia.

continued into the 1850s as Liberated Africans organized for their progressive enfranchisement in The Gambia colony.

1.6 The flood of 1849 and the emergence of municipal government, 1843-1855

By the time of the composition of the 1842 petition, the number of Liberated Africans in colonial Gambia had exploded and, as a group, they had become more politically organized. Many of the leaders of the Liberated African community, which included merchants as well as preachers, were also the original settlers of Soldier Town described earlier in the Chapter.¹⁵⁹ Soldier Town was the first Liberated African neighborhood in Bathurst and continued to be the center of Liberated African social and political life through the 19th century. The Liberated African leaders in Soldier Town were also the heads of Friendly Societies—organizations that had a range of functions including providing money for the burial of its members, mutual aid, and labor organizing.¹⁶⁰ As a result, when Bathurst was again hit by a devastating flood in 1849, Liberated African leaders were in a strong position to demand that the Governor of The Gambia be removed due to his inability to effectively drain the town. The Governor responded to these demands by forming the Ratepayer's Council, which was a body of property owners who had the power to use the revenue generated from property taxes on drainage and other infrastructural improves in Bathurst. As such, the Ratepayer's Council was the first municipal government in Bathurst. The case of the 1849 flood and its aftermath point to the centrality of drainage and

¹⁵⁹Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 83-85.

¹⁶⁰ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 83.

aquatic management in the evolution of both Gambian municipal politics *and* Liberated African politics.

Beginning in the 1830s, there was a large influx of liberated Africans into The Gambia colony from Sierra Leone.¹⁶¹ Colonial officials in The Gambia wanted a more permanent labor force in the colony, and preferred Liberated Africans over itinerant Wolof slaves whose loyalties to the Crown could not be guaranteed due to their ties to the French. The arrival of this community in Bathurst and the colonial plans for their settlement will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. What is important here is the formation of the Liberated African Department in 1831 in The Gambia in response to the new arrivals.¹⁶² This government department was tasked with the management of the Liberated African community in Bathurst, including their housing, labor, and rations. However, in 1843 this department was closed by the Imperial Parliament in response to the same report by Dr. Maddan which also made a case for Gambian independence from Sierra Leone. The closure of the Liberated African Department in The Gambia increased the precarity of Liberated Africans in urban Bathurst. As has already been discussed, much of the land in Bathurst was unsuitable to agriculture and large numbers of Liberated Africans relied on the rations provided by this department. In response to this insecurity, Liberated Africans organized themselves into mutual aid societies known then—and now—as Friendly Societies.

¹⁶¹ Richard Anderson, *The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans*, 113.

¹⁶² Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 59.

Friendly Societies began as mutual aid and especially burial societies.¹⁶³ As the heads of the Friendly Societies would explain to the Secretary of State in 1865, when the colonial government tried to regulate Friendly Societies, seeing them as subversive:

That your memorialist, being liberated Africans for some years, and served as apprentices in this colony, and after the expiration of their apprenticeship have managed to provide themselves accommodation, but finding they are composed of different tribes, who are more or less interested in the welfare of those to whose tribe they belong, have raised up societies among themselves for the sake of providing for the necessary wants in time of sickness, deaths, childbirths, marriage of a member or member's family, and thereby relieving the Government from the expense incurred occasionally for burying their dead, to the disgrace of that tribe to which they belong.¹⁶⁴

When Liberated Africans arrived in The Gambia, they were either made apprentices to European merchants and African artisans or settled in Liberated African villages. In these arrangements they were either fed by their European and in some cases African “masters,” or the Liberated African Department.¹⁶⁵ The end of apprenticeship for some—which typically occurred at 18 years of age- and the closure of the Liberated African Department meant that many had little access to food, accommodation, or even guaranteed work. In this state of abandonment, Liberated Africans began organizing along communal lines (which start to resemble ethnic lines) around issues of autonomy, security of livelihood, and dignity in death. Friendly Societies had to respond to the Secretary of State in 1865 because of their labor activism. While societies were

¹⁶³ David Perfect, *Organized Labour and Politics in the Gambia: 1920-1984*, (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Birmingham 1987), 27-28.

¹⁶⁴ Copy of Memorial of Natives at the Gambia to H.M's Government Against an Ordinance for the Regulation of Friendly Societies or Clubs, *African Times*, London, Thursday, November 23, 1865.

¹⁶⁵ Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 60.

initially organized around ethnicity, they quickly became important institutions for organizing labor strikes and as institutions through which Liberated Africans could join and make demands on the colonial state in the 1840s.

In fact, many of the petitioners who signed the 1842 petition also signed the 1849 petition, which helps to link the earlier petitioners to Soldier Town. Daniel Prophet, Charles Pignard, Harry Finden, among others, appear on both petitions. According to Mahoney (2006), these three Liberated Africans were the heads of the Egba, Aku and Ibo Societies respectively.¹⁶⁶ They also all owned “grog shops” on Fitzgerald, Grant and Kent Streets, the three major streets in Soldier Town. These shops sold wine and spirits stores that were supplied, in turn, by the wealthier British and French merchants. It was through these shops that many of the Liberated African leaders accumulated wealth. This is one of the reasons the petitioners saw themselves as middle class, writing “...we are here precisely what the middle classes in England, we hope your Lordship will not look on our grievances as either light or frivolous.”¹⁶⁷ The petitioners were also sure to point out their class in anticipation of MacDonnell’s response, a figure they claimed to be racist and generally oppressive “against some of ourselves and others of our race and colour.”¹⁶⁸ At this juncture it is important to note the race consciousness and racial identification of Liberated Africans. In the 1849 petition the petitioners referred to themselves as the “Principle Black Inhabitants.” These types of emergent racial identifications marked

¹⁶⁶ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 85.

¹⁶⁷ Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849.

¹⁶⁸ Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849.

Liberated Africans as a Black Diaspora—and making claims to Black Diaspora—like others in the Atlantic World in this same era.¹⁶⁹ Yet Liberated Africans were a Black Diaspora whose Blackness was not hinged on the erasure of their ethnic identity as Gomez (1998) argues for the North American context.¹⁷⁰ Thus Blackness was a means through which Liberated African organized on a large scale while also maintaining their ethnic and labor base organizational structures in their Friendly Societies.

When Bathurst flooded in 1849 under the Governorship of Richard Graves MacDonnell (1847-1852), Friendly societies sprang into action. The flood submerged parts of Bathurst including Soldier Town, already in a low-lying part of town as described above, and other parts of Bathurst. In response, Liberated Africans and other African elites organized themselves into the “Committee of Principal Black Inhabitants,” and composed a petition with 139 signatures that they sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey.¹⁷¹ The petitioners demanded that Governor MacDonnell be removed from office:

We consider the inundation of this colony by the sea on the 17th, 18th, 19th & 20th of the present month of August solely attributable to a want of proper caution and attention in the part of Governor MacDonnell to the sluice gate and its embankments, on the due efficiency of which the safety of the colony entirely depends for Drainage, as well as for protection against inundation from the spring tides, which at full and new moon rise considerably above the level of many positions of the town of Bathurst.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993) 15-17.

¹⁷⁰ Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998)

¹⁷¹ Hughes and Perfect. *A Political History*, 60-61.

¹⁷² Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849.

At the height of the rainy season in August, the main and oldest embankment in Bathurst burst. Made of sand and mud, this embankment had to be regularly repaired, which the petitioners claimed MacDonnell did not do. Petitioners described having to, “place young children on tables to keep them from drowning.”¹⁷³ Many lost their home gardens which they depended on to supplement the imported food that they bought at high prices from European merchants or Africans from the mainland. They also lost their furniture and other possessions. For a community that was largely living in debt and paid low wages, the flood was a major catastrophe.¹⁷⁴ The petitioners wrote:

The destruction of property belonging to persons of the middle and lower classes, who are the only sufferers, has been very great. All those possessed of gardens—few of us are without them have had them—completely destroyed by the salt water. Living as we do in cottages and huts whose floors are but slightly raised above the surface of the streets, it is not surprising that everything which we could not promptly remove should be either injured or entirely spoiled. Numbers of persons have been compelled to quit their houses, and seek refuge with their less unfortunate neighbours, while many others have found it difficult to obtain a temporary shelter.¹⁷⁵

In a state of devastation, physically and likely emotionally, the petitioners demanded that MacDonnell be removed from his position as Governor. They also demanded that they be exempt from paying the 4% tax on households which MacDonnell had imposed, “towards the expense incurred in draining the town.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849

¹⁷⁴ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 70-72.

¹⁷⁵ Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849.

¹⁷⁶ PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

When MacDonnell became Governor of The Gambia in 1847, he attempted to put the financial burden of drainage on the population of Bathurst, by requiring everyone to contribute 4% of the value of their houses towards drainage. Prior to MacDonnell introducing the 4% tax, drainage was paid for through parliamentary grants, the colony's own treasure and voluntary donations from residents in Bathurst.¹⁷⁷ MacDonnell's new taxation on property came into effect through the Rates Ordinance of 1848.¹⁷⁸ The petitioners saw the 4% tax as especially oppressive considering the flooding of 1849 which was taken as evidence that their monies were not well spent.

The petitioner's grievances were not limited to drainage, much like the 1842 petition. The petitioners complained about MacDonnell's large expenditure of public funds on the Government House in which he lived. The petitioners also pointed to "various cases of assaults from which several Blackmen have suffered at different times from Governor MacDonnell."¹⁷⁹ Importantly, the petitioners were also discontent with MacDonnell's increase of custom duties on goods imported into Bathurst. The petitioners portrayed MacDonnell's regime as one in which they were overly taxed and poorly served, and sometimes even assaulted. For the petitioners, nothing represented the oppressive nature of MacDonnell's rule more than his negligence in regard to drainage that exacerbating the damage and loss of life the flooding entailed. In the 1849

¹⁷⁷ PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

¹⁷⁸ Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849.

¹⁷⁹ Kew, CO 87/46, Petition to Secretary of State Earl Grey, 24th August 1849.

petition ineffective drainage was the primary line upon which arguments about bad governance were made, first of the Lieutenant Governors as a system, and now of Governor MacDonnell.

As anticipated by the petition's authors, MacDonnell attempted to discredit the petitioners in his response. He wrote:

As the document emanates chiefly from Liberated Africans and person of a very humble class—ignorant of our language and laws...not one out of the 139 signing understood a syllable of the document...my opinion on the enclosed memorial to be, that Mr. Ingram taking advantage of an accident to an embankment contributed to impress on the minds of some of the most ignorant of the natives that the Governor had been the cause of the said accident, He then drew up a memorial of his own and by the aid of misrepresentation and intimidation (exercised through the Headmen of some native tribes here)—procured the signatures and mark of a small body of natives to it.¹⁸⁰

MacDonnell's response was racist in its suggestion that the petitioners were unable to comprehend English or the laws of England or the colony. The "Mr. Ingram" mentioned in the text, Thomas Lewis Ingram, was a political rival of MacDonnell's. Ingram had worked as the Director of the Liberated African Department from 1831 to 1843, and as Acting Governor in 1847 prior to MacDonnell's appointment.¹⁸¹ Conscious of Ingram's relationship with the Liberated African community, MacDonnell attempted to suggest that he, along with "headmen" (the leaders of the Friendly Societies), pressured people to sign the petition.¹⁸² MacDonnell attempted to portray these leaders as oppressive to their own people, for example by accusing them of intimidating people to sign the petition. Attempting to defend against his removal,

¹⁸⁰ Kew, CO 87/46, Letter from Governor MacDonnell to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18th September 1949

¹⁸¹ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report.

¹⁸² Kew, CO 87/46, Letter from Governor MacDonnell to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 18th September 1949

MacDonnell accused the most powerful Bathurst figures who also had close relationships with the Liberated African community of instigating this petition. This also reveals the extent to which MacDonnell perceived the petition as a serious threat to his Governorship.

Governor MacDonnell was not removed from office. According to the petitioners in a later letter, many of their members were “tampered and unduly interfered with by Mr. J. F. Quin, the inspector of Police, in reference to our memorial.”¹⁸³ MacDonnell used the police to intimidate the petitioners, forcing some of them to be cross-examined. While MacDonnell continued as Governor, the flooding and the bursting of the embankment exacerbated the political struggle between the colonial government and the Liberated African community that demanded more from it. In the struggle between Governor MacDonnell and this African community, a compromise was eventually reached in the passage of the 1850 Rates Ordinance and the establishment of a Ratepayer’s Council. This was the first such council in all British West Africa, and the first political institution in The Gambia colony in which Africans could participate.

Although unique in British West Africa, the formation of the Ratepayers’ Council in Bathurst was linked to transformations in English municipal politics. In 1835, ratepayers (taxpayers) in England won the right to vote and decide how their taxes would be spent. Prior to this, in the late 18th century the Imperial Parliament passed a series of Improvement Acts that appointed Commissioners in urban settings to oversee and undertake issues related to drainage,

¹⁸³ Kew, CO 87/46, Principle Black Inhabitants to Governor MacDonnell, 19th September 1849.

bridge- and roadbuilding, among other municipal affairs.¹⁸⁴ The appointment of commissioners for improvement works had begun during the restoration of the English monarchy in the 17th century but increased in momentum by the end of the 18th century. Over the course of the first decades of the 19th century, English municipal politics was gradually becoming more democratic and concerned with improving the livelihood of urban taxpayers. Under pressure from Liberated Africans, MacDonnell drew inspiration from English Ratepayer's Councils, but nonetheless found a way to make the Ratepayer's Council in The Gambia as closed of an institution as possible, allowing the European minority of Bathurst an outsized level of control.

The 1850 Rates Ordinance repealed the 1848 Rates Ordinance and established the first municipal government in colonial Bathurst. This was done expressly for "the drainage of the town and other local improvements."¹⁸⁵ Like the 1848 ordinance, the 1850 ordinance levied a rate of 4% on the property of "every individual owning or occupying a house, lot, or hut."¹⁸⁶ Unlike the previous ordinance, however, the 1850 ordinance mandated that decisions on the expenditure of the rates would be made during public meetings of the Ratepayer's Council. Once established, this council was composed of all ratepayers who paid 16 shillings of rates annually. The 16-shilling minimum excluded most of the poor residents of Bathurst. For example, most of

¹⁸⁴ J.A. Chandler, *Explaining Local Government: Local government in Britain since 1800*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2007), 42-45.

¹⁸⁵ PP, 1851, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1850.

¹⁸⁶ NRS, PUB 5/1. Ordinance to provide a Rate for certain Local Improvements in the British Settlements in the Gambia. Laws and Ordinances of the British Settlement in The Gambia and Their Dependencies. 19th October 1850.

¹⁸⁶ PP, 1851, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1850.

the residents who lived on “Half a Lot, 1 Hut” had their properties valued at “under 5 L” and therefore paid a rate of about 3 shillings.¹⁸⁷ Ratepayers who reached or passed the 16shilling minimum had the power to elect commissioners to execute the resolutions that were passed in the Ratepayer’s Council. They were also invested with the authority to examine and approve all the work that commissioners sought to do and did. The jurisdiction of this council was limited to Bathurst, and to works that included, “the making and repairing of roads and foot-paths, drainage, the building and repairing of bridges, and the building and repairing of embankments.”¹⁸⁸ Of note, the Ratepayers’ Council had no authority over the question of public buildings. As MacDonnell explained in an annual report, “the entire drainage of the town is thus thrown on the inhabitants...”¹⁸⁹

On the one hand, the 1850 Rates Ordinance gave landowners and taxpayers in Bathurst control over drainage and other aspects of urban infrastructure, widening the number of people who could participate in Bathurst urban politics beyond a handful of wealthy European merchants on the Executive and Legislative Councils. On the other hand, MacDonnell’s suggestion that the “inhabitants” of Bathurst oversaw drainage was not entirely true. The Ratepayer’s Council was an elite, patriarchal institution even as it was democratic and the first institution in which African men could participate. For example, only ratepayers who paid 16

¹⁸⁷ NRS, Pub 5/1, Laws of the British Settlements in the Gambia, Ordinance to provide a Rate for Certain Local Improvements in the British Settlements in the Gambia, 19th October 1850.

¹⁸⁸ NRS, Pub 5/1, Laws of the British Settlements in the Gambia, Ordinance to provide a Rate for Certain Local Improvements in the British Settlements in the Gambia, 19th October 1850.

¹⁸⁹ PP, 1851, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1850.

shillings in rates had a vote at the meeting. People who paid an additional yearly sum of 20 shillings had two votes, which could be increased by paying higher rates up to a maximum of 8 votes to a person. Women were not allowed at the Ratepayer's Council and could only vote by proxy.¹⁹⁰

The 1850 Rates Ordinance was designed to give Europeans and upper-class African men the power to make decisions about urban space for everyone. This was also in line with the design of similar municipal institutions in England, and therefore cannot be viewed as a radical institution.¹⁹¹ With the passage of the 1850 Rates Ordinance, Governor MacDonnell aimed to satisfy elite Liberated Africans by giving them more power according to how much land they owned and how much they could afford to pay in taxes and additional voluntary rates. Most Bathurst inhabitants had no property or property of low value and therefore had no access to municipal decision-making. No municipal institution in colonial Gambia would allow for universal franchise or voting by men and women who did not own property, until 1947.¹⁹² Nonetheless the Ratepayer's council was the first governance institution in which Africans could vote in colonial Gambia, and it was established in the aftermath of political organizing around the issues of drainage and aquatic management in Bathurst. In this way, drainage formed the basis of municipal politics in Gambia.

¹⁹⁰ NRS, Pub 5/1, Laws of the British Settlements in the Gambia, Ordinance to provide a Rate for Certain Local Improvements in the British Settlements in the Gambia, 19th October 1850.

¹⁹¹ Chandler, *Explaining Local Government*,

¹⁹² Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 109-110

The Ratepayer's Council was short-lived. MacDonnell's successor, Governor O'Connor, abolished the council in 1855. In so doing O'Connor gave the colonial government access to the taxes collected on property, creating a new revenue stream for the state. O'Connor put the responsibility for drainage back in the hands of the Governor and the Legislative Council. Under financial pressure due to his expansionist war in Kombo described in more detail in the following Chapter, O'Connor continued to collect the rates but prevented ratepayers from making decisions over how they could be spent. The short five-year existence of the Ratepayer's Council and its abolition by O'Connor has produced a historical amnesia around the emergence of municipal government in colonial Gambia, which historians of The Gambia typically date the 1930s. One result of this amnesia is that the impact of the environment of colonial Bathurst on the evolution of municipal governance has been overlooked and its history foreshortened. Liberated Africans, however, did not forget the gains they won from 1850 to 1855. There is little doubt that memories of this brief but significant democratic enfranchisement—and subsequent disenfranchisement—contributed to their continued organizing around this particular issue throughout the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that to settle and transform the watery landscape that was Banjoul into St. Mary's Island with the colonial capital Bathurst, colonial officials had to drain. Drainage became a fundamental part of governance and among the earliest acts and responsibilities of the colonial state. Because of the centrality of drainage both for access to dry

land and British colonial ideas of keeping the island habitable and healthy it became central to constructing and challenging authority. Wherein proper drainage by a particular state regime was used by Bathurst inhabitants to describe good governance and poor drainage the opposite. Almost every colonial official administrating Bathurst attempted to undertake some form of drainage.

By examining early drainage projects this chapter shows that the projects and their outputs are an important means for understanding the early development of Liberated African politics as tied to aquatic management. Drainage in early 19th century Bathurst was only possible through Liberated African labor. First in the form of the King's Boys and then through forced resettlement of Liberated Africans in the 1830s. Further, because Liberated Africans were among the later inhabitants in Bathurst, they occupied very low-lying land which suffered the most from flooding and relied the most on drainage infrastructure. In demanding that the colonial governor, be removed in 1849 because of flooding, Liberated Africans displayed the importance of proper drainage to their community. The first truly democratic municipal body in colonial Gambia which was the rates payer's council, came out of Liberated African demands and beliefs about proper governance and drainage. The creation of the Ratepayer's Council by the colonial governor, however, gave landed property a new political value in that it gave residence with property a political voice.

The political power that came with landownership, was none-the-less restricted and eventually degraded with the abolition of the Ratepayers Council in 1855. From 1853 to 1860 there would be a pause on major drainage projects as the colonial state attempted to expand the

colonial territory through conquest and war on the mainland. These wars, their context and consequences will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 2

From the Mainland to the Mangroves: the Shifting Colonial Frontier, 1819-1866

2.1 Introduction

The British colony of The Gambia went through a significant amount of territorial expansion in the mid-19th century. In 1853, the Gambia colony expanded into large parts of mainland Kombo, creating the British colonial territory known as Kombo St. Mary. The area that became Kombo St. Mary had formerly been the territory of the people of Sabijee, who the British invaded during the 1853 Sabijee War. Prior to the Sabijee War, the town of Sabijee had been an Islamic scholarly community in conflict with the king of Kombo. The British colonial government sided with the Kombo King and helped to destroy Sabijee and occupy their lands. During the same period, the colonial government also began its first major land reclamation projects on the Island of St. Mary's (Bathurst) in 1846 and 1860. One of the main justifications that colonial officials gave for these two kinds of expansionist projects in the Gambia were the land needs of Liberated Africans. Chapter One followed Liberated African labor in the construction of Bathurst's early drainage infrastructure, as well as their participation in Bathurst's municipal government and the changing politics around aquatic management and land ownership. This chapter explores the relationship between Liberated African resettlement in the Gambia after 1831 and colonial expansion through land reclamation and territorial conquest. While the British resettled Liberated Africans in Gambia from 1816, the large influx of Liberated Africans began in the early 1830s. This chapter illustrates how the presence of so many

Liberated Africans in such a small, wetland island colony, combined with the British colonial commitment to the idea that Liberated Africans should practice agriculture were the primary motivators for the colony's mid-19th century expansion into its two frontiers: mainland Kombo and the mangrove estuaries.

This chapter adopts the definition of frontier that Martin Legassick (2010) formulated in *The Politics of a South African Frontier*. Legassick defined the frontier or frontier zone as a place in which “there was no single source of legitimate authority, in which different legitimate authorities could compete, and in which anyone who could generate power for himself could exercise it.”¹⁹³ The essential element in Legassick's definition is that the frontier is defined by state weakness and its relative inability to impose its social and political forms in that area.¹⁹⁴ Legassick settled on this definition out of a frustration with South African historiography that conflated the existence of white political dominance in the form of white supremacy with the process of acculturation or the spread of European culture and vice versa.¹⁹⁵ Legassick argued that this dominant framework for understanding the relationship between white supremacy and acculturation did not account for the *Griqua*, a non-white, Cape Colony-produced society far from the Cape Colony's power and authority. While the Griqua's presence on the edge of African and European states led to acculturation, it did not mean white dominance.¹⁹⁶ Rather, as

¹⁹³ Martin Chatfield Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier: The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries, 1780-1840*, (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2010), 6. For more on the question of frontier zones in African history, see Kopytoff, Igor. *The African frontier: The reproduction of traditional African societies*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

¹⁹⁴ Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier*, 7.

¹⁹⁵ Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier*, 1-3.

¹⁹⁶ Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier*, 10-11.

Legassick shows, white dominance in the frontier zone only came much later with British imperial expansion in Southern Africa.¹⁹⁷

Legassick's understanding of the frontier is useful for the present study because of his concern with colonial expansion. One of the questions that this chapter asks is: why did the Gambian colonial state pursue territorial expansion in the mid-19th century? In the mid-19th century, colonial officials expanded the territory of the colony through conquest in Northern Kombo and land reclamation on the island of St. Mary's. If we understand the frontier as a site of state weakness, as well as sites where alternative social and political formation are possible, then state expansion in the frontier zone can be understood as state attempts at increasing its power and foreclosing alternatives. In the literature on land reclamation, Eric Ash (2017) uses a similar framework to explain English state formation through the drainage of The Fens and the consequent marginalization of Fenmen and their way of life.¹⁹⁸ In the mid-19th century The Gambian colonial state attempted to resolve crises and weaknesses within the state through territorial expansions in the frontiers of Northern Kombo and the mangroves on St. Mary's Island.

Legassick's understanding of the frontier is a socio-political one, yet the colonial expansion into the mangrove wetlands that surrounded the island of St. Mary's demands a consideration of the ecological dimensions of the frontier. As discussed in Chapter One, the

¹⁹⁷ Legassick, *The Politics of a South African Frontier*, 11.

¹⁹⁸ Eric H. Ash, *The Draining of the Fens Projectors, Popular Politics, and State Building in Early Modern England*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

changing nature of land in mangrove wetlands posed a challenge to colonial state claims on where exactly the shoreline of St. Mary's Island was. An indeterminate shoreline was threatening to state power because such a situation caused confusion over the legal title and jurisdiction of the colonial state in those areas, as the works of Battacharyya (2018) and Hudson (1996) have shown.¹⁹⁹ The mangrove swamps of Bathurst were where the colonial state's jurisdiction was the weakest, and it is for this reason that this chapter views the mangrove wetlands as a colonial frontier. According to Legassick (2010) the frontier is also a place of state competition; in other words, it is a place where the colonial state attempted to reproduce colonial society over other ways of living. This chapter argues that in The Gambia, colonial land reclamation was the main strategy that the colonial state deployed in its attempts to reproduce its social and political forms in the mangroves of St. Mary's Island. While land reclamation may seem like a radical project of environmental transformation, its goals were always politically and socially conservative. Mid-19th century colonial land reclamation on St. Mary's Island was about preserving a colonial social order in crisis.

The main social and political crisis in mid-19th century colonial Gambia was British officials' inability to organize and maintain the newly arrived Liberated Africans in Christian peasant communities along the lines of the "Parish Model." Early 19th century colonial policy for Liberated African resettlement was to settle Liberated Africans freed from slave ships into

¹⁹⁹ Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Brian J. Hudson, *Cities on the Shore: The Urban Littoral Frontier*, (London ; New York: Pinter, 1996).

Christian agricultural villages or parishes.²⁰⁰ British officials hoped that the “Parish Model of resettlement,” as it was known, would make Liberated Africans productive Christian subjects of their colonies. The Parish Model was rooted in a type of British abolitionist politics that was invested in demonstrating moral Black freedom. This politics also sought to demonstrate that an agriculturally-based economy organized with free labor could compete with a slave-labor agriculturally-based economy.²⁰¹ The abolitionist ideas of a moral Black freedom after liberation and a free Black agricultural labor force together hoped to ensure that the British empire could continue to profit from Black labor while also suppressing white fears of Black freedom in the wake of abolition.²⁰² This kind of abolitionist politics dominant in 19th century West African colonial circles was useful for justifying the expansion of British empire in Africa. The British established African colonies to demonstrate a profitable experiment in free Black labor under British rule.²⁰³ Liberated Africans became mediums through which the British would realize their imperialist experiment in Africa after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.²⁰⁴ This imperialist project, however, hit its ecological limits in the mangrove wetlands of The Gambia.

²⁰⁰ Padraic X Scanlan, “The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery: The Liberated African Villages of Sierra Leone”, 1815-1824, *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (2016), 1096-1098; Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 34-37.

²⁰¹ Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89-93.

²⁰² Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 94-95.

²⁰³ Christopher Leslie Brown, “Empire without America: British Plans for Africa in the Era of the American Revolution” in Derek Peterson (ed.), *Abolition and Imperialism in Britain, Africa, and the Atlantic*, (Athens: Ohio University Press 2010), 94-95.

²⁰⁴ Bronwen Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21.

The soil of the Gambian wetland environment was constantly inundated by the River Gambia and therefore too salty for the type of agriculture colonialists envisioned. Colonial officials responded to these ecological limitations with land reclamation in 1846 and then territorial expansion in Northern Kombo in 1853. When territorial expansion in Kombo did not turn out as planned, colonial officials reverted to land reclamation again in 1860.

This chapter argues that as colonial officials attempted to preserve the colonial social order through land reclamation and territorial conquest they changed the form of the imagined Liberated African village as well as the purpose of land reclamation in The Gambia colony. The Liberated African village became militarized as the British expanded into the frontiers of Northern Kombo. The Gambia colony was unable to militarily secure the captured territory in Kombo as the imperial government refused to send military support. Liberated African life in Kombo became more militarized and precarious as a civil war continued to rage in Kombo. The Liberated African village became a community of soldiers organized to defend their own territory with no assistance from British imperial troops. Whereas Chapter One shows how land reclamation in the early 19th century was designed with the purpose of creating more land near the center of Bathurst town where free African communities could live, by the mid-19th century land reclamation in Bathurst was primarily driven by the demand for land in Bathurst that was under British military protection because the settlements in Kombo had grown to be so vulnerable. By the 1860s the ownership of land in Bathurst, whether reclaimed or not, came with the promise of protection that marked Bathurst landowners as safer than those living in the margins outside of the island of St. Mary's. As a result, mid-19th century land reclamation more

closely tied Liberated Africans to the British colonial project in The Gambia as more and more Liberated Africans demanded land in Bathurst. Land reclamation allowed the colonial state to appear responsive to Liberated African needs for secure land in times of crisis. Over time, Liberated Africans living on the island of St. Mary's came to perceive the maintenance of their colonial status as wedded to land reclamation projects. This last point will be explored in more depth in Chapter Five.

This chapter is organized into five sections. The first considers the Parish Model of Liberated African resettlement and explores how these parishes or villages failed in The Gambia due to soil and land conditions. It also considers the colonial response to this failure in the form of the first land reclamation project of 1846. The second section follows how a new colonial governor abandoned land reclamation for territorial expansion in Kombo. This section follows the governor's arguments for expansion to illustrate the different interests and goals that motivated territorial expansion. The third section considers the broader political context in Kombo that allowed for British colonial expansion in 1853 under Governor O'Connor. Following O'Connor's war of expansion, typically referred to as the "Sabijee War," the territories captured were poorly secured. The intensification of a civil war in Kombo fueled by British expansion led Liberated African settlers in Kombo to ask for land on St. Mary's Island for safety. The fifth and final section considers how the new governor, Colonel D'Arcy, responded to Liberated African demands by undertaking the largest land reclamation project in Bathurst to date.

2.2 The Parish Model of Liberated African resettlement in The Gambia Colony, 1819-1849

This section will discuss the dominant model of Liberated African resettlement in the Gambia colony, its impracticality and failure in the wetland environment of the colony, and British responses to these failures. Chapter One discussed the early settlement of Liberated Africans on St. Mary's Island and the use of Liberated African labor to construct the early drainage infrastructure on the island. It also traced the emergence of Liberated African involvement in municipal politics through their engagement with the island's drainage infrastructure and water management. This section moves between St. Mary's Island and other parts of the Gambia colony where Liberated Africans were settled to give a broader perspective on the difficulties of Liberated African resettlement. These challenges played a large role in the outbreak of the Sabijee War (1853-1855) and the creation of Kombo St. Mary in the northern part of the Mandinka kingdom of Kombo.

After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, British imperial policy was to designate the British West African colony of Sierra Leone as the main site for processing and resettling slaves rescued from slave ships by British Squadrons.²⁰⁵ After freeing enslaved people, British officials in Sierra Leone initially settled Liberated Africans in Freetown. As Scanlan (2016) notes, at the beginning this was largely an afterthought for the British.²⁰⁶ It was not until the ascendancy of

²⁰⁵ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery*, 1094.

²⁰⁶ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery*, 1088.

Charles MacCarthy to the Governorship of Sierra Leone in 1816 that Liberated African resettlement became systematized and organized around the needs of the Sierra Leone colony.²⁰⁷

In 1816, MacCarthy introduced the Parish Model in the Freetown Peninsula as the dominant government policy for resettling and organizing Liberated African communities.²⁰⁸ The Parish Model organized Liberated Africans into Christian agricultural villages in which the clergyman of the parish church acted as the manager or local government representative in the community. Much of the educational and social needs of the parish community were under the control of the missionaries of the Christian Missionary Society (CMS).²⁰⁹ MacCarthy envisioned the Parish Model as an effective way to achieve all the ideals that justified the new colonial projects of the post-slave trade era. The parish was intended to bring “Civilization,” Christianity, and Commerce to the newly settled Liberated African community.²¹⁰ Because of the timing of Bathurst’s creation in 1816 and MacCarthy’s appointment as the Governor of Sierra Leone and all British West African Settlements, the Parish Model was also transported to The Gambia.

Chapter One described the establishment of the first parish or Liberated African village of disbanded soldiers of the Royal Africa Corps and West Indian Regiment at Oyster Creek on St. Mary’s Island in 1819. By the mid-1820s, this planned community had failed, and the disbanded soldiers established the first Liberated African neighborhood known then (and now) as “Soldier Town” in the low-lying parts of Bathurst that had been drained through the work of “the

²⁰⁷ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery*, 1088-1089.

²⁰⁸ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery*, 1096.

²⁰⁹ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery*, 1095-1096; Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone*, 34-37.

²¹⁰ Scanlan, *The Colonial Rebirth of British Anti-Slavery*, 1096.

King's Boys." The failure of Oyster Creek is significant for the purposes of this discussion because it was the first and last attempt made by the colonial government to settle Liberated Africans in parishes within the colony.

The Governor of Sierra Leone said the following about the issue:

...the Adults settled on St. Mary's appear to depend on such occasional labour as they can procure for subsistence, having no means of making farms or gardens, to assist their other resources.²¹¹

For Liberated African adults who were not apprentices to "masters" (discussed in more depth in Chapter Three) making a livelihood was difficult on St. Mary's Island. Most of the land on was constantly inundated with salty water from the Gambia River and Atlantic Ocean. The constant flooding and the low-lying nature of the land on St. Mary's Island made most of the island's soil either too wet or too salty for agriculture. Nonetheless, for the early colonial government Liberated Africans formed a small part of the population and their subsistence was not a major concern or challenge for the government.²¹²

This would drastically change following the large relocation of Liberated Africans to The Gambia from Sierra Leone in 1831. The then Lieutenant Governor of The Gambia, George Rendall (1830-1837), wanted to increase the labor pool of the colony and make it less reliant on the Wolof artisan slaves coming from the French colonies in Senegal.²¹³ In 1831, the Secretary

²¹¹ NRS, CSO 1/2, Letter from Acting Governor Macaulay to Earl Bathurst, Sierra Leone, 28 June 1826; See also Chapter One.

²¹² PP, 1827, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into The State of The Colony of Sierra Leone, Second Part, I. Dependencies in the Gambia; According to the Rowan Report there were about a 100 or so permanently settled out of a population of 1,600.

²¹³ Richard Anderson, 'The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, Forced Migration, and "Liberation" at Freetown, 1808-1863, *African Economic History*, Vol.41 (2012), 112-113.

of State approved the relocation of Liberated Africans from Sierra Leone to the Gambia.²¹⁴ Although there are no exact figures of the total number of Liberated Africans sent to the Gambia, Anderson (2012) estimates that 2,468 Liberated Africans were sent between 1832-1835.²¹⁵ Further, an 1841 parliamentary report compiled by a Dr. Madden states that 2,914 Liberated Africans were present in the Gambia colony at the time of his report.²¹⁶ It therefore seems that the bulk of Liberated African resettlement occurred in the early- to mid-1830s. Once this large number of Liberated Africans arrived in The Gambia, their existence and presence in the colony became a major concern for colonial officials.

To manage, resettle, feed, and house the new arrivals of Liberated Africans in the Gambia, the colonial government formed the Liberated African Department in 1831.²¹⁷ Much like the Liberated African Department in Sierra Leone, the one in The Gambia was designed to handle the provision of rations, housing, clothing, and the organization of Liberated African labor for government projects.²¹⁸ The colonial government put the direct management of the Liberated African village in the hands of Wesleyan missionary. The Wesleyan missionaries working under the Liberated African Department were tasked with handling day-to-day activities, education, and agriculture in the Liberated African villages.²¹⁹ In light of the previous failure of settling Liberated Africans on St. Mary's Island, in 1831 Lieutenant Governor Rendall

²¹⁴ Richard Anderson, *The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans*, 113.

²¹⁵ Richard Anderson, *The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans*, 113.

²¹⁶ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report, 187.

²¹⁷ Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 60.

²¹⁸ Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 60.

²¹⁹ Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 61.

planned to settle new arrivals on Jangjangbure (MacCarthy's Island), one of the largest islands in the middle-region of the River Gambia.²²⁰

Lieutenant Governor Rendall believed that MacCarthy's Island would be a more successful place to establish a Liberated African village based on the experience of the disbanded soldiers previously settled there. In 1823 the colonial Gambian government acquired the island of Jangjangbure (meaning *place of refuge*) from the King of Cattaba.²²¹ Jangjangbure was in the middle of the Gambia River, about 170 km from St. Mary's Island. The British renamed Jangjangbure MacCarthy's Island and settled it with Liberated African soldiers of the West Indian Regiment.²²² Originally, colonial officials intended that this island serve as a commercial depot for merchants trading upriver, allowing them a secure place to keep their goods under British military protection.²²³ From 1823 to 1827 the Liberated African soldiers settled on MacCarthy Island formed a town called George Town, built next to the fort of the same name.²²⁴ In 1826 the Governor of said the following about the soldiers in George Town in comparison to the soldiers settled in Oyster Creek, "but those on MacCarthy's Island appear well clothed, comfortable, and contented, enjoying a rich soil, capable of producing every article of food..."²²⁵. Colonial officials attributed the better state of the disbanded soldiers on MacCarthy's Island to the better state of the soil. Building on this experience, Lieutenant Governor Rendall

²²⁰ Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 63-64.

²²¹ Patrick Webb, "Guests of the Crown: Convicts and Liberated Slaves on MacCarthy Island, the Gambia." *The Geographical Journal* 160, no. 2 (1994): 138.

²²² Webb, *Guests of the Crown*, 138.

²²³ Webb, *Guests of the Crown*, 137.

²²⁴ Webb, *Guests of the Crown*, 138.

²²⁵ NRS, CSO 1/2, Acting Governor Macaulay to Earl Bathurst, 28th June, 1826.

gave the Wesleyan Church tracts of land on MacCarthy's Island with the aim of forming a Liberated African village and a model farm.

Therefore, in 1832 the colonial government sent Liberated Africans arriving from Sierra Leone to MacCarthy's Island to form a parish community.²²⁶ This community, like that imagined in Oyster Creek, failed. Much like St. Mary's, the community on MacCarthy's island was set up in a mangrove wetland. The little land that Liberated Africans could farm on provided low agricultural yields.²²⁷ Furthermore, the settlement suffered repeated attacks from the surrounding African states as enslaved people from those states began escaping to the island in search of refuge. The 1841 Madden Report noted about Liberated Africans on MacCarthy's Island that "Out of the 600 located in MacCarthy 400 had left".²²⁸ For much of the 19th century the population on MacCarthy's Island rarely surpassed 500 inhabitants.²²⁹ Like St. Mary's, it was not a good place for building a community along the Parish Model lines, although British officials had perceived it to be.

The Parish Model of Liberated African resettlement did not fit well with the littoral nature of The Gambia colony. From 1816 to 1840, the colony was made up of low-lying islands, riverbanks, mudflats, and mangrove wetlands. Colonial officials, Wesleyan Church leaders, and Liberated Africans themselves were unfamiliar with these ecologies. Europeans also typically

²²⁶ Webb, *Guests of the Crown*, 138

²²⁷ Webb, *Guests of the Crown*, 140.

²²⁸ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report, 187.

²²⁹ Webb, *Guests of the Crown*, 140.

avoided them due to their fears of miasma.²³⁰ Further, even if the Liberated African disbanded soldiers had agricultural experience, they likely would not have had the highly specific knowledge required to successfully farm in such environments that, for example, members of indigenous communities had developed over centuries in coastal Senegambia.

As Carney (2001) has argued, historically communities living in the Gambia River basin used coastal lands almost exclusively for rice cultivation.²³¹ Rice farmers in The Gambia would first desalinate the lands they had cleared for agriculture in the areas of the Gambia River that salty year-round or seasonally salty. This process of desalination entailed the construction of embankments to keep salty river water out, while allowing rainwater to inundate and gradually drain the salt out of the land. Rice was also an ideal crop to grow in The Gambia's wetlands because it thrives in submerged land. Colonial officials did not have access to this knowledge and did not appear to seek it. When confronted with low crop yields, colonial officials and Liberated Africans did not know what to do to increase them.²³² As a result, in 1838 the Lieutenant Governor of The Gambia stopped the resettlement of additional Liberated Africans into The Gambia.²³³

²³⁰ Judith Carney, "The mangrove preserves life": Habitat of African survival in the Atlantic world", *Geographical Review*, 107:3, (2017), 433-436.

²³¹ Judith Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

²³² Webb, *Guest of the Crown*, 140.

²³³ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 58.

For officials such as Dr. Madden, The Gambia was the worst place for Liberated Africans. The British Parliament sent Madden to The Gambia to report on the state of the British West African colonies. He concluded that:

Of all places selected for the location of this class of persons, the settlement of the Gambia was the most unfitted, and the consequences has been that in no place where they have been located has their condition been more unfortunate.²³⁴

Madden continued by noting that, “the Governor admits there is no land to allot them in the settlement that would be of any benefit to them.”²³⁵ Committed to the colonial ideal of the Parish Model, Madden saw the settlement of Liberated Africans in The Gambia as a failure. As has already been discussed, a driving impetus for the Parish Model was the idea that these communities could be self-sustaining, and therefore not expensive for either colonial governments or the imperial government. Since the Liberated African Department was funded by the imperial treasury, the continued reliance of Liberated Africans on rations from this department posed a problem for metropolitan politicians who had to defend the government’s expenditures to the public. Madden’s 1841 report likely led British parliamentarians to believe that the ongoing support of Liberated African villages was financially and politically unviable. A few years later in 1843, the Liberated African Department was closed.²³⁶

²³⁴ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report, 187.

²³⁵ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty’s Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report, 187.

²³⁶ Hughes and Perfect, A Political History, 20.

The closure of the Liberated African Department increased both Liberated Africans' precarity in the colony and colonial officials' anxieties about this growing community. Prior to 1843, the colonial treasury did not need to provide much funding for the support of the resettlement of Liberated Africans to The Gambia. As stated in the 1841 Madden report:

The expenditure for the government, military protection and for the maintenance of Liberated Africans of the Gambia, in the year 1839 amounted to 18,588 l. 12 s. 3 ½ d. of this amount the colony defrayed the sum of 6,002 l. 9s. 10 ½ d. The expenditure of the military establishment included in the first amount was 8,481 l. 18s. 5 ½ d.; and the for the Liberated African Department, included also in it, amounted to 2,238 l. 0s. 2 ¾ d.²³⁷

These figures illustrate the extent to which The Gambia colony was reliant on external funding to sustain both the military establishment and Liberated African resettlement. Following the closure of the Liberated African Department and with the failed agricultural experiments on both St. Mary's Island and MacCarthy's island, the question of Liberated African subsistence and survival in the colony became an acute problem.

Liberated Africans often had to fend for themselves. Some left the colony in search of work and food, which also meant that they left the area protected by the British military. Another response to this crisis discussed in the previous Chapter was the formation of mutual aid societies called Friendly Societies. These societies provided their members with financial aid and organized the community around labor issues, but in their infancy, they were limited in their

²³⁷ PP, 1842, Report Of Her Majesty's Commissioners on The State of the British Settlements on the Western Coast of Africa, Appendix No.8, Gambia, Commissioners Report, 185.

reach and disliked by colonial officials.²³⁸ The colonial solution to this crisis was to create more land on the island of St. Mary's.

Under the Governorship of Captain Charles Fitzgerald (1844-1847), the colonial government turned to land reclamation in an attempt to create more agricultural land and to improve drainage near the center of Bathurst town..²³⁹ To achieve these goals, Fitzgerald cleared mangrove swamps on the southeastern end of Bathurst and began works for the installation of a lock gate.²⁴⁰ The lock gate was a technology deployed in the construction of canals in Ireland and England. Lock gates allow boats on canals to move between two sections of a canal that are at a significant height difference. The hope was that in Bathurst the lock would allow for more fall or gravitational pull by creating an artificial height difference between the low-lying land in Bathurst and the Gambia River. This height difference would then allow the water that accumulated in Bathurst from rains and spring tides to flow more quickly into the Gambia River. As Hughes and Perfect (2006) noted "Fitzgerald appears to have been popular with Liberated Africans, probably because he made a determined attempt to complete the draining of Bathurst and thereby prevent the flooding which so detrimental to health..."²⁴¹ Governor Fitzgerald came from a family of Irish investors who financed some of the major canal works in Ireland constructed under British rule. In an attempt to bring his knowledge of water infrastructure in

²³⁸ The Gambia Clubs Ordinance, *African Times*, December 23, 1865.

²³⁹ PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

²⁴⁰ PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

²⁴¹ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 60.

Ireland to bear on the drainage issues in The Gambia, Fitzgerald's project was highly ambitious but was successful in securing funds from parliament for the project. Seeking the perfect materials, Fitzgerald even imported stone from England for the construction of the lock gate. Despite these grand ambitions, Fitzgerald left the Governorship of The Gambia in 1847 before the project was completed.

Fitzgerald's successor Governor Greeves MacDonnell (1847-1852) abandoned Fitzgerald's land reclamation project. According to MacDonnell, while Fitzgerald's project "would have effectually drained the town and reclaimed nearly a square mile of swamp in the neighborhood..."²⁴² he added that "no adequate provisions appears to have been made for carrying out the undertaking on the scale requisite to ensure its utility."²⁴³ MacDonnell claimed that Fitzgerald had underestimated the cost of the land reclamation project. Specifically, he commented that Fitzgerald's previous estimate of 2,254 pounds for the entire project did "not include the cost of certain embankments, quite as essential as the lock itself..." He concluded that, "I conceive that a great mistake was thereby committed at the outset."²⁴⁴ To complete the project, MacDonnell explained that a loan would be required, which itself would be impossible in the context of the 1848 economic crisis. The French Revolution of 1848 led to a dramatic fall in groundnut exports from The Gambia.

²⁴² PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

²⁴³ PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

²⁴⁴ PP, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

It is possible that MacDonnell's calculations were correct, and Fitzgerald had attempted a project far beyond the financial constraints of the colony. Even so, this would not explain MacDonnell's abandonment of land reclamation as a project. Unlike Fitzgerald and the many predecessors already discussed in Chapter One, MacDonnell did not believe that St. Mary's could be improved through land reclamation or any other means. About liberated African villages, for example, MacDonnell wrote:

Three villages were laid out for liberated Africans on the sands of the island of St. Mary and a Wesleyan chapel built near them. These settlements were all established for agricultural pursuits, where those pursuits were impossible, and resulted in an utter waste of large sums of money without any benefit to the natives.²⁴⁵

Viewing the previous attempts at building Liberated African villages on the island as futile, MacDonnell was simultaneously making an argument to the Secretary of State for the Colonies for colonial expansion onto the Kombo mainland. Up to this point, the colonial frontier was the mangrove wetlands that surrounded the island of St. Mary's and other islands including MacCarthy's island. With ambitions far beyond the settlement of Liberated Africans, by 1849 MacDonnell saw colonial territorial expansion beyond The Gambia's wetlands as the solution to its multiple crises.

2.3 The search for agricultural land and other arguments for expansion

This section examines Governor MacDonnell's 1849 letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the arguments he made for territorial expansion. In so doing this section parses

²⁴⁵ PP, 1850, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1849.

the various intersecting British colonial interests for expansion in Northern Kombo. There were three main drivers for this expansionist project including first, the need to access large tracts of suitable farmland on which to establish Liberated African village communities, as has already been discussed; second, the desire to acquire more high-elevation, “miasma-free,” healthy land for white settlement; and finally, the establishment of cotton plantations to improve the economic position of the colony and decrease its reliance on the French who were the primary importers of Gambia’s main export of groundnuts. Governor MacDonnell therefore abandoned Governor Fitzgerald’s ambitious land reclamation project and turned instead to territorial expansion onto mainland Kombo as a solution for the various intersecting challenges the colony faced under his tenure.²⁴⁶

Taking the first of these three motivations for expansion first, the increase in the number of impoverished Liberated Africans in Bathurst raised colonial anxieties about this community. The acquisition of agricultural land on which Liberated Africans could farm and sustain themselves was a major driver of mid-19th century attempts at colonial expansion. As MacDonnell wrote in an 1852 letter to the Secretary of State:

I cannot but wish, therefore, that this Government had the means of giving land of fair average fertility to the numerous liberated Africans and others who are at present scattered through the adjacent countries in search of a precarious livelihood. If they were collected into a town with sufficient land round it both for tillage and grazing, and were subjected to no other tax than either a fair quit-rent or tithe of the produce in return for the land and the protection of this

²⁴⁶ PP, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

Government, they would very soon be able to defend their own town and maintain themselves with little or no aid from the Government.²⁴⁷

Liberated Africans were leaving Bathurst in large numbers. Officials recognized that, “all those who leave Bathurst because they cannot find room or opportunity there for agricultural pursuits.”²⁴⁸ One of the concerns about this exodus was the unprotected status of Liberated Africans who left the colony. In many riverine states in Senegambia at this time, slave-raiding and slave-trading was active and ongoing. In leaving the colony, Liberated Africans ran the risk of being re-enslaved. Since Liberated Africans embodied the stated purpose of The Gambia colony as an anti-slavery society, MacDonnell expressed concern about re-enslavement as it would represent a failure of the British colonial project in the Gambia River region. As has already been discussed, the official British justification for African colonization was that these colonies would counter the slave trade by providing a viable and prosperous alternative.²⁴⁹ The success of Liberated Africans in British colonial Gambia would affirm the British justification for setting up colonies in Africa.

In addition to the Liberated African question, another motivation for the British military incursion into mainland Kombo was their desire to acquire more “healthy” land for white settlement. The only British possession in mainland Kombo prior to 1853 was a small section of

²⁴⁷ PP, 1851, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1850.

²⁴⁸ PP, 1851, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1850.

²⁴⁹ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 94-95.

the Cape of St. Mary close to the Muslim town of Bakau.²⁵⁰ The King of Kombo, Suling Jatta, ceded this small piece of land to the British in 1840 through a treaty in which the British gave him a onetime payment of “100 dollars in merchandise.”²⁵¹ British officials believed the Cape of St. Mary to be a healthy place because of its high elevation, strong winds, and the absence of wetlands, unlike Bathurst.²⁵² Here, the British built a convalescence house where white officials, and troops went to recover from the various fevers that were at the time understood to be caused by the dangerous gases emitted from Bathurst’s swamps.²⁵³

The British desire for better tracts of land for white settlement and habitation was not a minor motivation for expansion. In 1825 there was a collective trauma that left an indelible mark on colonial consciousness and Bathurst’s toponyms up to the present day. The east end of Bathurst was known as *Half Die*, which was also the site of the *Half Die Swamp*. In 1816 Alexander Grant decided to build the first fort in Bathurst on the lower eastern edge of St. Mary’s Island. As described in Chapter One, Grant picked this site to fulfill his orders from Governor MacCarthy that the fort be able to monitor the entry and exit of ships to the Gambia River.²⁵⁴ The name of this fort was originally Banyon Point Fort, but after an incident in which a

²⁵⁰ Pp,1865, Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast), App.No.3. Treaties made by the Government of the Gambia from the Year 1840 to the present time, No. 1, Convention with the King of Combo, for the cession a piece of land at Cape St. Mary, 9 November 1840.

²⁵¹ Pp,1865, Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast), App.No.3. Treaties made by the Government of the Gambia from the Year 1840 to the present time, No.2, Gambia, No.47, Lord John Russell to Lieutenant Governor Huntley, 9 November 1840.

²⁵² PP, 1851, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1850.

²⁵³ NRS, CSO 1/2, Letter from Captain Frazer to Sir Neil Campbell, 6 January ,1827.

²⁵⁴ NRS, CSO 1/2, Letter from Governor Neil Campbell to Earl of Bathurst, 17 August ,1826.

large number of troops stationed there died of fever in 1825, it was renamed Half Die.²⁵⁵ On another occasion, more than half of the Royal African Corp soldiers (all of whom were white) died of fever.²⁵⁶ The name Half Die stuck, and is still today the name of the neighborhood that is home to the National Port Authority of The Gambia. British officials pointed to the swamp next to Banyon Point as the cause of the deaths. From the 1820s onward, the loss of European life on St. Mary's Island was associated with the many swamps on the island. In response to the deaths on St. Mary's Island, British administrators approach the King of Kombo for a small piece of land at the Cape of St. Mary's, believing the higher elevation and lack of swamp made it an ideal location for a convalesce house. From 1850, Governor MacDonnell began to seek more territory around the Cape of St. Mary and beyond for white settlement.

In mid-June 1852 MacDonnell wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Duke of Newcastle, to make a case for British territorial expansion into the Kingdom of Kombo. He argued that Kombo would be better for European and African habitation than Bathurst because it was more "salutary." He added that, "the difference of its climate from that of Bathurst is still more owing to the fact that the ground not only slopes towards the sea in front, but also declines gradually towards the rear, so that it is perfectly drained by nature."²⁵⁷ The reference to drainage here shows how the question of water flow and aquatic management had become so central to

²⁵⁵ PP, 1829, Sierra Leone, Queries addressed to Dr. Barry and others, by the commissioners of West African Inquiry, on Climate of Sierra Leone and Its Dependencies, with the replies thereto annexed, No. 80.

²⁵⁶ PP, 1829, Sierra Leone, Queries addressed to Dr. Barry and others, by the commissioners of West African Inquiry, on Climate of Sierra Leone and Its Dependencies, with the replies thereto annexed, No. 80.

²⁵⁷ NRS, CSO 1/11, Letter from Governor MacDonnell to Duke of Newcastle, June 1st 1852.

the colonial project in The Gambia. In addition to the benefits of acquiring land in Kombo for Europeans, MacDonnell noted that this land would also provide opportunities for Liberated Africans and Wolof people who were British subjects and who were in MacDonnell's eyes so "anxious to obtain and cultivate land."²⁵⁸

Dwelling on the limitations of Bathurst, MacDonnell sought to impress upon the Secretary of State the impossibility of redeeming the town. He wrote:

Neither our excellent harbour, well built streets, or extensive commerce, can supply the want of land, a want which is at once a natural and healthy sign of progress. In reference to that want, I would observe that whatever objections there may be to increasing our territories in this part of the world or elsewhere, I am not aware of any objection which can be raised to the acquisition of as much land as we can bona fide occupy, and I am of opinion that the cultivation and permanent tenure of the soil is essential to any lasting improvement amongst the natives. Those who are not mechanics and who are yet something more than labourers and all those who leave Bathurst because they cannot find room or opportunity there for agricultural pursuits, might be made a useful medium for extending at little expense our social customs, religion and a portion of our civilization amongst the natives.²⁵⁹

Defending his arguments for territorial expansion on civilizational terms, MacDonnell highlighted the role he envisioned Liberated Africans and Wolof people could play in "civilizing" the "natives" of the surrounding territories. Anticipating counterarguments about the financial and political costs of such territorial expansion, MacDonnell noted that this land would be occupied "bona fide," or in good faith—the implication being not through subterfuge or

²⁵⁸ NRS, CSO 1/11, Letter from Governor MacDonnell to Duke of Newcastle June 1st 1852

²⁵⁹ PP, 1852, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1851.

warfare as was custom.²⁶⁰ In sum, MacDonnell argued that the possession of healthy, agricultural land would drive the British civilizational mission in West Africa.

The final justification MacDonnell gave for expansion was the establishment of cotton plantations in Kombo. This, he argued, could help the British reduce their dependency on French imports of groundnuts to fund the colony, therefore broadly improving The Gambia's economic position within the British empire.²⁶¹ By the mid-19th century, the French had become the primary importers of Gambian groundnuts from which they produced groundnut oil.²⁶² In the mid-19th century Europeans used groundnut oil as a lubricant for industrial machines and as a more affordable cooking oil than olive oil.²⁶³ MacDonnell argued that setting up cotton plantations to diversify Gambia's economy would reduce the colony's reliance on French trade and French commercial interests while simultaneously addressing England's soaring demand for cotton.²⁶⁴ The establishment of cotton plantations in the Kombo would solely be for the benefit of British merchants. By the 1850s British merchants in the Gambia were beginning to lose out to their French competitors, as the groundnut industry had already been constructed around the demands of the French market, controlled by French monopolies. For example, British merchants had to put their groundnuts on French ships for them to enter France due to French

²⁶⁰ PP,1852, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1851.

²⁶¹ PP,1852, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1851.

²⁶² Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate : The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834-1934*,(Boston: Brill, 2006),15-16.

²⁶³ Swindell and Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate*, 15-16.

²⁶⁴ Parliamentary Papers (Pp), Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1851

tariffs and restrictions.²⁶⁵ In addition to the trade above board, the French regularly smuggled groundnuts from the Gambia River through Albreda, a town under French control on the Gambia River. Considering these factors, an argument for cotton plantations in the Kombo acted as an alternative avenue for capital accumulation for British merchants who could not compete with the French.

MacDonnell hoped cotton exports could also improve the position of The Gambia colony in West Africa. In the mid-19th century, Britain's primary West African import was palm oil from the Niger River region.²⁶⁶ In an imperial context in which there was a hierarchy of colonies organized according to which regions contributed the most towards British trade, and wherein this hierarchy dictated how much military spending could be allocated to that colony, local colonial officials including Governor MacDonnell were always seeking to edge out their competition across European empires (as in the case of the French), and within the British empire itself. MacDonnell expressed his frustration with The Gambia's marginal contribution to British trade in the following terms:

It would obviously be much more gratifying to me to be able to report that the commerce of the Gambia was one which took off a large quantity of British manufactures, and gave extensive employment to British shipping. Nevertheless, the figures given above establish beyond dispute a conclusion quite the opposite.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵ Swindell and Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate*, 19.

²⁶⁶ Martin Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa : The Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

²⁶⁷ Pp, 1849, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

The quote above is from MacDonnell's 1848 report to the Secretary of State, in the report it is calculated that out of a total export tonnage of 8,636 tons, only 3,036 were exported to Britain while the rest went to "Foreign States." The problem with these figures for MacDonnell was that the military establishment in the Gambia was completely funded by parliamentary grants but as MacDonnell notes the Gambia attracted little "British Shipping". MacDonnell's proposal for cotton plantations in Kombo, sought to increase the political position and power of Gambia in West Africa by attracting more British trade and shipping.²⁶⁸

MacDonnell as governor of the Gambia faced many intersection problems in 1852: the Island of St. Mary's continued to flood. And in the aftermath of serious floods, disease would spread and kill many white officials hampering the colonial bureaucracy. And the flooding made the island a difficult place to establish agriculture. The infertility of the soil on St. Mary's Island made the settlement of Liberated African into agricultural villages an almost impossible task. To make things worse, colonial officials like MacDonnell believed that Liberated Africans could only become moral citizens through agriculture. The limitations in agriculture also made it difficult for the colony to develop a different cash crop other than groundnuts, as groundnut were so tied to French commercial interest. For all these reasons, MacDonnell and the colonial elite in the Gambia came to understand the problems of the colony as a land issue. The solution for MacDonnell was to find more healthy and fertile land in Kombo rather than question the policies of Liberated African resettlement or the nature of imperial commercial competition. MacDonnell

²⁶⁸ Parliamentary Papers (Pp), Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1848.

to resolve the colonies land issue looked to expanding the small piece of land the colony had already secured on the Cape of St. Mary- which was the colony's frontier on mainland Kombo. However, it was the tense political environment in Kombo in which the thought of expansion became possible for MacDonnell in the first place. The context in Kombo will be discussed next.

2.4 The political context in Kombo, 1840-1852

Had it only been the British who had an interest in acquiring land in Kombo, there may not have been enough cause to launch a military incursion into Sabijee in 1853. The reason why Macdonell claimed that expansion would happen "bona fide" in the earlier quote to the Secretary of State was because, Suling Jatta the King of Kombo had offered land to the British in return for military assistance against Sabijee. Colonial expansion became possible because Suling Jatta had plans for how to weaponize colonial forces to achieve his own political ends. To explore the changing politics around land in Kombo this section will focus on a meeting between Kombo's King, Kombo's chiefs and British colonial officials in Jeswhang in 1850. Jeswhang is a town in Kombo that was very close of the Cape of St. Mary. The meeting in Jeswhang was about the land on the Cape that Jatta had given to the British in 1840. The events of the Jeshwang meeting are used in this section to think more broadly about the changing politics in Kombo that led to Jatta's war on Sabijee in 1853.

In late 1850, about a year before Governor MacDonnell wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies arguing for territorial expansion. A politically charged meeting took place at the cottage of Mr. Finden in Jeshwang a town located in Kombo few miles from Bathurst. Finden

was a British merchant who had acquired land from the King of Kombo and was resident on mainland Kombo-probably seen by the attendants as neutral. The attendants to the meeting were Governor MacDonnell and other colonial officials, Suling Jatta and all the main chiefs of Kombo including the chief of Bakau.²⁶⁹

The primary subject of the meeting was the land at the Cape of St. Mary's, which Suling Jatta had ceded to the British since 1840. The land at the Cape had previously belonged to the Islamic community of Bakau.²⁷⁰ At the meeting, a debate occurred over the legality of Jatta's offering of land to the British. According to the reporting done by the *Illustrated London News*, Jatta adopted a "war-like" tone during the meeting in contrast to his other interactions with the British. Although, Jatta had signed a treaty in 1840 ceding the land to the British for a onetime payment, during the Jeshwang meeting Jatta agree with the Kombo chiefs that encircled him "that the King could not give away or sell any land; that he could not, in fact, give up his rights of sovereignty over it; but that he could, with the consent of his chief men, lend it or rent it for any period".²⁷¹ We can conclude from the newspaper report, that the King and his chiefs asserted to British that land was inalienable in Kombo and therefore the British had to pay their rents. The meeting in Jeshwang ended with signing of a treaty in which the British agreed to pay an annual rent of ten pounds to the king and another ten pounds to the "headman of Bakau" for the land at

²⁶⁹ The Illustrated London News, February 15, 1851, *Sketches On the Gambia*, 133.

²⁷⁰ Pp,1865, Report from the Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast), App.No.3. Treaties made by the Government of the Gambia from the Year 1840 to the present time, No. 1, Convention with the King of Combo, for the cession a piece of land at Cape St. Mary, 9 November 1840.

²⁷¹ The Illustrated London News, February 15, 1851, *Sketches On the Gambia*, 133.

the Cape. While the King and the chiefs of Kombo agreed to recognized that the land at the Cape was ceded to British “Majesty, Her heirs and successors for ever.”²⁷²

As explained above the documentary evidence of this meeting comes from *The Illustrated London News* which reported on the meeting in depth. *The Illustrated* founded in 1842 was the first illustrated weekly news magazine in Victorian England.²⁷³ *The Illustrated’s* report on the Jeshwang meeting was a positive one in that the report attempted to dispel ideas of Africans as “savages”. The report dispelled these ideas by showing that Kombo was not ruled by “patriarchal or despotic power” but that the “King is obliged to consult his ‘headmen’ or chiefs on every occasion, and their ‘vested interest’ in the soil is guarded with the greatest jealousy.”²⁷⁴ In other words, the sovereign had a respect for some form of democracy and idea of property rights which are hallmarks of British experience of modernity.

The Illustrated’s 1850 report’s explanation of political authority in Kombo aligns well with the historiography on pre-colonial kingdoms in the Gambia. According to Charlotte political authority in pre-colonial Kombo was organized around a set of kingly towns, with each of those towns having the chance to select the king among their founding families in turn.²⁷⁵ Each of the kingly towns had a council of leaders with the oldest male of the founding family

²⁷²PP, 1865, Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast), App. No.3, Gambia Treaties, Combo, Cession of Territory, 26 December 1850.-Confirmed, 25 February 1851.

²⁷³ Grogg, Ann Hofstra, "*THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, 1842-52*," (unpublished dissertation, Indiana University, 1977).

²⁷⁴ The Illustrated London News, February 15, 1851, *Sketches On the Gambia*, 133.

²⁷⁵ Charlotte A. Quinn, *Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia; Traditionalism, Islam, and European Expansion*, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 14-15.

taking the office of Alkalo or what the British describe as chiefs.²⁷⁶ The Alkalos of the kingly towns were also the high-ranking members of the king's council, while the alkalos of non-kingly towns formed the junior members of the kings council. Bakau and other Islamic scholarly towns in Kombo would have been the junior members of the kings council present at the Jeshwang meeting reported on by the *The Illustrated* in 1850.

The Illustrated's report by explaining political authority in Kombo and the control over land was providing a reason for the Jeshwang meeting. Suling Jatta-the King of Kombo- violated the land rights of Bakau by giving their land to the British without any payment of rents to Bakau or the King himself. Bakau to maintain their rights over their lands pushed Jatta to sign a new treaty with the British forcing them to pay rents to Bakau. *The Illustrated's* focus on the 1850 Jeshwang meeting also allowed British readers to understand why it seemed like MacDonnell was taking more land in the Gambia by signing a treaty. The report, publish a few months after the treaty signing at Jeshwang was responding to growing concerns in the British metropole about African colonization and the use of the imperial military to that end. The report in *The Illustrated* was ultimately a useful tool for the Gambian colonial administration in justify the gradual British encroachment on mainland Kombo that began in 1840.

The 1850 treaty was however, a win for Bakau against King-Suling Jatta. As Sarr argues chiefs or *alkalos* ability to control the access to land, as well as receive obligations such as rent on that land was the basis of their power.²⁷⁷ Alkalos through land relations acquired,

²⁷⁶ Quinn, *Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia*, 13.

²⁷⁷ Sarr, *Islam, Power and Dependency*, 79-82.

incorporated, and favored dependents. Jatta by giving away the Cape of St. Mary to the British without rents to himself or Bakau was displaying a new kind of power that undermined those of Bakau's Alkalo. Jatta's centralization of power through the control of land may have led to a rebellion in Sabijee starting sometime around the late 1840s. Sabijee like Bakau was a coastal Islamic scholarly community. According to colonial military reports Sabijee was the home to the largest mosque in Kombo making it the most important Islamic center in the region. By the signing of the treaty of 1850 in Jeshwang conflict between Sabijee and the King of Kombo had already broken out, it is not clear what the direct stimulus for the conflict was. However, the 1850 treaty demonstrates that the Sabijee conflict occurred in the context of Jatta violating the land rights of Islamic scholarly communities.

Jatta sometime in 1851 approached MacDonnell for military support against Sabijee. The meeting ended with the offer of Sabijee's land by Jatta in return for British military support. It is not certain whether Jatta came to the British with an offer of land or the British demanded land as a compensation for their support. MacDonnell would use Jatta's offer of land in Kombo as part of his argument for territorial expansion to the Secretary of State in 1852.²⁷⁸ In another letter to the Secretary of State MacDonnell asked for authorization to intervene in Kombo on the side of the King.²⁷⁹ The Secretary of State denied MacDonnell's request and commanded him to adopt

²⁷⁸ Pp, 1852, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1851.

²⁷⁹ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 62.

the policy of “non-intervention”.²⁸⁰ The policy of non-intervention would be abandoned by MacDonnell’s successor, Governor Smyth O’Connor 1852-1859.

2.5 “The Sabijee War”: a precarious expansion, 1852-1859

O’Connor on assuming the office of the governorship in 1853 initially followed the policy of non-intervention in Kombo. However, on May 17, 1853 O’Connor along with the members of the legislative council agreed to send a messenger to the king of Kombo telling him that they would give military assistance. However, the colonial state’s support to the king was predicated on his agreement to ceded land to the British as promised to MacDonnell.²⁸¹ It is not clear what exactly caused this drastic change of policy in O’Connor’s government. Nonetheless, O’Connor’s planned military operation in Kombo was approved by the Secretary of State for the Colonies.²⁸² The Secretary of State at the time was John Pakington who served in the office for one year from 1852-1853, under an English Conservative government. A military detachment of West Indian Regiment soldiers was sent to the Gambia for the purpose of engaging in the Sabijee War. Along with 463 men of West Indian Regiment troops, 35 disbanded soldiers and 105 Bathurst militiamen were also mobilized for the Sabijee War.²⁸³

Many Liberated Africans interested in acquiring land in Kombo would have been pensioners and militiamen who volunteered to fight in Sabijee. Governor Reeves MacDonnell

²⁸⁰ NRS, CSO 1/11, letter from Secretary of State to Governor O’Connor, 10 December, 1853.

²⁸¹ NRS, CSO 1/11, letter from Secretary of State to Governor O’Connor, 10 December, 1853.

²⁸² NRS, CSO 1/11, letter from Secretary of State to Governor O’Connor, 26 July, 1853.

²⁸³ The National Archives UK (Kew), WO 287/3, Military Report on the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia, Vol. 1, 13-14.

had reconstituted the Bathurst Militia in 1848 through a legislative ordinance.²⁸⁴ Recruitment into the militia occurred in draft like fashion wherein; up to 300 male residence of Bathurst between the ages of 16 and 50 who were able to bear arms were liable to be enlisted. If any individual who was enlisted refused to join the militia, they were fined ten pounds or put in prison for up to three months.²⁸⁵ The 1848 Militia Ordinance excluded all the Europeans and wealthy inhabitants of Bathurst from enlist by exempting; all Government officials, minister of the Church of England, teachers, Justices of the peace- which all the wealthy European merchants were- and anyone who could pay 10 pounds.²⁸⁶ Therefore, poor Bathurst residents were generally forced into the militia. However, according to the Militia Ordinance the Bathurst militia was conceived as a defensive force within the colony and not an invading army. But the Militia Ordinance made an exemption for militiamen to volunteer in wars outside the colony with the following:

...lawful for the Governor or officer administering the government for the time being to enroll any number of volunteers from the said militia, and to order them, with their consent, to serve in places beyond the limits of the said settlements and their Dependencies.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ NRS, PUB 5/1, Ordinance to renew and amend an Ordinance intitulated “An Ordinance to embody and constitute a Militia in the Settlement of Bathurst and its Dependencies on the River Gambia.”, 18 October, 1848.

²⁸⁵ NRS, PUB 5/1, Ordinance to renew and amend an Ordinance intitulated “An Ordinance to embody and constitute a Militia in the Settlement of Bathurst and its Dependencies on the River Gambia.”, 18 October, 1848.

²⁸⁶ NRS, PUB 5/1, Ordinance to renew and amend an Ordinance intitulated “An Ordinance to embody and constitute a Militia in the Settlement of Bathurst and its Dependencies on the River Gambia.”, 18 October, 1848.

²⁸⁷ NRS, PUB 5/1, Ordinance to renew and amend an Ordinance intitulated “An Ordinance to embody and constitute a Militia in the Settlement of Bathurst and its Dependencies on the River Gambia.”, 18 October, 1848.

Due to the consent clause in the Militia Ordinance, it is likely that O'Connor had to convince Liberated Africans and Wolof residents in Bathurst to fight in Sabijee. It is possible to imagine that the promise of land which drove O'Connor to war in Kombo was also promised to Bathurst militiamen. Out of 300 men enlisted in the Bathurst militia, 105 fought in the initial engagements of the Sabijee War.²⁸⁸ On the 31st of May 1853 the Gambia Colonial forces began their march on Sabijee.

The goal of the colonial forces in 1853 was to destroy the defences, and symbolic power that Sabijee held as a religious center in Kombo. As discussed in the previous section tensions in Kombo were high towards the end of MacDonnell's tenure. During that time Sabijee built a stockade around the entire vicinity of Sabijee town.²⁸⁹ Stockades or defensive walls in precolonial Gambian states were usually made from large pieces of wood fix around the entire perimeter of a town-fortifying the town. In the political context of 19th century Gambian Riverine states, a town building a stockade without the king's permission was a political act of defiance against the king. Jatta saw the Sabijee stockade as an act of resistance against his rule. During the Sabijee War, colonial artillery initially bombarded and destroyed the stockade around Sabijee and then the rockets were aimed at the central mosque in town. Colonial accounts claimed that the Sabijee mosque acted as the last line of defense for the Sabijee fighters. In 1885 Major Ellis of the West Indian Regiment recounts the events of the war and destruction of the Sabijee mosque in the following:

²⁸⁸ Kew, WO 287/3, Military Report on the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia, Vol. 1, 13-14.

²⁸⁹ NRS, CSO 1/11, Letter from Secretary of State to Governor O'Connor, 1st September, 1853.

When the British attacked, the armed men kept up a heavy fire from the loopholes of their stockade over which a green flag was flying. As the central mosque caught fire, a strong body of fanatics still held the mosque and succeeded in extinguishing the fire in the roof amid the beating of war drums and cries of Allahu Akbar! from the imams. As the fighting became intense, the defenders of the mosque only increased their drumming and shouts of defiance for they were secure in their belief in the local tradition which said that the mosque was impregnable and indestructible. In the end, when the mosque became untenable, dozens of fanatics blew out their brains rather than surrender, while others rushed, sword in hand, in a state of frenzy upon the British.²⁹⁰

Here Ellis attempted to portray that the intense defense of the Sabijee mosque by Sabijee fighters was a form of fanaticism. Further, that the defense of the mosque was tied to certain local beliefs. Yet, Ellis does not explain why the British were so determined in destroying the Sabijee mosque after they had already destroyed the stockade. The stockade unlike the mosque was the main form of political defiance against the king of Kombo. According to Ellis the Sabjiece mosque was “the largest mosque in this part of Africa.” While the Sabijee War cannot be summed up as a religious war between “Muslims” and “Pagans” as I have so far tried to show, the colonial government was motivated by religion. British officials in the Gambia used Christianity as a means of social organization. This fact can be seen most clearly from how Liberated African villages were organized as parish with missionary managers. The continued existence of the Sabijee mosque even after the stockades were destroyed would have been a treat to British aims of establishing Christian communities in Kombo. According to oral histories Sabijee was an important place of Islamic learning in Kombo, attracting many religious scholars

²⁹⁰ Major A B Ellis, *The History of the First West Indian Regiment*, (London: Chapman and Hall Limited, 1885).

and students.²⁹¹ The Sabijee Mosque was a symbol of Sabijee's importance as a place of learning in Kombo. Sabijee and its many Islamic scholars would have provided a strong alternative to missionary work planned for in the Liberated African villages that the colonial government hoped to establish in Kombo after the Sabijee War.

In the aftermath of the war, Governor O'Connor began devising plans for securing and settling the captured territory in Kombo. On June 4, 1853, after the destruction of the Sabijee stockade, mosque, and deaths of many Sabijee fighters, Suling Jatta signed a cession treaty giving away Sabijee's lands to the British.²⁹² This treaty officially created Kombo St. Mary in the northern part of Kombo and brought Sabijee and Bakau under British colonial rule. Despite the destruction in Sabijee the people of Sabijee remained in their heavily bombarded town. Sabijee lands however were given to Liberated Africans who participated in the war. O'Connor sent a letter to the Secretary of State asking that forts be next to Sabijee and the Cape of St. Mary, to ensure that the people of Sabijee and Bakau did not launch any attacks on the settlers. As part of this defensive plan O'Connor also requested that an entire company of the West Indian Regiment be sent to the Gambia; with half stationed at the Cape and the other at Sabijee. O'Connor envisioned the colonial settlements in Kombo as Liberated African agricultural villages protected by forts and West Indian Regiment.

²⁹¹ Ousman Mohammed Cham, *Gambia, Sukuta*, February 2018.

²⁹² Kew, WO 287/3, *Military Report on the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia*, Vol. 1, 13-14.

Unfortunately for O'Connor's plans the government in England had switched to a Liberal government in 1853 and the Liberals was against any further British expansion in West Africa.²⁹³

The new Secretary of State for the colonies-the Duke of Newcastle rebuked O'Connor for the war in Sabijee and attempts at expanding the colony. Secretary of State responded in the following to O'Connor's request for military and financial support:

For I cannot take too early an opportunity of impression on you that there is no prospect whatever of any addition to the present Parliamentary note in aid of the Public expenditure at the Gambia, or of any military force being sent there, and that consequently, the maintenance of this acquisition against the hostility which it may be expected to excite, will, necessarily have to be provided for out of the resources of the Settlement.²⁹⁴

The Secretary of state under the Liberal Government was unwilling to increase the parliamentary aid and military spending on the Gambia because of the Sabijee War. Although, the Secretary of State was opposed to the Sabijee War, the treaty of cession signed by Suling Jatta was accepted by the Imperial Government. O'Connor was therefore successful in capturing new agricultural lands for Liberated Africans and Wolofs in Bathurst. However, the Imperial government's refusal to provide financial and military support left the colony with a huge financial burden and poorly protected conquered territory.

In response to the rejection from the Colonial Office, O'Connor organized the Liberated African and Wolof settlers in Kombo into what he called "military villages." O'Connor celebrated

²⁹³ See Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, (London, Hutchinson & Co Ltd, 1968) 45-50; Crowder discusses the British policy of non-intervention and the imperial governments policy against territorial expansion in West Africa during the mid-19th century.

²⁹⁴ NRS, CSO 1/11, Letter from Secretary of State to Governor O'Connor, 26 July 1853

the military villages and his hope that the Wesleyan Church would soon enter the conquered areas with the following:

The Wesleyan Missionary Society steadily persevere in their their meritorious and useful labours in God's vineyard...I trust before any considerable time has elapsed temporary places of worship and chapels will be found at "Jeswang," Bacco Konko, a military village, and even at "Sabagee;" and the field thus boldly taken by those "soldiers of Christ" against the creed and followers of the "false prophet," the fast spreading tide of Mahomedanism may be checked,-at all events in the British Settlements in Combo.²⁹⁵

Related to the discussion on the Sabijee Mosque, the quote here shows O'Connor's concern with placing the Liberated African and Wolof soldiers referred to as "soldiers of Christ" in Muslim dominated region of Kombo. O'Connor expresses the idea that "Mahomedanism" is spreading fast and must be checked, erasing the fact that it was Christianity which was being forcefully spread in Kombo. O'Connor frames the settlement of Liberated African and Wolof soldiers in Kombo as a religious war. By framing colonial expansion as a religious war, O'Connor obfuscate the land grab which under pinned the entire encounter and the most likely cause of conflict between settlers and indigenous inhabitants. It is also important to note the name of the military village of *Bacco Konko* or *Bakau Kunko*. *Kunko* in Mandinka means farm, the name tells us that O'Connor granted Liberated Africans lands that were the former farms of the people of Bakau.

Without much imperial military support the Gambia colony found the protection the fertile land conquered in Kombo difficult. In 1855, there was conflict between the people of

²⁹⁵ PP,1855, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1854.

Sabijee and the settlers in Kombo St. Mary. It is not clear what happened, but colonial sources refer to the acts of Sabijee “disturbances.” O’Connor called the conflict the “The Combo Insurrection.”²⁹⁶ In response to Sabijee’s acts the colonial government sent a force of 120 West Indian regiment soldiers, 26 pensioners and 120 Gambia Militia men to attack Sabijee. On the way to Sabijee the colonial forces were ambushed by Sabijee fighters resulting in the deaths of 23 colonial soldiers and the injury of 53 among the colonial forces.²⁹⁷ After this first battle, Sabijee allied with a southern Kombo Islamic scholarly community called Gunjur threatened to attack Bathurst. The colony then asked the French in the nearby colony of Senegal for assistance. A French gun boat and 80 men arrived from Goree. On the 3rd of August 1855 a combined British and French forces descended on Sabijee. On the way to Sabijee, the colonial troops were ambushed at “Bakau woods” and had to repel four waves of counterattack before they could reach Sabijee.²⁹⁸ The colonial forces then bombarded Sabijee, destroying the town and pushing those left alive to flee beyond Kombo St. Mary. Even with the defeat of Sabijee however, war continued in Kombo as Sabijee’s ally Gunjur began its own expansion and attack on the Mandinka elite in Kombo.²⁹⁹ Kombo after 1853 continued to be in a state of civil war.

Kombo in the aftermath of the Sabijee war was transformed from a colonial frontier into a colonial border. The Secretary of State ordered O’Connor in 1853 to build a boundary of “stone masonry” around the conquered territory and warned him that “it is

²⁹⁶ PP, 1856, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1855.

²⁹⁷ Kew, WO 287/3, Military Report on the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia, Vol. 1, 13-14.

²⁹⁸ Kew, WO 287/3, Military Report on the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia, Vol. 1, 13-14.

²⁹⁹ Sarr, *Islam, Power and Dependency*, 114-120.

your duty not to undertake any expeditions beyond the limits of the colony, without previous orders from this country, nor accept by cessions or otherwise any addition of territory.”³⁰⁰ The colony would not expand further into Kombo till 1894.

The fertile soil which the colony was in search of at the beginning of Governor MacDonnell’s tenure in 1848 had been captured by Governor O’Connor in 1853 Sabijee War. However, O’Connor’s war in Sabijee came at great financial cost to the Gambia colony. Moreover, the Gambia colony was left without financial or military backing from the metropole to secure the conquered land. Under O’Connor and because of the conquest in Kombo, the British colonial idea and form of the agricultural and Christian Liberated African village became militarized with most of its residents being soldiers or prepare for war. In 1859, Liberated Africans settled in Kombo continued to live amidst an ongoing state of war. The situation in the Gambia by the beginning of Governor D’Arcy’s regime in 1859, was that the safest place in the colony was the tiny Island of St. Mary’s as it was surrounded by hostile neighbors. And lacked the ability to fully military engage them as it had no support from the empire. D’Arcy shifted the colonial frontier back to the mangroves through land reclamation, in response to Liberated African demands for land on St. Mary’s Island for security purposes.

³⁰⁰ NRS, CSO 1/11, Letter from Downing Street to Governor O’Connor, 10 December 1853.

2.6 Governor D’Arcy and the return to land reclamation, 1859-1866

In 1859 colonial Gambia came under the regime of Colonel George Abbas D’Arcy, a governor who engaged in the most extensive land reclamation projects in the mid-19th century. After the failure of Governor Fitzgerald’s land reclamation project in 1847, land reclamation was generally abandoned for territorial expansion into Kombo. D’Arcy’s predecessors as explained in the section above wanted to form new Liberated African and Wolof communities on mainland Kombo that would solve the issues of soil infertility in the colony, French economic competition, and space. By 1859 the British territory of Kombo St. Mary was an unsafe place for the Liberated Africans and Wolof people who were granted Sabijee and Bakau lands by O’Connor. The Sabijee War had only intensified the civil war in Kombo leading to an advancement in military victories and territorial gains for the Islamic scholarly community of Gunjur. D’Arcy deciding to resolve the issues of space, safety, and finances in the colony through land reclamation. however, land reclamation was not the obvious solution for D’Arcy to take as it had been abandoned since Fitzgerald. D’Arcy In an 1864 Report concerned with government expenditure and public works projects writes:

Having served for many years in Bombay and Demerara I was much struck on arrival here to mark the affinity the Gambia bears to these places, for of all three we may appropriately quote, that their inhabitants live- “Where the broad ocean leans against the land, and sedulous to stop the coming tide. Lift the tall rampires artificial pride.”³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Kew, CO 879/2, Letter Governor D’Arcy to the Right Hon. Edward Cardwell, M.P., Report Enclosure 3 in No.3. Bathurst, September 20, 1864.

D'Arcy served as a military official in the South Mahratta country from 1844-45 and as the Aide De Camp or personal assistant to the Governor of Bombay.³⁰² And from 1852 to 1854 he served as an officer in the West Indian Regiment in the British West Indies. D'Arcy was stationed in Jamaica, Demerara and Barbados.³⁰³ D'Arcy in quoting a poem from Oliver Goldsmith's *The Traveller* in which the poet describes his experiences in the Netherlands, was not only struck by the ecological "affinities" of these place but was rather articulating the mode of ecological management required to govern such places. The Netherlands in the British experience and imaginary was the preeminent nation of drainers and land reclaimers.³⁰⁴ The drainage and reclamation of the Fens in England used the technical knowledge and skill of Dutch Engineers to increase the power of the British crown over that region. Dutch improvers were equally important in Demerara.

According to D'Arcy Demerara in modern day Guayana was abandoned by the English in 1667 in part due to the repeated flooding and difficulty of settling in the wetland ecology.³⁰⁵ When English gave it up to the Dutch in 1667, the Dutch engaged in extensive drainage and land reclamation work which the British would benefit from when they seized the colony in 1802.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Ian F. W. Beckett, The Capture of Tubabakolong, 1866, The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, Vol. 92, No. 372 (Winter 2014), pp. 259

³⁰³ Ian F. W. Beckett, The Capture of Tubabakolong, 1866, The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, Vol. 92, No. 372 (Winter 2014), pp. 259

³⁰⁴ Eric H. Ash, *The Draining of the Fens Projectors, Popular Politics, and State Building in Early Modern England*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017)147-150.

³⁰⁵ Kew, CO 879/2, Dispatches and Reports in 1864, on the Finances of the Settlements on the Coast of West Africa No. 3, Enclosure 3. Report by Governor D'Arcy.

³⁰⁶ Kew, CO 879/2, Dispatches and Reports in 1864, on the Finances of the Settlements on the Coast of West Africa No. 3, Enclosure 3. Report by Governor D'Arcy.

Thus, British power and control over Demerara was built on Dutch land reclamation and drainage.

British control over Bombay was also made through land reclamation. According to Tim Riding British reclamation in Bombay was used to strengthen British territorial claims over Portuguese ones, as each empire forwarded contradictory and contested imaginaries of the Bombay archipelago's geography.³⁰⁷ Where the Portuguese saw four Islands, the British saw two. By connecting the Islands through land reclamation, British claims were made a reality.³⁰⁸ By talking about Bombay and Demerara D'Arcy was arguing that reclamation in the British experience was an effective solution to difficult political problems.

The problem that D'Arcy faced in 1859 was both a political and spatial one. In 1860 D'Arcy explained to the Secretary of State that there was a shortage of land in Bathurst, claiming that he was "hunted for allotments of ground."³⁰⁹ D'Arcy decided the remaining 120 lots of vacant land in Bathurst would be given to the Newcastle Pensioners.³¹⁰ The Pensioners were the group of disbanded Liberated African soldiers who had fought in the Sabijee Wars, and settled the conquered territory.³¹¹ By 1859 the Pensioners felt increasingly unsafe with the advance of

³⁰⁷ Tim Riding, "Making Bombay Island: land reclamation and geographical conceptions of Bombay, 1661-1728" *Journal of Historical Geography* 59 (2018) :28.

³⁰⁸ Riding, *Making Bombay Island*, 32-38.

³⁰⁹ PP, 1860, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1859

³¹⁰ PP, 1860, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1859

³¹¹ PP, 1860, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1859

Gunjur in their counter offensive against the aristocratic families of Kombo. D’Arcy explained to the Secretary of State that the Pensioners:

respectfully urged that in the event of another war at Combo (by no means an improbable event), they had nothing to fall back upon as a base of operations; they were willing, as before, in 1855 to leave half their number dead on the field, but they wished for ground in Bathurst to send their wives and children on the first alarm being sounded.³¹²

The demands for land by the Newcastle Pensioners suggest that they felt unsafe in Kombo and were looking for more protection from the colonial state. With the ban on expansion from the colonial office and its refusal to send more troops to the Gambia, the colony could not protect this conquered territory through more expansions or warfare. Furthermore, as the Pensioners were among those demanding for more land in Bathurst, Kombo was therefore an unattractive space for most of the colonial population. With no space to expansion either in Kombo or Bathurst, D’Arcy decided to reclaim because he had been in places that had reclaimed. Thus, shifting the colonial frontier from Kombo to the mangrove wetlands.

D’Arcy’s reclamation project was focused on the Half Die Swamp on the southeastern end of St. Mary’s Island.³¹³ From 1860 to 1861 D’Arcy began the work of clearing the mangroves in Half Die and building a sea wall around the area.³¹⁴ D’Arcy conducted this project with fifteen months of convict labor.³¹⁵ Which was an unprecedented use of prison labor in this period. D’Arcy combined the traditional role of prisoners as street cleaners with their new role in

³¹² PP, 1860, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1859.

³¹³ PP, 1861, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1860

³¹⁴ NRS, CSO 1/13, Letter from Governor D’Arcy to Campbell, 28th January 1865.

³¹⁵ PP, 1861, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1860

reclaiming land by having the prisoners dump trash in the reclaimed area.³¹⁶ Trash in colonial Bathurst became an important means of stabilizing the new land that was created. It was during D'Arcy's period that Half Die became an important site of expansion.

The shifting of the colonial frontier under the colonial regime of D'Arcy set into motion an enduring dynamic between the colonial space of St. Mary's Island and the surrounding space. Within this dynamic land reclamation in Bathurst became a colonial response to potential crises or treats coming from within and outside the colony. Land reclamation was a state response to crisis and therefore an exercise of maintaining the British colonial project. The crisis that land reclamation attempted to resolve changed from its first implementation in 1847 under Fitzgerald to the second major attempt at reclamation under D'Arcy. Whereas Fitzgerald was in search of fertile land, D'Arcy was in search of land for safety. However, both reclamation projects were undertaken to answer to the needs of Liberated Africans and their descendants. Thus, linking Liberated African belonging and survival in colonial Gambia to land reclamation. But we should not confuse the colonial state's land reclamation project with pure altruism for Liberated Africans, rather to borrow a phrase from Frederick Liberated Africans after 1807 became the *vital infrastructure* of British empire in West Africa.

³¹⁶ PP, 1861, Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, Part II, Gambia, Blue Books 1864.

2.7 Conclusion

While the Gambia Colony was a place of Liberated African settlement from its founding in 1816, the importance of Liberated Africans to the colony grew exponentially after 1831. During the 1830s repeated shipments of Liberated Africans were sent to the Gambia. The colonial government attempted to manage and ensure the survival of the Liberated Africans brought there by organizing them into Liberated African villages based on the Parish Model from Sierra Leone. The Parish Model project however failed in the Gambia as the type of fertile agricultural land British officials imagined as central to the model did not exist in the Gambia Colony. The Gambia Colony from 1816 to 1852 was composed of swampy islands, shorelines, and mudflats. The Gambian Liberated African Department created in 1831, provided rations for the Liberated Africans who were unable survive off the infertile soil. The closure of the Gambian Liberated African Department in 1843 made the survival and subsistence of Liberated Africans an acute issue for colonial officials. Governor Fitzgerald tried to remedy the Liberated African situation by attempting to reclaim land on St. Mary's Island, the project was however never completed. Fitzgerald's successors move Liberated African settlement onto mainland Kombo in 1853. The precarity of the Kombo settlement due to warfare would lead to another reclamation project on St. Mary's Island under D'Arcy in 1860.

The goal for this chapter has been to show the difficulties of Liberated African resettlement in colonial Gambia and to demonstrate the transformation of the Liberated African village and land reclamation in responding to those difficulties. Land reclamation as this chapter has also shown is always undertaken for more than one purpose. In 19th century colonial Gambia

however, land reclamation was in part a solution to the dilemmas of Liberated African resettlement. For the British empire, it was not enough that they freed slaves and liberated them, these slaves had to serve the empire. On the one hand, the freed slaves or Liberated Africans were used by colonial governments to prove that an agricultural economy based on free labor was possible. Secondly, the Liberated Africans served the military, labor, and demographic needs of the colony. Liberated African resettlement was therefore a new form of British control, one in which structures of being were imposed on Liberated African life to fit British imperial needs. The ability of British officials to impose the agricultural Christian village of the parish model found its practical and ecological limits in the Gambia Colony as it was constituted between 1816-1852. It was within these practical and ecological limits, that land reclamation and territorial expansion in Kombo became colonial responses. The precariousness of territorial expansion made land reclamation the more important colonial response. As such, land reclamation tied Liberated Africans to the Gambia colony by allowing colonial officials to respond to their land and safety needs. Land reclamation while emerging from Liberated African demands and needs, also always made space in a literal and figurative sense for Liberated Africans to belong in the ways suitable to the British colonial project in Gambia.

Chapter 3

‘Children of the soil’: the Fight for Debtor Protections in Colonial Gambia Under the British West African Settlements, 1866-1888

“Those of your petitioners who have done such services and hazard their lives for the protection of their country and are also tax payers are completely shut out of the enjoyment of their revenue, and are nearly half starving; whilst others from their wealthier country are imported here by Sir Arthur E. Kennedy to fill up appointments to the injury of the children of the soil.”

– Petition from Natives of Bathurst to Pope Hennessy, Bathurst, Gambia, 31st October 1872.³¹⁷

In October 1872 leaders of the Liberated African and Wolof communities in Bathurst sent a petition to the newly appointed Governor-in-Chief of Sierra Leone, Pope Hennessy. The petitioners complained of the “...badly wrought out” drains that led to frequent flooding when “...most part of the town [was] inundated for days together.”³¹⁸ Chief among the petitioner’s complaints, however, was the political restructuring of British West Africa that led to Liberated Africans and Wolof elites in Bathurst who were working in the colonial bureaucracy to be replaced by newly arrived Liberated Africans from Sierra Leone. Beginning in 1866, the independent Crown Colonies of Sierra Leone, The Gambia, the Gold Coast, and Lagos were re-organized into a hierarchical structure of dependent colonies administered by a Governor-in-

³¹⁷ National Record Service of The Gambia (NRS), CSO 1/36, Petition from Natives of Bathurst to Pope Hennessy, Bathurst Gambia 31st October 1872.

³¹⁸ NRS, CSO 1/36, Petition from Natives of Bathurst to Pope Hennessy, Bathurst Gambia 31st October 1872.

Chief headquartered in Sierra Leone.³¹⁹ This Governor-in-Chief had the power of executive oversight over all the “British West African Settlements,” as they were newly called. Governor Arthur Kennedy, the object of the petitioner’s ire, placed Liberated Africans from Sierra Leone in bureaucratic positions throughout the Settlements, including in The Gambia. This created resentment among Liberated African leaders in The Gambia who, by the mid-19th century, had gained a footing in the colonial state bureaucracy and municipal affairs as discussed in Chapter One. Despite the clear distinction made in the petition between “others from their wealthier country” (referring to Sierra Leoneans) and the “children of the soil” (Bathurst “natives”), a few months prior, representatives from these two groups of Liberated Africans together sent a separate petition to the British Administrator of The Gambia.

In August 1872 a group of seven Liberated African groundnut traders imprisoned for debt in colonial Bathurst composed a petition asking for an insolvency court to be established in The Gambia to help release them from their debts and imprisonment.³²⁰ The petition’s authors described themselves as “traders, and men of family from Sierra Leone and this place.”³²¹ While there were tensions between the two communities of Liberated Africans that sometimes surfaced

³¹⁹ Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia, 1816-1994*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 65-66; For a short description of the British West African Settlements; see Crowder Michael, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, (London, Hutchinson, 1968); to get a good sense of the administrative structure and its dynamics with the colonial office in England and party politics in Britain; see George James Moutafakis ‘The British Colonial Policy and Administration of The British West African Settlements, 1866-1888’ (Unpublished PhD Diss, New York University, 1960).

³²⁰ ‘Petition for Means of Obtaining Release from Imprisonment for Debt’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872, 30.

³²¹ ‘Petition for Means of Obtaining Release from Imprisonment for Debt’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872, 30.

as in the October 1872 petition above, there were also solidarities forged through the fact that members of both groups could easily be imprisoned for debt at the request of their creditors for indeterminate lengths of time.³²² Most of the people who ended up in The Gambia's debtor's prison in 1872 were Liberated African traders in the groundnut industry who had taken credit from European merchants based in Bathurst. Traders from Sierra Leone, however, had knowledge and perhaps even first-hand experience of accessing an insolvency court in Sierra Leone if and when they found themselves in debt. Members of this community played an important role in arguing for an insolvency court like the one in Sierra Leone to be established in The Gambia colony. This call was part of a larger effort to restructure the credit system inherited from the slave trade that continued to underpin the groundnut trade in The Gambia.

This chapter examines the fight against debt imprisonment in colonial Gambia in the context of the British West African Settlements (1866-1888). Drawing on newspaper articles, court cases, petitions, and administrative correspondence, it argues that the closer contact between Liberated Africans in The Gambia and Sierra Leone ultimately created new opportunities for solidarity that allowed Liberated Africans in The Gambia to better protect themselves and their land from the predatory credit system controlled by European merchants. In 1873, one year after the signing of the petition, the colonial Gambian Administration passed a ban on debt imprisonment under orders from the Governor of Sierra Leone. This ban was the first of its kind in all British West Africa and signaled a break with slave-trade era logics in

³²² 'Debtor's Relief Ordinance for The Gambia', *The African Times*, Vol VIII. 87, London, Wednesday, September 23, 1868, 32.

which confinement and unfree labor had been the means of securing debt and credit. Whereas Chapter One and Chapter Two explored the process of Liberated Africans moving from a place of precarity within the colony to an established position in which access to dry land enabled them to own property and participate in the political life of the colony from 1816 to 1865, this chapter focuses on Liberated African organizing to further secure these economic and political positions in the 1870s and 1880s.

The commercial arrangements that organized the Gambian groundnut trade—the primary colonial export—put Liberated Africans at great risk. Liberated African traders took European manufactured goods on credit from European import/export merchants stationed in Bathurst. Like in most British West African colonies in the 19th century, their commercial credit was securitized with land as the collateral for the loans.³²³ Traders then attempted to barter these goods for groundnuts produced along the banks of the Gambia River.³²⁴ This required Liberated Africans to negotiate with and pay local chiefs to gain permission to trade in their territories; transport and store goods in depots upriver; and maintain the products in good condition. In addition to these challenges, frequent upheavals in the region resulted in the theft and damage of trade goods. Bad harvests and changing tastes and preferences could leave Liberated Africans

³²³ Antony G. Hopkins, Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain's Annexation of Lagos, 1861, *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec. 1980), 777-798; Kristin Mann, Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos, *Signs*, Summer, 1991, Vol. 16, No. 4, 682-706; Also see description of the importance of land in commerce for the 1842 petitioners in chapter one.

³²⁴ National Records Service of the Gambia (NRS), CSO 1/13, Annual Report 1865; For more on the groundnut trade see. Swindell, Kenneth, and Jeng, Alieu. *Migrants, Credit and Climate: The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834-1934*. Leiden: BRILL, 2005.

with nothing to trade for or with. European merchants dominated this credit-based system by controlling prices and monopolizing the import and export of manufactured goods and produce in the colony.³²⁵ Taken together with astronomical interest rates, it was nearly impossible for Liberated African traders to repay their debts. This predatory system resulted in Liberated Africans being in perpetual debt, imprisoned for debt, and in some cases having their land seized by creditors.

Liberated Africans took the creation of the British West African Settlements as an opportunity to struggle for greater freedoms to conduct commerce as free subjects not bound to European commercial magnates. After 1866, the colonial Gambian government had to seek approval from the Governor of Sierra Leone for all legislative and financial affairs and depended on Sierra Leone for military protection.³²⁶ As a result, the political power of European merchants in Bathurst was temporarily circumscribed and they were unable to use the Gambian Legislative and Executive Councils to pass laws that favored them. When the Governor of Sierra Leone pressured Gambia to ban debt imprisonment in 1873 to safeguard Sierra Leonean commercial interests in the region, European merchants in Bathurst were unable to block the move.

Unfortunately for the Liberated African community in Bathurst, European merchants worked to limit the impact of hard-earned debtor protections after 1888. In that year, Gambia again became an independent Crown Colony not beholden to the Governorship of Sierra

³²⁵ C. W. Newbury, 'Credit in Early Nineteenth Century West African Trade', *Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1972), pp. 87-89.

³²⁶ *Parliamentary Papers* (PP), 1865, Report from The Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast); Together with The Proceedings of The Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix 26 June 1865.

Leone.³²⁷ European merchants regained significant political authority and restricted Liberated Africans from the markets in the newly formed Gambia Protectorate through new laws and monetary policies. The colonial government worked to eliminate Liberated Africans as middlemen traders and transformed the Gambian credit system into one that favored European monopolies.³²⁸ The ban on debt imprisonment was never extended to The Gambia Protectorate after its formation in 1889, and by 1900 Liberated Africans had lost their positions as the primary traders between Bathurst and the groundnut producing communities on the Gambia River.

This chapter contributes to a growing body of work on credit and debt systems in nineteenth century West Africa. To date, this scholarship has revealed mechanisms of debt recovery and shown how European and African elites secured their investments and extended their power.³²⁹ By contextualizing the fight for debtor protections in colonial Gambia within the

³²⁷ There was a trend of European merchant backlash and commercial consolidation detrimental to Liberated African commercial endeavors at the end of the nineteenth century which Martin Lynn calls the “European Merchant Counterattack” see Martin Lynn, *Technology, Trade and ‘A Race of Native Capitalist’: The Krio Diaspora of West Africa and The Steamship, 1852-95*, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (1992), 421-440.

³²⁸ NRS CSO 1/29 1870 Census; In the 1870 census Liberated Africans comprised 915 individuals out of a total population of 4,591 on the Island of St Mary’s.

³²⁹ For a good understanding of credit systems in British West Africa in the early nineteenth century; see C. W. Newbury, ‘Credit In Early Nineteenth Century West African Trade’, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (1972), pp. 81-95. For work on the prison as a means of debt recovery and generator of cash flow; see Sarah Balakrishnan, ‘Of Debt And Bondage: From Slavery to Prisons in The Gold Coast’, c. 1807-1957, *Journal of African History*, 61.1 (2020), pp. 3–21; for a focus on political authority as it relates to debt recovery; see Paul E. Lovejoy and David Richardson, ‘This Horrid Hole’: Royal Authority, Commerce and Credit At Bonny, 1690–1840’, *Journal of African History*, 45 (2004), pp. 363–92; for the centrality of credit and debt systems in creating mortgages as financial securities and thus as a driver for commodified forms of land ownership; see Hopkins, Antony G. “Property Rights and Empire Building: Britain’s Annexation of Lagos, 1861.” *The Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 4 (1980): 777–98, Kristin

commercial transformation in West Africa after the end of the Atlantic slave trade, this chapter shows how credit systems were not only sites of struggle between European merchants and their African agents, but also sites through which the formerly enslaved sought rights as British subjects. As Liberated African movements across West Africa increased—facilitated by steamship travel—they began to experience different legal and commercial arrangements within British West Africa that limited intercolonial trade. Demands for more beneficial commercial arrangements made against the backdrop of similar debtor protections being passed in England initiated the homogenization of West African credit and debt systems. As such, juridical wins such as the 1873 ban on debt imprisonment in colonial Gambia are also an important legacy of mid-19th century Liberated African mobility.³³⁰

Further, despite the transformative nature of the British West African Settlements (1866-1888), the scholarship on this era is quite thin.³³¹ Historians have generally characterized this moment as one of imperial decline in West Africa.³³² Scholarly attention has also been drawn to politics in the metropole and the metropolitan relationships to the administrative and military transformations in British West Africa. Little space has been given to the question of how groups

Mann, Women, 'Landed Property, And the Accumulation Of Wealth In Early Colonial Lagos', *Signs*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Women, Family, State, and Economy in Africa (Summer, 1991), pp. 682-706.

³³⁰ James L. A. Webb Jr, 'The Trade in Gum Arabic: Prelude To French Conquest in Senegal', *Journal of African History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1985), pp. 149-168; looks at state intervention in protecting debtors but there is no conversation on the organizing of debtors as the work is most concerned with describing the gum trade and its credit system.

³³¹ Crowder Michael, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*. (London, Hutchinson, 1968); George James Moutafakis 'The British Colonial Policy and Administration of The British West African Settlements, 1866-1888' (Unpublished PhD Diss New York University, 1960).

³³² Crowder Michael, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, 47-48.

like Liberated Africans strategically used these administrative and military transformations to their advantage. Furthermore, since most historical accounts of colonial British West Africa are framed spatially by the borders of modern African states, this era of intercolonial movement and trade tends to be overlooked. The significance of the British West African Settlements varies depending on the colony. For example, this period was short-lived in the Gold Coast and Lagos. The Gold Coast became independent of the British West African Settlements in 1874 and absorbed Lagos as its dependency.³³³ By contrast, The Gambia remained a part of the British West African Settlements until 1888. The Gambia's loss of legislative and executive independence during this time enabled Liberated Africans to transform the credit system and shore up their status as "children of the soil."

This chapter is organized chronologically. The first section unravels the question of how most of the people imprisoned for debt in Bathurst in the early 1870s were Liberated African men. The second section situates prisoner petitions to end debt imprisonment from 1872 and 1873 within the wider context of the British West African Settlements. This includes the administrative and military re-arrangement of British West Africa, the influx of Sierra Leonean Liberated African traders into the Gambia colony, and the civil war in the groundnut-producing region of Gambia, Baddibu. This war put Liberated African traders at a heightened risk of being imprisoned for debts accrued through no fault of their own. Successful in their organizing, debt imprisonment was banned in The Gambia colony in 1873. Despite this and other hard-earned

³³³ Moutafakis, *The British Colonial Policy*, 84-86.

gains made between 1866 and 1888, the third and final section considers how European merchants spent the next decade working to curtail these and other debtor protections and to limit the political and economic power of Liberated Africans in Bathurst. The declaration of the Gambia Protectorate in 1889 and the growing French-dominated cash-based economy signaled the end of Liberated Africans as the primary African traders in the colony.

3.1 From Apprentices to Traders: Liberated Africans in the Gambia, 1807-1865

This section considers how Liberated Africans became the primary middlemen in the Gambian groundnut trade in the mid-nineteenth century, and the predatory credit relationships that they entered to occupy that position. The credit relationships between Liberated African traders and European merchant creditors were labor relationships that emerged from the British apprenticeship system, which itself was created to manage the transition from slavery to emancipation. The transition mediated by the colonial state-backed apprenticeship system favored the labor requirements of European merchants over the autonomy of the formerly enslaved Liberated Africans, a dynamic that would manifest in their credit relationships after apprenticeship.

By the mid-nineteenth century, European merchants in Bathurst were mainly interested in organizing labor around the extraction of groundnuts produced up the Gambia River. By 1860 there were eight primary European firms stationed in Bathurst, four British and four French.³³⁴ All the major European firms imported European goods and exported groundnuts grown in the

³³⁴ NRS, CSO 1/18, Admiral Patey to Governor in Chief Arthur Kennedy 22 June 1869.

Gambia River. To access groundnuts, British merchants gave Liberated African middlemen goods such as textiles, firearms, tobacco, rum, and iron on credit and tasked them with bartering these goods for groundnuts from African producers.³³⁵ For Liberated African middlemen to take goods on credit European merchants required them to provide land as a collateral for the debt. As described in Chapter One, the commercial system that emerged at the end of the Atlantic Slave Trade was increasingly securitized through landed property as opposed to pawnship or other forms of hostage-taking.³³⁶

Unlike their British counterparts, French merchants preferred to give cash to their agents to buy directly from producers. As such, the agents for French firms more closely resembled employees than independent traders.³³⁷ Nonetheless, the French cash system and the British credit-barter system both relied on African agents who operated between Bathurst and riverine communities because European merchants typically remained stationed at Bathurst.³³⁸ British administrators in The Gambia claimed that European merchants and traders did not leave Bathurst for the interior because of “the nature of the climate which has hitherto rendered it difficult to command the means of establishing European agency...”³³⁹ The refusal to move beyond Bathurst and remain sedentary, wealthy, and protected by a military was another

³³⁵ NRS, CSO 1/13, Annual Report 1865.

³³⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy Pawnship, Debt, And ‘Freedom’ In Atlantic Africa During the Era of The Slave Trade: A Reassessment, *Journal of African History*, 55 (2014), 55–78.

³³⁷ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1859, Gambia.

³³⁸ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1848, Gambia, 52.

³³⁹ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1848.

dimension of European merchants' displacement of risk onto Liberated African middlemen who risked their finances and their lives to trade upriver.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Liberated Africans in The Gambia emerged as the primary traders for European merchants seeking to export groundnuts.³⁴⁰ Prior to this, European merchants in Bathurst relied mainly on “colored men,” a few European agents, and Mandinka merchants known as Julas to facilitate trade in the Gambia River.³⁴¹ Merchant preferences changed with the Gambian colonial state's large “importation” or forced resettlement of 2,468 Liberated Africans into The Gambia from Sierra Leone between 1832 and 1835.³⁴² The arrival of large numbers of Liberated Africans—many of whom were children—gave European merchants access to a new cheap labor pool.

Many of the children and young adults among the Liberated African community became tied to European merchants through the apprenticeship system.³⁴³ By the 1830s, apprentices were African children and young adults up to the age of 18 who had been freed from slave ships by

³⁴⁰ Florence K. Omolara Mahoney, ‘Government and Opinion in The Gambia 1816-1901’ (unpublished PhD thesis, London University, 1963) 114-115.

³⁴¹ PP, 1842, Report from The Select Committee on The West Coast Of Africa Part 1 Report And Evidence, Madden Report 31 July 1841.

³⁴² Richard Anderson, The Diaspora of Sierra Leone's Liberated Africans: Enlistment, forced Migration and Liberation at Freetown, 1808-1863. *African Economic History* V.41(2013): 111-116; almost all apprentices came from Sierra Leone.

³⁴³ PP, 1827, Report on the Commission of Inquiry Into The State Of The Colony Of Sierra Leone, Second Part, Dependencies In The Gambia, Rowan Report 9 May 1827; for apprenticeship in the Caribbean and Jamaica see Vasconcellos, Colleen A, *Slavery, Childhood, and Abolition in Jamaica, 1788-1838*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015); for apprenticeship in West Africa see Daniel Domingues da Silva, David Eltis Philp Misevich, Olatunji Ojo, The Diaspora of Africans Liberated from Slave Ships In the Nineteenth Century, *Journal of African History*, 55 (2014), 358-359.

British squadrons and resettled or forced to migrate to colonial cities like Bathurst.³⁴⁴

Apprenticeship was a form of indentured servitude during which the “master” was obligated to provide food, shelter, clothing, religious instruction, and training to the apprentice. In return, the apprentice was supposed to give their “master” their labor and obedience. Under the system of apprenticeship, European merchants were tasked with turning freed African children into productive Christian citizens of the colony. Apprentices who violated their labor commitments and servility to their merchant masters could be punished with imprisonment.³⁴⁵

The British apprenticeship system and the colonial prison were important ways in which European merchants accessed and maintained forms of unfree labor after the Atlantic Slave Trade was abolished in 1807. The first British merchants who settled Bathurst at its founding in 1816, such as William Goddard, kept their armies of slaves from Senegal by registering them as apprentices. They also incorporated new Liberated African labor through the same means.³⁴⁶ British officials in The Gambia eagerly supported apprenticeship because the system reduced the cost of the British antislavery campaign by displacing costs associated with caring for the freed slaves from the colonial state to European merchants. Through apprenticeship British merchants like Goddard who were formerly slave holders and dependent on slave labor maintained their

³⁴⁴ Although apprentices after the British ban on the slave trade were both adults and children, by the 1830s they were exclusively children and young adults up to the age of 18.

³⁴⁵ NRS, CSO 1/48 Frederick Speer to the Administrator of the Gambia, June 30, 1877.

³⁴⁶ For information on Goddard; see Florence K. Omolara Mahoney, ‘Notes On Mulattoes Of The Gambia Before The Mid-Nineteenth Century’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 1965, Vol. 8 (1965), 120-129

wealth and commercial positions in the new Gambian colony.³⁴⁷ After their apprenticeship, Liberated Africans often continued to work for their merchant “masters” as traders or dealers.³⁴⁸ Merchants defined traders as “...servants paid monthly wages,” while dealers were “...men who take goods on credit for six months or more.”³⁴⁹ Liberated African dealers (referred to as “traders” or “middlemen” in this chapter) became the preferred group for trade along The Gambia River.

As discussed in Chapter One, most of the colonial population in Bathurst lived on wet, flood-prone land with no arable land for cash crops such as groundnuts. Those who did have enough dry land preferred to use it as collateral for commercial pursuits up the Gambia River. Additionally, the small mainland parts of the colony in Northern Kombo entered a prolonged state of civil war in the 1850s due to British attempts at territorial expansion. This rendered agricultural pursuits in those areas insecure.³⁵⁰ With few other options for work, many formerly apprenticed Liberated Africans trained in commerce used their land and social networks to access goods on credit from their former masters or other European merchants to sell upriver.

³⁴⁷ NRS, PUB 5/1 Act to explain and render more clear an Act of the British Parliament passed in the Fifth Year of Reign of his late Majesty King George the Fourth, intituled “An Act to amend and consolidate the Laws relating to the Abolition of the Slave Trade.”, 31 December 1831.

³⁴⁸ Mahoney, ‘Government and Opinion’.

³⁴⁹ NRS, CSO 1/62 Petition from “merchants, agents of mercantile houses, and other residents, or natives of Bathurst in the British Settlements on the River Gambia” to Right Hon. The Earl of Kimberley Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies. 27 Dec 1881. In this article Liberated African trader prefers to dealers who were not servants of European Merchants but relied on their credit to conduct trade.

³⁵⁰ NRS, CSO 1/36, Upper and Lower Combo, Trade Treaty and Contract that neither of the parties will molest one another’s Territory, Treaty, 24th March 1873.

The credit relationships between European merchants and Liberated Africans were predatory and disadvantageous for the trader. Arthur Kennedy, the Governor-in-Chief of British West Africa, accused European merchants in Bathurst of charging “fifty percent on principal” of the trade goods they gave out as credit.³⁵¹ The governor was not alone in making these accusations. They were echoed in *The African Times*, a popular London-based newspaper that circulated in British West Africa from 1861 to the 1890s.³⁵² *The African Times* published articles aimed at showing the plight of Liberated African traders and the unfairness of the Gambian credit system.³⁵³

First published in 1861, *The African Times* began as a newspaper produced by the African Aid Society in London. This Society was devoted to promoting African American migration to Africa, along with spreading “Christianity” and “Commerce” in Africa. The African Aid Society used the newspaper as an outlet for that cause.³⁵⁴ By 1866 however, the African Aid Society broke with the main editor of the newspaper, Ferdinand Fitzgerald, an obscure historical

³⁵¹ *Parliamentary Papers*, 1870, The Gambia Settlement, Enclosure in No.85 Governor Sir Arthur Kennedy to Right Honorable the Earl of Kimberley. Kennedy accuses the merchants of making “advances of goods to their traders or buyers at about 50 percent, on invoice prices.”

³⁵² Derrick, Jonathan. *Africa, Empire, and Fleet Street: Albert Cartwright and West Africa Magazine*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2018).

³⁵³ ‘Petition For Means Of Obtaining Release From Imprisonment For Debt and Legal Release From Debt At Bathurst’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872; ‘Defiance of British Authorities In The Gambia’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.136, London, Wednesday, October 23, 1872; ‘The Prisoners at The Gambia, Petition Of The Prisoners In Bathurst Gaol and Merchant Oppression At The Gambia’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.137, London, Friday, November 29, 1872; ‘Imprisonment for Debt at Bathurst’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.141, London, Saturday, March 29, 1873; ‘The Debt Prisoners Not Yet Released’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.145, London, Tuesday, July 29, 1873; ‘Imprisonment for Debt Abolition Ordinance, Letter of Thanks From The Late Prisoners In Bathurst Gaol and Abolition Of Imprisonment For Debt At Bathurst Gambia’, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.150, London, Wednesday, December 31, 1873.

³⁵⁴ Jonathan Derrick, *Africa, Empire and Fleet Street*, 14.

figure believed to be an Irishman who championed Liberated African causes.³⁵⁵ After Fitzgerald's break with the African Aid Society, he made deeper ties with the emerging Liberated African commercial class across West Africa. Fitzgerald acted as an agent in England for Liberated African traders trying to procure goods directly from England on commission. Fitzgerald not only relied on Liberated African correspondents for content for the paper, but he used the commissions he earned as an agent to fund the newspaper after its break with the African Aid Society.³⁵⁶ Despite the questions surrounding the identity of Fitzgerald, by the 1870s *The African Times* had become a Liberated African newspaper. As such it provides unique insight into the Liberated African commercial community in British West Africa in the second half of the 19th century.

In 1868 Ferdinand Fitzgerald, drawing on insights from Liberated African correspondents, wrote the following about the plight of Liberated African traders in colonial Gambia:

They have therefore, to take the goods for barter from the merchants. At the merchants' prices, as agents with the responsibility of principals. They are charged with the goods they take up River for barter, at prices which may possibly enable them, in a very good ground-nut season, and barring accidents and plunder by marauding tribes (for there is no efficient British protection up the River), to cover their expenses and realise a small sum for the support of their

³⁵⁵ Jonathan Derrick, *Africa, Empire and Fleet Street*, 15.

³⁵⁶ There is little in the literature on this issue and evidence for this can be gained from the papers themselves. In editions of the *African Times* produced after 1866, there is an advertisement in the front page of the newspaper for the AFRICAN AGENCY for transacting business in England for Native and other traders on the West Coast of Africa. This ad also adds "Mr. Fitzgerald has made arrangements for selling produce consigned to him by ships to London or Liverpool."

families; but practically, the result is, that the unfortunate trader is always in debt to the merchant—is hopelessly his slave.³⁵⁷

In this excerpt, Ferdinand described the barter system through which Liberated African traders procured groundnuts in exchange for European merchants' goods. Fitzgerald argued that Liberated African traders bore too much risk in the trade, in part because there was no British military protection along the Gambia River after the military's partial withdrawal in 1865. Fitzgerald noted that since European merchants had the power to set prices and carried none of the risks associated with the trade, they reaped almost all the profits from a successful trade but little loss in an unsuccessful one. This editorial portrayed the commercial arrangements in The Gambia as tantamount to slavery to mobilize abolitionist sentiments among a London-based and African readership. Fitzgerald effectively painted European merchants as violators of the abolitionist cause many decades after the 1807 abolition of the slave trade.³⁵⁸

Due to the inflated European merchant prices and the persistent outbreaks of warfare along the Gambia River during the mid- to late-19th century, Liberated Africans could rarely escape their debts. While Liberated Africans could opt to leave the colony altogether, they were not guaranteed any protection from the violence that engulfed the region and ran the risk of being re-enslaved. Liberated Africans preferred the relative safety of Bathurst and therefore remained tied to European merchants, many of whom had formerly been their "masters." As Newbury

³⁵⁷ Debtor's Relief Ordinance for The Gambia' *The African Times* Vol. VIII No.87. London, Wednesday, September 23, 1868.

³⁵⁸ Seymour Drescher, 'Emperors of the World: British Abolitionism and Imperialism', in Derek Peterson (eds.), *Abolitionism and Imperialism in Britain, Africa and the Atlantic*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010) 136-137.

(1972) argued, the credit arrangements of the Gambian groundnut trade created a clear division and hierarchy between the European import/export merchant and the African middleman trader who had almost no possibility of advancement.³⁵⁹ The highest positions that Liberated Africans could look to earn in mid-nineteenth century Bathurst were to become merchant clerks or small shop owners, one example being the “grog shop” owners described in Chapter One.

European merchant power over Liberated African traders was not limited to their control of the credit and debt system. Prior to ending up in prison for their debts, Liberated Africans were first judged in court by their creditors. All the primary European merchants in Bathurst were appointed by colonial administrators as Justices of the Peace.³⁶⁰ In this role, they had the ability and privilege of deciding most minor civil and criminal cases. British officials argued that unqualified European merchants had been given such judicial positions because of staff shortages in the colony. However, the 1841 Madden Report on The Gambia as part of a parliamentary commission on West Africa accused the Gambian administration of willfully making every white person in the colony a Justice of the Peace. The report stated, “The practice of giving the commission of the peace to every white person settled in the colony... has a great tendency to bring the magisterial office into contempt.”³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Newbury, *Credit*, 87-89.

³⁶⁰ PP, 1842, Report from The Select Committee on The West Coast of Africa Part 1 Report And Evidence, Madden Report 31 July 1841.

³⁶¹ Pp, 1842, Report from The Select Committee on The West Coast of Africa Part 1 Report And Evidence, Appendix No. 8, Gambia, Commissioner’s Report, The Government, Administration of the Laws And Public Establishments.

European merchant dominance over the judicial system gave them an important hold over Liberated African labor. One of the most influential British merchants in colonial Bathurst, Thomas Brown (1811-1881), was not only a major creditor in Bathurst but also a judge and a member of the Executive Council. Brown presided over many debt cases in which the individuals in court were indebted to him, using the court as a means to renegotiate his own credit agreements. Furthermore, the property and educational requirements imposed for jurors from the early nineteenth century meant that juries were also full of merchants or their clerks.³⁶² With little to no opposition in court, if a European merchant wanted their Liberated African agents to be imprisoned for debt it was a simple matter to adjudicate. Accordingly, in debt cases where land was involved it was also easy for European merchants to claim their land.³⁶³

European merchants used their executive and legislative positions to block any passage of debtor protections. The Gambian Legislative Council was comprised of British officials such as the Governor and Secretary of State, and unofficial members who were all European merchants.³⁶⁴ The first unofficial member of the legislative council was William Goddard, a former slave holder from Goree, Senegal appointed in 1843.³⁶⁵ By 1865 there were three European merchants on the nine-person legislative council and one European merchant on the

³⁶² NRS, Pub 5/1 Ordinance for the better regulation of Juries and the mode of returning the same, 28 April 1845.

³⁶³ NRS, CSO 1/64, Martha Thorpe Vs Mary Ann Isidore, Ejectment Trial 16th June 1879. This trial was after the passage of the ban on debt imprisonment, but it gives some important insights as the prosecution had to show that the debtor was not a fraudulent debtor who either hide property outside of the colony upriver or engaged in unauthorized transactions with the goods given on credit. The higher threshold for culpability was because of the 1873 Debtors Act.

³⁶⁴ Arnold, and Perfect, *A Political History*, 47-48.

³⁶⁵ Arnold, and Perfect, *A Political History*, 47-48.

five-person executive council. In the same year and under pressure from Liberated Africans, Governor of the Gambia George Abbas D'Arcy attempted to introduce a Bankruptcy Act in the Gambia in 1865 shortly after it was passed in Sierra Leone. Unsurprisingly, it was rejected by the merchants on the legislative council.³⁶⁶ As discussed in Chapter Two, D'Arcy tried to improve the Liberated African position in Bathurst as further colonial expansion and Liberated African resettlement outside the colony became impossible. The Bankruptcy Act would have given Liberated African agents the chance to be released from debtor's prison, renegotiate debts, and possibly discharge those debts by declaring bankruptcy.³⁶⁷

By the mid-nineteenth century, debt peonage was an essential part of the groundnut trade in the Gambia. Predatory lending and ballooning debts tied Liberated African land and labor in the groundnut trade to European merchants in continuity with the apprenticeship system. As with that system, the debtor-creditor relationships between Liberated Africans and European merchants were enforced through the debtor's prison. Any attempts to change this system were blocked by European merchants, who controlled both the colonial Executive and Legislative Councils.

3.2 Sierra Leoneans and a changing commercial landscape, 1866-1873

Increased Liberated African autonomy and participation in the groundnut trade came after the fight for debtor protections led to the abolition of debt imprisonment in 1873. This

³⁶⁶ Mahoney, *Government and Opinion*, 137.

³⁶⁷ NRS, CSO 1/38 Queen's Advocate to Governor-in-Chief, 13th June 1874.

section situates prisoner petitions and the end of debt imprisonment within the context of the British West African Settlements, the arrival of Sierra Leonian Liberated African traders, and the spread of civil war in the primary groundnut producing region of Baddibu up the Gambia River which put Liberated Africans at a heightened risk of being imprisoned for debt.

Bathurst's debtor's prison was an important institution through which European merchants controlled their Liberated African agents on the Gambia river and sought the repayment of debts. Once in prison, traders were fed by their creditors while they worked to pay off their debts.³⁶⁸ Ferdinand Fitzgerald of *The African Times* explained the position of Liberated Africans in the debt prison system as follows:

In the event of his desiring emancipation from this thralldom, or claiming for himself and his fellows equal protection and advantages with the merchants under British rule, he is proceeded against in the court of law for the balance alleged to be standing against him, has, almost as a matter of course, judgment pronounced against him, and from that moment becomes a hopeless and helpless victim of injustice under the name of law, to be locked up or allowed to be at large only at the will and caprice of his creditors.³⁶⁹

In this piece, Fitzgerald attempted to show how British laws and courts were being manipulated in The Gambia for European merchants' own ends. Fitzgerald argued that while British law was technically supposed to give Liberated African traders equal "protection and advantages," it was generally used in The Gambia to suppress any opposition to the commercial system. For Fitzgerald and his Liberated African readers, the law in The Gambia was backward

³⁶⁸ *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.137, London, Friday, November 29, 1872.

³⁶⁹ *The African Times* Vol. VIII No.87. London, Wednesday, September 23, 1868.

and did not adhere to the progressive legislations being passed in England and in Sierra Leone around debt and credit.³⁷⁰ In Sierra Leone, an insolvency court had been established in 1864.³⁷¹

For the European merchants in The Gambia, the movement of Liberated African traders between the colony at Bathurst and up the Gambia Tiver was essential for the functioning of the groundnut trade. However, this movement also posed a problem for creditors: how could European merchants be sure that their traders were buying groundnuts with the goods given to them on credit, as opposed to other items? Merchants argued that debt imprisonment was necessary because Liberated Africans travelled and conducted trade outside the colony. They claimed that since Liberated African traders spent time beyond the colony, they could hide goods and profits they made upriver away from the merchants' gaze and outside of the colonial court's jurisdiction.³⁷² According to this logic, the colonial court and debtor's prison could force Liberated African traders to disclose their hidden goods and halt unauthorized transactions. This argument ignored Liberated Africans' complaints that they bore all the risk of trade up the river, earned little profits if any at all, and that they were imprisoned if they protested the unfair system. It also ignored Liberated Africans' ties to Bathurst, and their general preference for living within the colony where their security was better guaranteed.

European merchants' ability to maintain their political power and the commercial system that benefited them began to weaken with the creation of the British West African Settlements in

³⁷⁰ *The African Times* Vol. VIII No.87. London, Wednesday, September 23, 1868.

³⁷¹ Mahoney, *Government and Opinion*, 137.

³⁷² NRS, CSO 1/62 Petition from "merchants, agents of mercantile houses, and other residents, or natives of Bathurst in the British Settlements on the River Gambia" to Right Hon. The Earl of Kimberley Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies. 27 Dec 1881.

1866. The British West African Settlements were created through a process of imperial centralization of the British colonies in West Africa. Under the British West African Settlements, Sierra Leone became the seat of the Governor-in-Chief and other British West African colonies were downgraded into dependencies of Sierra Leone. Colonies including The Gambia lost their independent executive and legislative councils, and their governors were demoted to administrators under the Sierra Leone Governor-in-Chief.³⁷³ As such, European merchants in The Gambia lost their legislative and executive council positions, making them unable to block the passage of laws that the Governor-in-Chief approved.

The creation of the British West African Settlements was borne out of the dying British fervor against the Atlantic Slave Trade. A segment of British metropolitan politicians and the public considered the Atlantic Slave Trade to be over by the mid-1860s.³⁷⁴ They questioned the continuing British military and colonial presence in West Africa that had been justified as necessary to ending the slave trade. British politicians who were against West African colonization also critiqued the large amounts of military spending in West Africa.³⁷⁵ In response to these concerns the British parliament established a commission in 1865 to inquire into the state of British West Africa.³⁷⁶ The policy decision that resulted from this commission was the

³⁷³ PP, 1865, Report from The Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast) ; Together With The Proceedings of The Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix 26 June 1865.

³⁷⁴ Seymour Drescher, 'Emperors of the World: British Abolitionism and Imperialism', in Derek Peterson, *Abolitionism and Imperialism in British, Africa, and the Atlantic*, (Ohio University Press, 2010) , 142.

³⁷⁵ Crowder Michael, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, (London, Hutchinson, 1968).

³⁷⁶ PP, 1865, Report from The Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast); Together With The Proceedings of The Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix 26 June 1865.

withdrawal of British troops from all West African colonies except Sierra Leone, and the administrative rearrangements described above.

The 1865 commission also argued that the risk of military withdrawal to Sierra Leone could be mitigated by the steamship. Commissioners claimed that the steamship could facilitate quick communication and movement of troops if necessary, in addition to the inter-territorial travel of the Governor-in-Chief stationed in Sierra Leone. To increase the availability of steamships and the frequency of travel, the commission recommended that colonial governments subsidize steamships.³⁷⁷ This recommendation led to what came to be known as the “mail subsidy,” or the subsidization of the steamship which was also central to the opening of steamship travel to many Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans.³⁷⁸

Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans travelled on steamships across West Africa in pursuit of work and opportunity outside of Sierra Leone. This movement tied the economy and politics of Sierra Leone more closely to other British West African colonies, including The Gambia. In the 1860s Sierra Leoneans came to The Gambia as wealthy merchants, petty traders, and new low-level administrative staff for the colony. Liberated African women from Sierra Leone expanded the kola nut trade in The Gambia and other colonies, transforming kola nuts into Sierra Leone’s second largest export.³⁷⁹ This women-dominated trade was a new industry in The

³⁷⁷ PP, 1865, Report from The Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast); Together With The Proceedings of The Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix 26 June 1865.

³⁷⁸ PP, 1865, Report from The Select Committee on Africa (Western Coast); Together With The Proceedings of The Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix 26 June 1865.

³⁷⁹ E. Frances White, ‘Creole Woman Traders in the Nineteenth Century’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 1981, vol. 14 No. 4, 633-636.

Gambia, and Liberated African women traders offered an alternative path to income and credit for many Liberated Africans in The Gambia. The success of this trade enabled the emergence of a wealthier and more financially independent class of Liberated Africans in Bathurst. At the same time, other Sierra Leoneans came to work as traders upriver in both the groundnut and kola nut industries. Like their Gambian counterparts, many of these traders took credit from European merchants at great risk and found themselves imprisoned in Bathurst for debt. In 1872, the imprisoned Sierra Leonean debtors and their Gambian counterparts demanded that the Gambian administration give them the same debtor protections as had been instituted in Sierra Leone.

On August 9, 1872, seven people imprisoned for debt in Bathurst wrote a petition to the Administrator of the Gambia asking for an insolvency court to be established in the colony. They described themselves as “traders, and men of family from Sierra Leone and this place.”³⁸⁰ They wrote that they had been honest to the creditors and would pay their debts “but the series of wanton outrages perpetuated by bands of marauders in our places of trade, are the causes of our bad debts and shortcomings.”³⁸¹ By “wanton outrages,” the petitioners were referring to the theft of their trade goods which they had taken on credit from European merchants. The petitioners pointed out that, unlike in Sierra Leone, The Gambia colony had no insolvency court and asked why the European merchants in The Gambia should “...be over-favored at the cost of us poor

³⁸⁰ Petition For Means of Obtaining Release From Imprisonment For Debt, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872.

³⁸¹ Petition For Means of Obtaining Release From Imprisonment For Debt, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872.

people, who have to go through all the privations in the rivers with their goods?”³⁸² The petitioners’ question was a rhetorical argument against the Gambian credit system which strictly enforced the payment of debts through debt imprisonment, even when the debtors’ inability to payback their loans was due to theft resulting from a lack of British military protection.

The demands of the prisoners in The Gambia were formed in the context of a broader shift both in England and its colonies towards greater access for declaring bankruptcy and the abolition of debt imprisonment. In 1861 the British parliament passed the Bankruptcy Act in England which allowed non-merchants to declare bankruptcy. As noted previously, the Governor of The Gambia attempted to introduce the same legislation in 1865 after it was adopted in Sierra Leone. By the late 1860s, there was a more radical push in England to end debt imprisonment, culminating in the Debtors Act of 1869.³⁸³ This formally ended debt imprisonment for non-fraudulent debtors, although the practice continued for some time.

Keenly aware of these developments due to outlets like *The African Times* and Liberated Africans’ own movement around the Atlantic, Liberated Africans in The Gambia pointed to merchants’ access to insolvency courts in England as deeply unfair in their 1972 petition:

If the European merchants fail in business here, they have the advantages of passing through the Insolvent Court in England, and yet will return to these settlements, and re-open their businesses with no debt; notwithstanding this, they will oppose our having the Insolvent Courts here, as they have hitherto done.³⁸⁴

³⁸² Petition For Means of Obtaining Release From Imprisonment For Debt, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872.

³⁸³ Jay Cohen, The history of imprisonment for debt and its relation to the development of discharge in bankruptcy, *The Journal of Legal History*, 3:2 (1982), 164.

³⁸⁴ Petition For Means of Obtaining Release From Imprisonment For Debt, *The African Times*, Vol. XII. No.135, London, Monday, September 23, 1872.

The imprisoned debtors sought to impress upon the Administrator of The Gambia that the colony's credit system did not align with other parts of the empire, and that it was in a state of exception that needed to be addressed.

The creation of the British West African Settlements, the increased movement of Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans due to the expansion of steamship travel, allowed Liberated Africans in The Gambia to become more aware of the multiple, contradictory credit systems between colonies and the metropole. The detrimental economic situation in The Gambia led some Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans to join their Gambian counterparts in demanding for the extension of more progressive credit systems to The Gambia. As Bronwen Everill (2013) has shown, Sierra Leoneans were central in the push for anti-slavery activities, commercial expansion, democratic institutions, and rights as British subject across British West Africa in the nineteenth century.³⁸⁵ Similarly in The Gambia colony at Bathurst, Sierra Leoneans sought to extend progressive institutions and policies to The Gambia. The growing presence and influence of Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans in The Gambia and the political situation of the early 1870s provided the necessary conditions for the 1873 abolition of debt imprisonment.

After the withdrawal of British Imperial troops from The Gambia in 1870, debt imprisonment in the colony reached unprecedented levels. Prior to the military withdrawal, troops supported merchant interests by helping to recover debts or imposing merchant terms of

³⁸⁵ Brown Everill, *Abolition and Empire in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, (Palgrave Macmillan 2013), 159-163.

trade on African communities up the Gambia river with force.³⁸⁶ Without the military it became harder for European merchants to recover debts from African communities in cases of disputes or open warfare, and they held Liberated African agents responsible for these unpaid debts.

Between 1872 and 1873 the debtor's prison in Bathurst was filled to capacity. Built in 1819 with the express purpose of confining debtors, this stone building was divided into two floors. The bottom floor was for convicts and the top floor for debtors and others awaiting trial.³⁸⁷ There were six cells for debtors each with the capacity to officially hold three people, making the total capacity for debtors 18 out of an entire prison capacity of 72.³⁸⁸ In 1872 and 1873 the debtor's prison was officially full with at least 18 debtors.³⁸⁹ This indicated a debt crisis wherein too much debt was accumulating in the economic system. This crisis was intensified by the military withdrawal but began with the civil war in the key groundnut producing region of Baddibu.

As a result of the Baddibu civil war it became unclear to European merchants and the Gambian colonial state which African leaders would guarantee the safety of traders and facilitate the recovery of debts as had been stipulated in trade treaties. Baddibu was the center of the theocratic state formed by Maba Jahu Bah in 1862. By the 1870s, this state began to splinter, and a civil war broke out between factions supporting Maba's son and others supporting his

³⁸⁶ NRS, CSO1/42 Administrator of the Gambia to Governor in Chief, Bathurst 20th June 1877.

³⁸⁷ PP, 1827, Report on The Commission Of Inquiry Into The State Of The Colony Of Sierra Leone Second Part Dependencies In The Gambia, Rowan Report 9 May 1827.

³⁸⁸ NRS, CSO1/70 Administrator to Governor in Chief, Bathurst 26th February 1884; Returns with respect to the Gaol from 1873-1882.

³⁸⁹ NRS, CSO1/70 Administrator to Governor in Chief, Bathurst 26th February 1884; Returns with respect to the Gaol from 1873-1882.

brother.³⁹⁰ With new rulers vying for power in the region, the merchant credit system and groundnut trade became untenable. For example, by 1871 the number of groundnuts exported had fallen from 913 tons in 1870 to a mere 17 tons.³⁹¹ Liberated African traders in Baddibu suffered the most from the political instability as their trade goods were taken by different warring factions and they ended up in debtor's prison in large numbers.

Imprisoned Liberated Africans used the absence of the British military and the civil war in Baddibu to make demands on the colonial state for more juridical protections from European creditors. In the 1872 petition they argued that they were honest debtors who had been plundered, the implication being by warring factions in Baddibu. Ferdinand Fitzgerald echoed the arguments of the prisoners in *The African Times*:

When the natives become troublesome and daring up river, as they most likely now are, since the troops and gunboat have been withdrawn by Her Majesty's Government from Bathurst and the river, those poor hard-working traders, who go forth year by year with their lives in their hands, while the employing merchant lives en prince at Bathurst or in Europe, are exposed to plunder—are, no doubt, plundered—come down with produce not equal in value, at the merchants' receiving price, to the value of the goods he furnished them with at his delivering price; the balance is against them—disputes arise; the trader, perhaps, complains of prices, or talk of trying another factory, to see if he can do better with a new employer; and then the tipstaff is incontinently upon him, and he finds himself a hopeless inmate of Bathurst Gaol.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Martin A. Klein, *Islam, and imperialism in Senegal; Sine-Saloum, 1847-1914*, (Stanford University Press, 1968),90-102.

³⁹¹ Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate: The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834-1934*, (Leiden: BRILL, 2005).

³⁹² 'Legal Release from Debt At Bathurst', *African Times*, Vol. XII. No.135. London, Monday, September 23, 1872.

Fitzgerald described the interactions between European merchants and their Liberated African traders that resulted in traders being sent to the debtor's prison. Due to theft and "plunder" upriver, the Liberated African traders returned to Bathurst with groundnuts and other produce not equal in value to the goods given to them on credit. This led to disputes between creditor and debtor. According to Fitzgerald, Liberated African traders complained about the prices at which the goods were credited to them and threatened to find different European merchants or creditor to work for. In response, European merchants had the "tipstaff" put on them, meaning they would be arrested and imprisoned. Fitzgerald pointed out that although the Liberated Africans who were "poor hard-working traders" lost goods because there was no military protection upriver, all their creditors cared about was that there was a "balance against them." In doing so Fitzgerald sought to highlight the unfairness of The Gambian credit system in support of the petition by the imprisoned debtors in Bathurst, which was reprinted in *The African Times*.

Despite having sent some of their Liberated African traders to prison, European merchants in The Gambia also complained about the unstable political situation upriver in a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies two months prior to the prisoners' petition.³⁹³ The merchants described the "...wanton outrages committed by the natives upon our trade and commerce in this River."³⁹⁴ They claimed that these "outrages" were "unprecedented in the

³⁹³ 'Legal Release from Debt at Bathurst', *African Times*, Vol.XII No.135.

³⁹⁴ NRS, CSO 1/30, Merchants to Acting Administrator, 4th June 1872.

history of the Gambia” and due to lack of protection and British military withdrawal.³⁹⁵ In their petition the merchants also asked that a gunboat be stationed in The Gambia and that the colony be made a coal depot so that it would attract more British military ships that could help patrol the river. This was a request which the Colonial Office denied.³⁹⁶

Merchants and people imprisoned for debt agreed as to the cause of instability in the colony: the withdrawal of British troops as part of the formation of the British West Africa Settlements. For the merchants, the removal of troops led them to demand that a gunboat be stationed in The Gambia river to safeguard their property. Meanwhile for people imprisoned the solution was an insolvency court in which they might prove their innocence and that it was largely the military withdrawal and unsafe conditions upriver that prevented them from paying their debts. These countering perspectives on the solution to the problem shows the extent to which the re-organization of British West Africa and the Baddibu civil war led to a great upheaval in The Gambia which necessitated a change in a credit system that was dependent on colonial state violence.

In response to these various petitions, the imperial state in England and the colonial government of Sierra Leone proceeded with the cheapest and most beneficial option for Sierra Leone: abolishing debt imprisonment. The merchant demand for a gunboat on the Gambia River would require more military spending, which ran counter to the post-1865 policy of reducing military spending in West Africa. For Sierra Leone, keeping Sierra Leonean Liberated African

³⁹⁵ NRS, CSO 1/30, Merchants to Acting Administrator, 4th June 1872.

³⁹⁶ NRS, CSO 1/30, letter from the Administrator to the Governor-in-Chief, 5th June 1872.

traders out of debtor's prison was key to maintaining the steady flow of kola nuts into the Gambia—an important source of revenue for the Sierra Leonean colonial state. Kola nuts were Sierra Leone's second-largest export in the late nineteenth century, increasing in value from £17,805 for 498,520 tons in 1875 to £30,490 for 588,745 tons in 1884.³⁹⁷ Within the new administrative and political framework of the British West African Settlements, European merchants in The Gambia had little power and no major supporters outside of the colony. As such they were largely beholden to the Sierra Leonean government.

As British MP and Under Secretary of State Knatchbull Hugessen wrote in *The African Times* in response to debt prisoners' and wider demands from Bathurst residents for debtor protections:

...their debts are not like ordinary debts; they are, as I am informed, the result, for the most part, of the high rates at which goods are entrusted to them for barter-of the low rates fixed by the merchants for produce brought down by them in return; and, above all, of plunder and exactions to which they are subject among the powerful native tribes up the river; there not being since 1870 any gunboat on the river for their protection...As public affairs are conducted at the Gambia, it does not seem at all probable that any proposals for such a change as that which I venture to suggest and advocate will be made by the authorities at Bathurst to Her Majesty's Government.³⁹⁸

That Knatchbull Hugessen wrote in *The African Times* in response to the demands coming out of The Gambia shows the extent to which the fight for debtor protections was

³⁹⁷ NRS, CSO1/80, letter from the Administrator of The Gambia to the Governor-In-Chief, Bathurst, 18 Jul 1885.

³⁹⁸ The Debt Prisoners Not Yet Released, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.145, London, Tuesday, July 29, 1873; Imprisonment for Debt Abolition Ordinance, Letter Of Thanks From The Late Prisoners In Bathurst Gaol And Abolition Of Imprisonment For Debt At Bathurst Gambia, *The African Times*, Vol.XII. No.150, London, Wednesday, December 31, 1873.

successful in reaching the British metropole. Most importantly, Liberated African arguments about the unfairness of the credit system were accepted, with Hugessen characterizing the debts in Gambia as “not like ordinary debts.” Hugessen’s recognition of the exceptional state of Liberated Africans’ debt signaled an important win for debt prisoners in The Gambia. Indeed, merchants used indebtedness in colonial Gambia as a means of accessing and controlling Liberated African labor after the end of their apprenticeship, rather than as an investment in hopes of a delayed return.

Under pressure from the Secretary of State and the Governor-in-Chief at Sierra Leone, the colonial administration of The Gambia abolished debt imprisonment on June 27, 1873, representing the first of its kind in British West Africa. Despite this significant win in the long-term fight for debtor protections, Gambia’s European merchants would spend the next two decades trying to reintroduce debt imprisonment and circumscribe the political and economic gains Liberated Africans made from the 1860s to the 1880s.

3.3 “The Merchant Counterattack” and the formation of The Gambia Protectorate, 1873-1889

This section considers the rising position of Liberated Africans in The Gambia colony after the ban on debt imprisonment in 1873 and before the dissolution of the British West African Settlements in 1888. It then examines the merchant counterattack, and how Liberated African traders gradually lost their positions as key figures in the groundnut trade connecting the European merchant class at Bathurst to African communities on The Gambia river. The 1889

declaration of a British Protectorate over The Gambia river and the growing dominance of French firms in the groundnut trade that operated on a cash system were key to these commercial and political transformations.

Between the ban on debt imprisonment in 1873 and the official dissolution of the British West African Settlements in 1888, Liberated Africans' financial and political prospects in The Gambia improved. More Liberated Africans became merchants, directly importing and exporting goods between Britain, Europe, and The Gambia. Increased wealth meant that more Liberated Africans were able to own land in Bathurst and even their own ships to ply the Gambia River in trade.³⁹⁹ Further, Liberated Africans from Sierra Leonean, The Gambia, and Wolof residents of Bathurst formed The Gambia Natives Association in 1875 to push for the interests of the African community in Bathurst and their rights as British subjects.⁴⁰⁰

Another example of the improved position of Liberated Africans in the mid- to late-nineteenth century was the appointment of Joseph Davidson Richards as the first Black person on the Gambian legislative council in 1883. Born in Sierra Leone, J.D. Richards moved with his mother to The Gambia where she became a prominent kola nut trader. Building his wealth upon hers, J.D. Richards became one of the largest importers of kola nuts from Sierra Leone.⁴⁰¹ J.D. Richards' political and commercial success in the late-nineteenth century is a representation of the material and political accomplishments that came out of the Sierra Leonean Liberated

³⁹⁹ NRS, CSO 1/43, Statement and Position of Circumstance of Persons who signed the Petition against the Transfer of this settlement to France, the Officer Administering the Government to the Earl of Carnarvon, 23 November, 1875.

⁴⁰⁰ Brown, *Abolition*, 162.

⁴⁰¹ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 70.

African migration and commercial expansion in the 1850s and 1860s.⁴⁰² On the eve of the declaration of The Gambian Protectorate in 1889, Liberated Africans as a community were politically and economically stronger than they had ever been.

During this period of relative Liberated African prosperity, European merchants in Bathurst attempted to pass a series of ordinances to repeal the ban on debt imprisonment and to remove any challenges in court to the imprisonment of debtors. The merchants failed to convince the Governor-in-Chief to reintroduce debt imprisonment and so focused their efforts on suppressing the power of African juries in debt cases. The increased prominence of Liberated Africans in the 1860s and 1870s allowed more of them to meet the property and wealth requirements to serve as jurors in Bathurst. By the 1880s most juries were majority African, reflecting the fact that most of the population of Bathurst was also African. Yet, under the leadership of Administrator Valesius Gouldsbury, in 1882 the Gambian legislature passed “An ordinance for the trial of certain offences without jury,” which allowed cases of debt to be tried by just two Justices of the Peace and no jury. Gouldsbury claimed:

So far as I know the statements that juries at the Gambia will not convict fraudulent debtors is in the main true...to my thinking the cause of right and justice would be fostered by amending the law in the way suggested by the merchants.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰² Asi Florence Mahoney, *Creole Saga: The Gambia's Liberated African Community in the Nineteenth Century*, (Baobab Printers, Gambia 2006), 114.

⁴⁰³ NRS, CSO1/63, letter from the Administrator to the Governor-in-Chief, 2nd June 1882.

This law to remove juries from debt trials was successfully passed in The Gambia because of a parallel movement to do the same in Sierra Leone during the mid-1860s.⁴⁰⁴ The economic and political gains of Liberated Africans such as the access to jury duty dwindled further following the creation of The Gambian Protectorate in 1889.

As the civil war in Baddibu dragged on and intensified, the profitability of European merchants engaged in the groundnut trade became increasingly precarious. The number of groundnuts purchased in 1887 had fallen to 2,500 tons, which was a dramatic reduction compared to a high of 25,000 tons in 1883.⁴⁰⁵ As a result of an impending collapse of the groundnut industry, both Liberated African and European merchants began pressuring the Gambian state to provide them with military protection. A popular solution that was proposed in merchant circles was to annex Baddibu and declare a Protectorate over the Gambia River, thereby justifying a military invasion of Baddibu.

Despite the merchant proposal to invade Baddibu, the British Colonial Office was reluctant to use military force to intervene. Instead, in 1887 the Colonial Office sent Samuel Rowe, Governor-in-Chief of the British West African Settlements, to negotiate a peace treaty between the warring factions in Baddibu.⁴⁰⁶ In the meantime, the neighbouring, expansionist French colonial government in Senegal used the war in Baddibu to justify its 1887 annexation of Northern Baddibu. The French claimed that the conflict posed a threat to the kingdom of Sine, its

⁴⁰⁴ PP, 1867, Ordinances (1866) relative to Administration of Justice at Sierra Leone, and other W. African Settlements; Petitions against Abolition of Trial by Jury; Correspondence between H.M. Government and Governor or Chief Justice.

⁴⁰⁵ PP, Reports of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1887, Gambia.

⁴⁰⁶ NRS, MP1/1, letter from Foreign office to Colonial office, November 24 1887.

ally in the central region of Senegambia that neighbored Baddibu.⁴⁰⁷ The annexation of Northern Baddibu strengthened calls in Bathurst to separate from Sierra Leone and to declare a Protectorate over the Gambia River. By late 1888 the Colonial Office was facing demands for a Protectorate from a dominant sector of the Gambian colonial economy alongside geopolitical fears of French imperial expansion.

After the French annexation of Northern Baddibu the Colonial Office authorized the request from the Gambian government to separate from Sierra Leone and form an independent colony. This was done on the basis that an independent government would be better able to respond to threats of French expansion in Senegambia.⁴⁰⁸ This meant that the Legislative and Executive Councils in Bathurst were no longer beholden to the Governor-in-Chief of Sierra Leone and were able to pass and enforce their own laws without seeking higher approval from Sierra Leone.

European merchants in Bathurst and Liberated African merchants like J.D. Richards were eager promoters of a Protectorate around The Gambia river. Richards wrote, “one can hardly see the utility of planting the English ensign anywhere in the Gambia if Badiboo is to become French.”⁴⁰⁹ Richards argued that it was necessary not only to take Baddibu but that, “Chiefs along the banks of the Gambia are anxious to have the British flag in preference to the

⁴⁰⁷ Klein, *Slavery*, 83-87.

⁴⁰⁸ Hughes and Perfect. *A Political History*, 79-81.

⁴⁰⁹ NRS, MP1/1, Letter from J.D.Richards to Mr. Radcliff Chairman of the African Committee October 17, 1887 Enclosure 4.

French.”⁴¹⁰ Despite Richards’ claims, many African communities on the Gambia River did not support being put under British rule through a Protectorate. These communities preferred to remain independent of any colonial rule. Nonetheless, British officials declared a Protectorate over the Gambia River in 1889.

Although British merchants and some Liberated African elites championed the Protectorate, French merchant houses in Bathurst were the primary beneficiaries of the administrative, territorial, and economic transformation that ensued. The civil war in Baddibu and the Great Depression of 1873 to 1896 put three of the major British firms out of business by the late 1880s. As a result, only one British firm and four French firms controlled the groundnut trade along the Gambia River at the turn of the twentieth century. Unlike British firms, French firms did not give out goods on credit to agents working independently; instead, they bought produce from African producers with the cash they gave their employees stationed close to those producers. The French use of paid agents who relied on wages originated in the gum trade on the Senegal River.⁴¹¹ After the creation of the Protectorate in 1889, the French cash system began to dominate the river trade in The Gambia and many traders became paid employees or traders indebted to large French firms in Bathurst. The ascendance of French merchant firms in The Gambia significantly transformed the older credit system and weakened the position of independent Liberated African traders and the debtor protections they had fought for.

⁴¹⁰ NRS, MP1/1, Letter from J.D.Richards to Mr. Radcliff Chairman of the African Committee October 17, 1887 Enclosure 4.

⁴¹¹ French firms in the Gum Trade used paid agents to compete with independent traders who were indebted to the same firm with the goal of completely monopolizing the Gum Trade; See Webb, “The Trade in Gum,” 164.

The Gambian colonial state supported the French cash system and created conditions in the Protectorate to restrict any potential competition. The government favored the cash system because of its own attempts to impose a “yard tax” paid in cash on the newly incorporated Protectorate peoples.⁴¹² In fact, the colonial state actively sought to increase the reach of French firms in the Protectorate to promote the use of cash. One way it did this was to allow French firms to own land in the Protectorate and establish branches of their companies in designated wharf towns along the Gambia River.

New rules and restrictions on trade in the Protectorate meant that European merchants in Bathurst gained more control over the places where the groundnut trade happened, and which people from the colony could participate in the trade. For example, the colonial government introduced trade licenses to restrict who could trade in the Protectorate. British subjects from Bathurst could only trade in the Protectorate if they had trade licenses issued by the treasury. These licenses cost anywhere from 80 shillings to 10 pounds depending on the nature of the trade.⁴¹³ Further, aspiring business people also had to furnish a certificate of good character signed either “by a member of either the Executive or legislative council and by two Justices of the Peace...”⁴¹⁴

The result of the state’s reorganization of the groundnut trade was that by the end of the 1910s the dominant role that Liberated Africans played as traders between The Gambia colony

⁴¹² Swindle and Jeng, *Migrants and Credit*, 114-118.

⁴¹³ Swindle and Jeng, *Migrants and Credit*, 114-118.

⁴¹⁴ Swindle and Jeng, *Migrants and Credit*, 114-118.

and African communities on the Gambia River for over sixty years came to an end and with it, the system of credit completely transformed. The Governor of The Gambia described the colony's groundnut trade in the following way in 1919: "The ground-nut industry is on a very simple basis. There are no middlemen." There were only "individual native farmers who sell direct to the merchant."⁴¹⁵ By "merchant" the Governor meant the five French and one British trading firms headquartered in Bathurst.

3.4 Conclusion

The wetland environment of colonial Bathurst afforded Liberated Africans few opportunities for agricultural subsistence and little means of freeing themselves from their dependent relationships with European merchants. The commercial system that organized The Gambia's groundnut trade and emerged out of the Atlantic slave trade tied Liberated Africans to European merchants in what seemed like a never-ending web of debt. These debts put Liberated Africans in Bathurst at great risk of being sent to the debtor's prison or losing their land in Bathurst. European control over the judicial and legislative system ensured that European merchants kept the upper hand in commerce although they were completely reliant on Liberated Africans to move their goods in and out of the colony. The Liberated African predicament in The Gambia began to change after 1866 with the creation of the British West African Settlements.

The British West African Settlements (1866-1888) brought Liberated Africans in the Gambia and Sierra Leone into closer contact resulting both in greater animosity and

⁴¹⁵ Reports of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions Past and Present ,1919, Gambia.

opportunities for solidarity. The British West African Settlements emerged out of British metropolitan opposition to colonization in Africa. Imperial officials sought to reduce Britain's military presence in West Africa and centralize the colonial administrative system. This imperial contraction resulted in the establishment of a hierarchical structure of colonial administration in which Sierra Leone was at the top with a Governor-in-Chief. In turn, this new arrangement was contingent upon fast and affordable travel and communication between colonies made possible by the steamship. After 1866 large numbers of Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans moved to Gambia to work as bureaucrats, replacing Gambian Liberated Africans leading to tensions between the two groups. At the same time, other Sierra Leonean Liberated Africans moved to Gambia as merchants and traders, establishing themselves as alternative sources of credit to European merchants.

The Sierra Leonean and Gambian Liberated Africans traders involved in the groundnut trade found themselves in a similar predicament of indebtedness to the European merchants who controlled the groundnut trade. The formation of the British West African Settlements and the founding of pro-Liberated African newspapers like *The African Times*, provided new opportunities to argue for better commercial arrangements in the groundnut trade. At the same time, the civil war in the groundnut producing region of Baddibu led to a dramatic increase in the number of imprisoned debtors in Bathurst in 1872. This dire situation mobilized the Liberated African community to demand debtor protections in The Gambia, culminating in the 1873 ban on debt imprisonment. While European merchants in Bathurst attempted to reinstate debt imprisonment after 1873, they were never successful.

The era of the British West African Settlements came to an end in 1888 and The Gambia once again became an independent Crown Colony. In 1889 The Gambia colony declared a Protectorate over the northern and southern banks of the Gambia River. The era of British West African Settlements was an important moment in the history of the Gambian Liberated African Community as in some ways it marked the height of their political and commercial power. The progress of Liberated Africans in this period was due to the broadening of the commercial and political space in which they could act, facilitated by the British West Africans Settlements and the steamship. Liberated Africans were well-poised to take advantage of this expanded economic and political space because of their history of resettlement in British West Africa and the political and commercial positions they had acquired since their emancipation in 1807.

Chapter 4

Medicalized Urban Governance: Bathurst Under the Board of Health 1845-1930

4.1 Introduction

Colonial officials in Bathurst justified their land reclamation and aquatic management projects as sanitary projects meant to make Bathurst healthier. And thus, land reclamation and aquatic management in Bathurst were in part justified and driven by British sanitary ideas and concerns. But buying solely into colonial official's sanitary discourse ignores other important elements of Bathurst's history of land reclamation and aquatic management. As Bhattacharyya argues the "overwhelming stress on epidemiology" as the driver of colonial urban infrastructure projects focuses on "environmentalist paradigm of disease" and the "climatic difference" between Europe and their colonies.⁴¹⁶ Thus, for Bhattacharyya who is interested in property markets and land speculation the epidemiological emphasis in understanding colonial land reclamation projects "obfuscated the market driven aspect of infrastructure, and how they in turn created forms of market governance".⁴¹⁷

The epidemiological perspective as a tool for understanding land reclamation frames it as a moment of encounter, a moment in which Europeans are in contact with strange environments

⁴¹⁶ Debjani Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology in the Bengal Delta: The Making of Calcutta*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018) ,145.

⁴¹⁷ Bhattacharyya, *Empire and Ecology*,145.

and response by trying to change them. In other words, the epidemiological perspective centers government infrastructural projects on the tiny European elite who found themselves in new environments and ignores other histories that are linked to the same infrastructural projects. This dissertation so far has attempted to move beyond British officials' sanitary discourse to uncover other histories of land reclamation and aquatic management tied to the emergence municipal governance and Liberated African political participation and belonging.

This chapter, while acknowledging the limitations of focusing on the epidemiological perspective/ sanitary discourse, follows the colonial state's responses to disease outbreaks in Bathurst to trace the evolution of municipal governance. Indeed, it was through state attempts at making Bathurst healthier, that new institutions and management strategies were imposed at the municipal level. As such, colonial responses to disease outbreak accumulated into a new type of governance over Bathurst. Further, it was also through state sanitation campaigns that most residents in Bathurst encountered colonial state action in its most drastic and intrusive form. And it was also through the accumulated colonial state responses to disease outbreaks that Liberated African and Wolof elites would regain positions of leadership in municipal government.

Liberated Africans and Wolof elites after losing municipal control through the abolition of the Ratepayers' Council in 1855, regained important political roles during the sanitation campaigns of the mid to late 19th century. Liberated Africans and Wolof elites filled the roles of sanitary commissioners, sanitary inspectors and finally as members of the Board of Health. The continuation of disease outbreaks in Bathurst therefore, created new roles for African elite as the colonial state responded to disease outbreaks by medicalizing governance. Medicalization here,

is understood as the administrative takeover of municipal government by medical professionals or individuals acting in a medical role, as well as the undue rationalization of all municipal government functions through a sanitary paradigm. The Board of Health which was established in 1887 in Bathurst and headed by the chief medical officer with European and African appointed members represented the outcome of the gradual medicalization of municipal governance over the late 19th century.

The scholarship on the enforcement of European sanitary ideas and regulations within African colonial spaces generally emphasizes colonial state suppress, surveillance and domination.⁴¹⁸ The general framework of a more repressive and invasive colonial state clearly applies to the medicalization of municipal governance in Bathurst. However, it is also important to understand what this medicalization meant for African elites in a municipal and administrative context. The many positions created by colonial legislation to make Bathurst healthier such as sanitary commissioner, sanitary inspector and member of the Board of Health existed in a vacuum of municipal government. And so, these medico-political positions became the primary means through which Bathurst was governed at the municipal level. Therefore, African elites looked to these positions to increase their power and control over Bathurst at the municipal level.

⁴¹⁸ Maynard W. Swanson, The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909, *The Journal of African History*, 1977, Vol. 18, No. 3 (1977), 387-410; Thomas S. Gale, Segregation in British West Africa, *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, Vol. 20, Cahier 80 (1980), 495-507; Philip D. Curtin, Medical Knowledge and Urban Planning in Tropical Africa, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (Jun., 1985), 594-613; Stephen Frenkel and John Western, Pretext or Prophylaxis? Racial Segregation and Malarial Mosquitos in a British Tropical Colony: Sierra Leone, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (Jun., 1988), 211-228.

This chapter by following the gradual formation of the Board of Health, continues the discussion on municipal governance after the abolition of the Ratepayer's Council in 1855. The chapter shows what the gradual medicalization of municipal government looked like on the ground. From 1866, when the first Public Health Ordinance was passed to the creation of the Board of Health in 1887 the colonial state became increasingly more intrusive in the lives of Bathurst residents and more microscope in its view. Microscope, because the colonial state became more concerned with how residents managed their household down to the level of the contents of their household water jugs. The state's adoption of mosquito theory at the beginning of the 20th century heightened the colonial state's intrusiveness and geared it towards controlling certain types of bodies and microbes. This transformation in the colonial state was reflected in the land reclamation projects that took place under the Board of Health. Whereas in land reclamation during the 19th century was justified by colonial officials to make Bathurst ecologically healthier and add space, in the 20th century land reclamation was justified as means of separating and excluding certain types of bodies in Bathurst.

The significance of the Board of Health's thirty-nine years of rule over Bathurst from 1891-1930 can be better appreciated if we compared municipal government in the Gambia Colony to other British West African colonies. In colonial Sierra Leone a town council was established in 1893, with ratepayers or property owners having the ability to vote in its members.⁴¹⁹ The Cape Coast, Accra and Sekondi in present day Ghana got town councils in

⁴¹⁹ Akintola J. G. Wyse, *The Dissolution Of Freetown City Council In 1926: A Negative Example Of Political Apprenticeship In Colonial Sierra Leone*, *Africa* 57 (4), 1987, 423.

1894, with eight members: four appointed by the governor and four elected.⁴²⁰ Lagos Colony got a town council in 1917, with elections allowed in 1919.⁴²¹ Bathurst in comparison to other British West African colonial cities was the most lacking in any form of democratic representation. Furthermore, the municipal government that Bathurst ended up having in the form of a Board of Health was led by the Chief Medical Officer. The emergence of medicalized municipal governance in Bathurst while a cumulative process also had a lot to do with the environment. In Chapter One it was explained that British colonial officials early on in Bathurst's history believed the town to be the unhealthiest of the other British colonies because it was surrounded by mangroves. Therefore, the colonial response to continuous disease outbreaks was to tighten control over people and things in Bathurst, which is what medicalization represented.

This chapter begins with an examination of the first public nuisance ordinance passed in 1845 as it was the first ordinance that gave colonial officials the power to police people and things for the purpose of making Bathurst healthier. As the first section will show, the 1845 ordinance provided the earlier legal framework for medicalized governance. However, the 1845 ordinance solely empowered justices of the peace and the police to deal with "nuisances". Municipal governance in the early 19th century as this section shows was more legalistic. Next, the chapter locates the beginning of medicalization to the sanitary campaigns of Governor

⁴²⁰ Samuel S. Quarcoopome, *The Municipal System and Local Administration At Cape Coast: 1858-1957*, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series, No. 6 (2002), 88.

⁴²¹ Tekena N. Tamuno, *Governor Clifford and Representative Government*, *Journal of The Historical Society Of Nigeria*, Vol. Iv No. I December 1967, 118-121.

D'Arcy (1859-1866) and the passage of the 1866 Public Health Ordinance. The 1866 ordinance created the position of sanitary commissioner, shifting the policing of nuisances for sanitary reasons from the justices to the commissioners. Many African leaders participated in governing of Bathurst as sanitary commissioners. The repeated outbreaks of disease led to the organization of the sanitary commissioners into a Board of Health in 1887. Following the second section the chapter looks at how the Board of Health's preoccupation with disease initiated a series of land reclamation projects and infrastructure developments, as well as the provision of municipal services to Bathurst landowners for the first time. As such, citizenship and belonging in 20th century Bathurst came to mean more than just access to land and British protection, it also meant access to municipal services. Landowners access to municipal services starkly distinguished them from the African migrants in Bathurst, who often worked as the Board's sanitation workers. In the fourth section the chapter looks at how medicalized governance under the Board of Health generally targeted migrant workers as the spreaders of disease in Bathurst. Showing that the medicalization of municipal government resulted in the increased fear of migrants as carriers of disease and state action to isolate and restrict them. This section also discusses how the Board of Health's isolation and segregation tactics were used to create a permanent sanitary workforce. The chapter ends with the abolition of the Board of Health in 1930 in response to urban uprising in Bathurst and labor strikes in 1929.

4.2 The Legal Background for Medicalized Governance

The first ordinance to deal with sanitation in colonial Bathurst was the 1845 Public Nuisances Ordinance. As this section will show the 1845 Ordinance provided the earliest legal framework for policing and managing urban space and infrastructure in Bathurst. The 1845 Ordinance gave the police and justices of the peace the power to prohibit and monitor activities and materials categorized as nuisances by the law. Many of these nuisances were policed because British officials believed that they were harmful to health. And so, the 1845 Ordinance represented an institutionalization of colonial state efforts at maintaining a sanitary order. This colonial state effort was, however, carried out by justices of the peace rather than by medical professionals. The reason justices of the peace were so involved in implementing the 1845 Ordinance as this section will discuss- was the legalistic nature of urban governance at the time. Urban governance in early 19th century Bathurst was centered around courts and court officials and it became their responsibility to maintain sanitary order.

The colonial state that Bathurst residents encountered on the ground prior to 1866 was a legalistic one, manifested in the Bathurst prison, police, courts, and justices of the peace. Note from Chapter One that the first form of government in Bathurst was the Settlement Court. The Settlement Court was composed of the commandant and five prominent merchants who not only attended to issues such as drainage but also adjudicated trials. After the Settlement Court was abolished in 1823 and the Gambia Colony made a dependency of Sierra Leone, the judicial system of Bathurst was organized around courts presided over by justices of the peace. An 1826 parliamentary report explains:

There are at present resident in St. Mary's eight justices of the peace; one of whom acts as sheriff, and the other seven are commissioners of requests. They are all Europeans, and connected with trade.⁴²²

After the abolition of the Settlement Court, European merchants continued to have important roles in the administration Bathurst as the above quote reveals. As sheriffs, European merchants had power to regulate and inspect the Bathurst prison and impose punishments therein for prisoners who broke rules.⁴²³ And as commissioners of request, they sat in court and adjudicated trials of minor crimes like theft, debts below certain amounts, etc. Early to mid-19th century Bathurst was run by European merchants through their positions in the judicial system.

European merchants also made decisions about how to govern Bathurst at public gatherings held in a judicial context. European merchants as justices of the peace appointed by the Governor in Serra Leone could only adjudicated minor cases. The more serious crimes in Bathurst were adjudicated by the Chief Justice in Sierra Leone. The Chief Justice, however, only came to Bathurst a few times in the year and these proceedings were known as the quarter sessions.⁴²⁴ These quarter sessions were important for show-casing big public trials, as well as being public meetings at which decisions were made in relation to governing Bathurst. For example, during the 1824 quarter session it was decided by an all-European grand jury that

⁴²² Parliamentary Papers (PP), 1827, Report on the Commission of Inquiry Into The State Of The Colony Of Sierra Leone, Second Part, Dependencies In The Gambia, Rowan Report 9 May 1827, 16.

⁴²³ Gambia National Record Service (NRS), PUB 5/1, Ordinance to establish Improved Regulations and Discipline in the Gaols of the British Settlements in the Gambia.

⁴²⁴ PP, 1827, Report on the Commission of Inquiry Into The State Of The Colony Of Sierra Leone, Second Part, Dependencies In The Gambia, Rowan Report 9 May 1827, 15-16.

prisoners in Bathurst should be used to construct and maintain roads in the town for the first time.⁴²⁵ Courts in Bathurst were extremely political spaces.⁴²⁶

As such, European Merchants in the position of justices of the peace and grand jurors, held immense power over most of Bathurst's African residents and economy. In Chapter Three it was explained that there were important language and property requirements used to restrict who could serve on the grand jury. The colonial government by implementing these restrictions attempted to limit African participation in courts. Chapter three also discussed how European merchants used their judicial positions to settle debt cases against their Liberated African commercial agents in their favor. However, as also explained in Chapter Three Africans were able to maintain some level of control through the *petit juries* that sat with the justice of the peace in minor cases. And so, in early Bathurst it is by looking at the judicial system and the role that court officials played outside courts to understand how urban governance was shaped and contested over.

The balance of power between European justices of the peace and their African juries would shift even more in 1845, as Governor Charles Fitzgerald (1843-1847) increased the power of justices of the peace by giving them the ability to police nuisances in public space. The 1845 Public Nuisances Ordinance discussed at the beginning of this section was passed under the

⁴²⁵ NRS, CSO 1/2, E. Babcock to President of the Court of Quarter Sessions, 1 November 1824.

⁴²⁶ For detailed conversation on the political nature of African courts under colonialism see Kristin Mann and Richard L. Roberts (ed.), *Law in Colonial Africa*, (Portsmouth, NH: London: Heinemann Educational Books ; James Currey, 1991).

Governorship of Charles Fitzgerald.⁴²⁷ Fitzgerald as described in Chapter Two was also responsible for the first major land reclamation project in colonial Bathurst. Chapter two argued that Fitzgerald's expansion into the mangroves represented an expansion and consolidation of state power in response to a social and political crisis. The main crisis being the unavailability of arable land for a large Liberated African population that no longer benefited from imperial support through the Liberated African Department. Fitzgerald's land reclamation project and 1845 Public Nuisance Ordinance were two sides of the colonial state's attempt to maintain state power and legitimacy by controlling urban space in Bathurst. The 1845 Nuisances Act increased the colonial state's control over Bathurst by giving new policing powers to justices of the peace and police officers over people and things in colonial Bathurst.

The passage of the 1845 Public Nuisances Ordinance under Fitzgerald specifically gave justices of the peace and police officers the power to order residents to remove and stop nuisances in public space.⁴²⁸ The materials categorized as nuisances by the 1845 Ordinance were filth, rags, dirt, or hides.⁴²⁹ The medical idea that underpinned the 1845 Ordinance's categorization was the claim that miasma arose from decomposing animal and plant materials within the city. The public spaces in which these nuisances had to be removed were the streets of Bathurst, the beach, drains, public grounds, or any space utilized as commons.⁴³⁰ Under the

⁴²⁷ NRS, PUB 5/1, Laws and Ordinances of the British Settlements in the Gambia, Ordinance for the more effectual Suppression of Public Nuisances within the Settlement of Bathurst and its Dependencies on the River Gambia, and for giving increased powers to Justices of the Peace and Constables in certain cases, and for the better regulation of the Constabulary Force, 5th May 1845.

⁴²⁸ NRS, PUB 5/1, Suppression of Public Nuisances, 5th May 1845.

⁴²⁹ NRS, PUB 5/1, Suppression of Public Nuisances, 5th May 1845.

⁴³⁰ NRS, PUB 5/1, Suppression of Public Nuisances, 5th May 1845.

1845 Ordinance individuals who refused to stop or remove nuisances under the orders of the justice of the peace or police were fined or imprisoned with or without hard labor.⁴³¹ The 1845 Ordinance ultimately had the effect of concentrating power in the tiny European merchant elite of Bathurst even more as they almost exclusively filled the positions of justices of the peace in this period.⁴³²

It is, however, important to consider the limitations of the 1845 Ordinance in terms of what the justices could do in relation to policing nuisances. These limitations help in distinguishing this period from the medicalized urban governance that comes later. The 1845 Public Nuisance Ordinance despite giving the police and European merchants new policing powers over space, limited those powers to public space. Because the law was concerned with public space, the home, and the nature of sanitation within it was not the purview of the justices of the peace and police. Furthermore, while the 1845 Ordinance was concerned with health and miasma the law was not solely focused on sanitation. The 1845 ordinance was also targeted at other acts characterized as nuisances such as “drumming”, “fast riding” and “brawling”.⁴³³ Fitzgerald’s main aim for passing the 1845 Ordinance was to give police and justices of the peace the power to maintain a certain type of colonial order in public.

As the next section will discuss, the 1866 Sanitation Ordinance would build on the 1845 Ordinance by allowing for the policing of nuisances within the home. Additionally in the 1866

⁴³¹ NRS, PUB 5/1, Suppression of Public Nuisances, 5th May 1845.

⁴³² PP, 1842, Report from The Select Committee on The West Coast Of Africa Part 1 Report And Evidence, Madden Report 31 July 1841.

⁴³³ NRS, PUB 5/1, Suppression of Public Nuisances, 5th May 1845.

Ordinance, the role of policing nuisances played by justices and police would be turned over to new medico-political figures known as sanitary commissioners. And so, the passage of 1866 Ordinances marked the beginnings of medicalized urban governance in Bathurst.

4.3 The Beginnings of Medicalized Municipal Governance

This section argues that the medicalization of municipal governance in Bathurst began during Governor D’Arcy’s (1859-1866) sanitation campaigns in the mid-19th century. There are two reasons for attributing D’Arcy’s governorship with beginning the process of medicalization. One, it was under D’Arcy that a colonial labor force comprised of prisoners was first organized to carry out sanitation campaigns. Subsequent colonial regimes after D’Arcy would continue to use prisoners and other vulnerable populations for sanitation work. The use of these vulnerable populations gave the colonial state the capacity to carry out sanitary work that many Bathurst residents were unwilling to perform. Examples of sanitation work in Bathurst ranged from cleaning out drains to removing and burying dead bodies during outbreaks of disease. Secondly, D’Arcy began medicalization in Bathurst by passing the 1866 Sanitation Ordinance. The 1866 Ordinance created the position of sanitary commissioner, whose job it was to improve and manage sanitation in Bathurst. Most importantly, sanitary commissioners unlike justices of the peace had the power to enter the home to inspect and alter its sanitary state. And so, D’Arcy expanded the sanitary arm of the colonial state both legally and in terms of manpower; creating greater capacity for colonial officials to carry out sanitation work in public and private space. Many of the attributes that would come to define the Board of Health such as using trash for land

reclamation, inspection of the Bathurst homes and using vulnerable population for sanitary work, began in the D'Arcy era.

A key reason D'Arcy pushed Bathurst towards medicalized municipal governance was due to two yellow fever outbreaks that book ended D'Arcy's tenure. There was a yellow fever outbreak in 1859 at the beginning of D'Arcy's rule and a second one in 1866 a few months before D'Arcy left the governorship. The yellow fever outbreak in 1859 killed most of the tiny population of Europeans in Bathurst as "By the end of September only six Europeans were alive and some of these were convalescent."⁴³⁴ The second outbreak in 1866 led to 17 deaths in the space of four months.⁴³⁵ The 1859 and 1866 yellow fever outbreaks were catastrophes for Europeans in Bathurst given their small population. Africans in Bathurst were little affected by the yellow fever outbreak as they constituted the majority of the 4500-5000 population of mid-19th century Bathurst.⁴³⁶ Thus, the yellow fever outbreaks under D'Arcy were an existential threat to the entire colonial system based on white dominance. As such, D'Arcy's response to yellow fever was to launch a sanitation campaign that gave the colonial state more capacity to manage public space, engaged in more land reclamation projects and inspect Bathurst homes.

After the 1859 yellow fever outbreak, D'Arcy began the second major land reclamation project in Bathurst's history. As explained in Chapter Two, D'Arcy's land reclamation project was not only about yellow fever as the project also responded to Liberated African demands for

⁴³⁴ G.M. Findlay and T.H. Davey, Yellow Fever In The Gambia, *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, Vol, XXIX. No.6 April, 1936, 673.

⁴³⁵ NRS, CSO 1/13, Reporting fatal continuance of the epidemic of yellow fever, 23 September 1866.

⁴³⁶ NRS, CSO 1/17, letter from Admiral Patey to Earl Granville, 17th May 1869; The census from this period is not very accurate and colonial officials tended to lower the population figures during epidemics.

land in Bathurst to ensure British protection. D’Arcy unprecedentedly used the prison and prisoners to acquire the labor for his land reclamation project.⁴³⁷ In the 1862 annual report for the colony, Governor D’Arcy celebrated all the major works he had been able to achieve with the “The chain gang”.⁴³⁸ The chain gang referred to prisoners in the Bathurst Prison, who were chained two by two while they worked outside the prison under the supervision of the gaoler/keeper of the prison and police. According the 1862 report, prisoners in 1860 built the new seawall at Half Die and built a road “on the dry marsh, commonly called the Poor Man’s Road”.⁴³⁹ And in 1862 “Mangroves cut down half a mile round the south-west of the town”.⁴⁴⁰ These projects indicate the increased capacity of the colonial government on the backs of prisoners.

To reclaim land from the mangrove wetlands of Bathurst, D’Arcy combined the waste management duties of prisoners with land reclamation. Prisoners under the supervision of the “gaoler” were ordered to dump the trash, they collected from street cleaning into a newly cleared area of mangrove. The trash dumping was then followed by sand filling, which resulted in the creation of reclaimed land for residential lots. D’Arcy described the trash filling the prisoners did in the following “Where the streets debouch on to the reclaimed land (the new racecourse) at Half Die, an amount of decomposed matter buried, sufficient to cover McCarthy’s Square”.⁴⁴¹ D’Arcy’s reference to McCarthy square indicates the large amounts of work prisoners were

⁴³⁷ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1859, Gambia.

⁴³⁸ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1862, Gambia.

⁴³⁹ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1862, Gambia.

⁴⁴⁰ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1862, Gambia.

⁴⁴¹ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1860, Gambia.

engaged in, as McCarthy Square was the largest open public space in the center of Bathurst. As will be shown in a later section, the Board of Health's anti-mosquito campaign in the early 20th century much like D'Arcy's would combine waste collection and land reclamation. The main difference being that the sanitary workers in the 20th century were migrants and not prisoners, and the goal was to remove trash in the home as a source of mosquito larvae. The point being that land reclamation was a material consequence of massive trash collection efforts which initiated most sanitation campaigns in Bathurst. Hence, the linkage between land reclamation and medicalization are as much material as they are ideological. For D'Arcy land reclamation was the solution to trash accumulation, land needs and disease.

D'Arcy's land reclamation project was, however, unable to prevent the 1866 yellow fever epidemic, leading to increased policing of Bathurst under the sanitary commissioner.⁴⁴² In response to the 1866 yellow fever outbreak D'Arcy passed the 1866 Sanitation Ordinance.⁴⁴³ Africanus Horton, the famous Liberated African political writer and assistant colonial surgeon in the Gambia, praised D'Arcy's 1866 ordinance with the following:

When the yellow fever was raging, Governor D'Arcy, with the aid of his councilors passed a most important ordinance which might really serve as a guide to all the Coast Governments. He formed a Sanitary Commission, consisting of five or six members, whose duty it was to attend to the cleanliness and other matters relative to the health of the town.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² NRS, CSO 1/13, Reporting fatal continuance of the epidemic of yellow fever, 23rd September 1866.

⁴⁴³ NRS, CSO 1/18, An Ordinance to make provision for the Sanitary regulation of the Settlements on the River Gambia, 18th August 1866.

⁴⁴⁴ Africanus Horton. *Physical and Medical Climate and Meteorology of the West Coast of African*. (London, 1867), 239; For biographical information on Africanus Horton see Christopher Fyfe, *Africanus Horton: West African Scientist and Patriot, 1835-1883*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); For a discussion on British concerns with urban space and disease, and how those concerns are projected into

Africanus like most medical professionals of the mid-19th century argued that there was a need for sanitary reforms in urban environments.⁴⁴⁵ An important part of Africanus' proposed sanitary reform was the appointment of officers of public health. The public health officer, Africanus hoped would allow the colonial government to "to examine and watch over the health of the population at large".⁴⁴⁶Hence, Africanus' was excited about D'Arcy's 1866 Ordinance which created the role of the public health officer in the sanitary commissioner. Africanus in the quote above wanted all other British West African colonies to adopt the same sanitary reforms passed in the Gambia by appointing their own public health officers. Africanus' call to for other colonies to appointment public health officers was a desire for medical professionals or those acting in medical roles to be more involved in urban governance.

The sanitary commissioners allowed for a more intimate mode of state surveillance through the sanitary commissioner's legal right to intrude into the Bathurst home.⁴⁴⁷ The 1866 Ordinance enabled the sanitary commissioners to enter "any building, Yards, or premises they may see fit for the purpose of ascertaining their sanitary condition."⁴⁴⁸Those who refused to comply with the sanitary commissioners' orders were fined any amount between five and twenty pounds or imprisoned without hard labor.⁴⁴⁹ The sanitary commissioners were new political

the colonies see Pamela K. Gilbert, *Mapping the Victorian social body*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

⁴⁴⁵ Africanus Horton, *Physical and Medical Climate*,113.

⁴⁴⁶ Africanus Horton, *Physical and Medical Climate*,113.

⁴⁴⁷ NRS, CSO 1/18, An Ordinance to make provision for the Sanitary regulation of the Settlements on the River Gambia, August 18, 1866.

⁴⁴⁸ NRS, CSO 1/18, An Ordinance to make provision for the Sanitary regulation, August 18, 1866.

⁴⁴⁹ NRS, CSO 1/18, An Ordinance to make provision for the Sanitary regulation, August 18, 1866.

actors in Bathurst who took over responsibilities for policing certain kinds of nuisances from justices of the peace.

The first major action undertaken by the sanitary commissioners in Bathurst was during the 1869 Cholera Epidemic.⁴⁵⁰ Officially it was estimated that the 1869 Cholera Epidemic took the lives of about 1, 174 people, about a quarter of the population in Bathurst.⁴⁵¹ The 1869 epidemic was part of the mid-19th century global cholera epidemic believed to have started in the east, going through mecca and reaching the Senegal River through Morocco.⁴⁵² As part of managing Bathurst under the onslaught of cholera the town was divided into districts with sanitary commissioners being responsible for each district.⁴⁵³ Each sanitary commissioner conducted house-to-house visits in their district. The commissioners along with a “gang of prisoners” fumigated homes, removed bodies, burnt contaminated articles, lime washed the homes of infected people and administered the delivery of food.⁴⁵⁴ The Cholera epidemic was foundational for what the function of the sanitary commissioner looked like on the ground, with house-to-house visitation as a key part of the commissioners’ duties.

⁴⁵⁰ NRS, CSO 1/20, Dr. Waters Report on the *Epidemic of Cholera in Bathurst, River Gambia, during May and June 1869*.

⁴⁵¹ NRS, CSO 1/20, Dr. Waters Report on the *Epidemic of Cholera in Bathurst, River Gambia, during May and June 1869*.

⁴⁵² NRS, CSO 1/20, Dr. Waters Report on the *Epidemic of Cholera in Bathurst, River Gambia, during May and June 1869*.

⁴⁵³ NRS, CSO 1/20, Dr. Waters Report on the *Epidemic of Cholera in Bathurst, River Gambia, during May and June 1869*.

⁴⁵⁴ NRS, CSO 1/20, Dr. Waters Report on the *Epidemic of Cholera in Bathurst, River Gambia, during May and June 1869*.

Sanitary commissioners, much like the justices of the peace however, had important limitations on their operations as they were appointed by the colonial governor or administrator and mainly during epidemics. The administrator's appointment of sanitary commissioners was therefore on an ad hoc basis. The first sanitary commissioners appointed during the 1869 Cholera epidemic were exclusively Europeans. The 1869 sanitary commissioners were the colonial surgeon, medical officers of the West Indian regiment and prominent European merchants.⁴⁵⁵ The colonial administrator would not appoint Africans as sanitary commissioners until 1878.

The sanitary commissioners and their activities occurred in a state of exception. D'Arcy created the sanitary commissioners as a response to a second yellow fever epidemic in 1866 during his tenure. For D'Arcy more sanitary policing was an imperative because the two yellow fever epidemics in Bathurst killed many Europeans, and so threatened the colonial system. The sanitary commissioners as envisioned by D'Arcy's 1866 Sanitation Ordinance were responsible for preventing epidemics through intimate and intrusive sanitary policing and management of the Bathurst home. But once the epidemic or state of crisis was over the sanitary commissioners were removed. However, during that period of crisis a municipal form of governance came into existence in which sanitary commissioners provided services such as regular meals to residents in their districts. The Board of Health represented a more permanent version of the sanitary commissioners medicalized governance. As the next section shows, elite Africans were avid

⁴⁵⁵ NRS, CSO 1/18, Henry Fowler to Appointed Sanitary Commissioners, 23 May 1869.

advocates for a Board of Health as they recognized in it a potential form of municipal government in which they could participate.

4.4 African Participation in Medicalized Municipal Governance

This section will trace African participation in and advocacy for the medicalization of municipal government. Prior to the creation of the Board of Health, Africans in Bathurst mainly used petitions, labor strikes, the press, and their positions as *petit jurors* to voice their opinions and put political pressure on the colonial state. Thus, the creation of the Board of Health in 1887 with appointed African members gave the African elite a new and important avenue for political participation.⁴⁵⁶ Therefore, the creation of the Board of Health should be understood in the vacuum of African participation in municipal governance.

African leaders such as J.D. Richards- who was the first Black legislative council member in 1883- saw the Board of Health as a step towards African run municipal government. Richards and the Gambia Natives Association (GNA), an organization of heads of friendly societies, African merchants, traders, and clerks were the main advocates for a Board of Health in the late 19th century.⁴⁵⁷ J.D Richards and some members of the GNA got experience running Bathurst directly as sanitary commissioners. And so, for these African elites a Board of Health represented an expansion and strengthening of the municipal roles they were already playing as

⁴⁵⁶ While the Board of Health was created in 1887 by the a Public Health Ordinance, the Board was not active till 1891.

⁴⁵⁷ Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia, 1816-1994*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006),72.

commissioners. As this section argues, without African elite participation medicalized municipal government would not have worked or evolved into a Board of Health. However, it took some years for African elites to get involved in medicalized municipal governance.

From the previous section it was shown that Africans were not appointed as sanitary commissioners during the 1869 Cholera epidemic. It would take until 1878 before the first Africans were appointed as sanitary commissioners by the colonial Administrator. In 1878 elite Africans were appointed sanitary commissioners to prepare Bathurst for a potential yellow fever outbreak, as news spread of an outbreak in French Senegal.⁴⁵⁸ The explicit reason the Administrator picked Africans is not clear. However, the newspaper sources from the period are filled with lots of criticism from Liberated Africans on the sanitary conditions in Bathurst. A primary critique of the papers was the Administrator's- Captain Cooper (1872-1877)- appointment of the colonial engineer as the public health officer. The colonial engineer in this role became the sole person responsible for sanitation in Bathurst. Colonial engineers in Bathurst over saw land reclamation and drainage projects, and Cooper's appointment of the colonial engineer as public health officer shows the strong relationship between land reclamation, drainage and sanitation in the minds of British officials. Newspapers such as the West African Reporter criticized Cooper's policy:

During the rainy season of 1876, the Colonial Engineer was on leave, and a Sanitary Board was appointed by the late Captain Cooper such Board consisting of a number of the agents and merchants here, under the chairmanship of the Colonial Surgeon, Dr. Spilsbury. This Board divided the town into districts, each member taking a district and

⁴⁵⁸ NRS, CSO 1/56, letter from Administrator to Governor in Chief, 31st October 1879.

visiting it regularly and when necessary, ordering drains or yards be cleaned and the town was never kept so clean.⁴⁵⁹

The excerpt above was part of an article from the *West African Reporter*, a Sierra Leone based paper that mainly represented the views of the Liberated African and Wolof commercial elite in Bathurst.⁴⁶⁰ The Paper tactfully criticized the colonial engineer's appointment as the only public health officer by discussing how Bathurst was the cleanest in the colonial engineer's absence. In addition to the article quoted above, a series of other articles appeared in the *West African Reporter* criticizing Bathurst's "sanitary condition".⁴⁶¹ The criticism from the Liberated African and Wolof elite and an outbreak of yellow fever in the neighboring colony of Senegal in 1878 most likely led to the appointment of the first African sanitary commissioners.

⁴⁵⁹ *The West African Reporter*, Gambia, December 5, 1877.

⁴⁶⁰ As with the African times discussed in chapter three newspapers circulating in British West Africa in this period relied on income from helping facilitate trade in England and so many correspondents and readers came from commercial elites and clerks of European firms.

⁴⁶¹ *The West African Reporter*, Gambia, June 27, 1877; *The West African Reporter*, Gambia, July 11, 1877; *The West African Reporter*, Gambia, December 5, 1877.

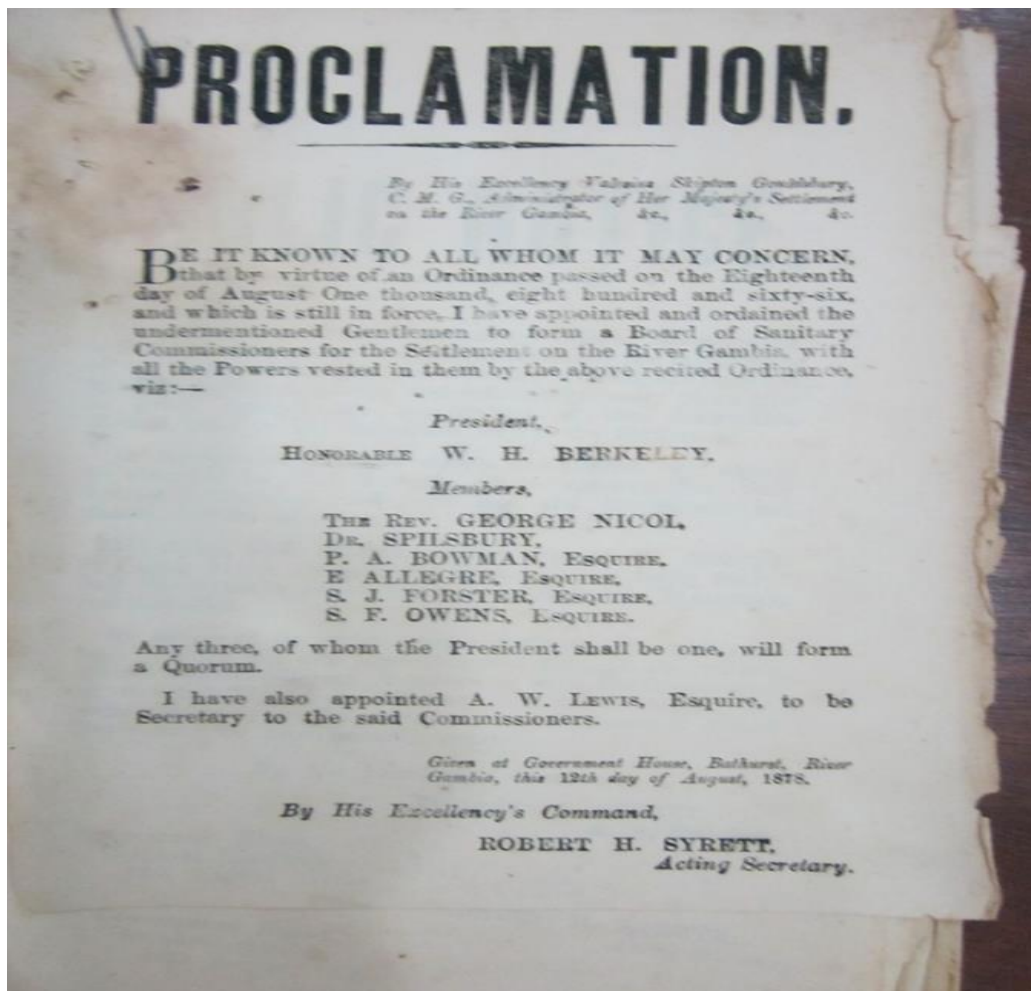


Figure 8 1878 Proclamation showing the names of S.J. Forster and George Nicol, the first two Africans appointed as sanitary commissioners by the Administrator of the Gambia (Source: NRS, CSO 1/52, Proclamation to form a Board of Sanitary Commissioners, 1878).

The Africans first appointed sanitary commissioners in 1878 were Reverend Gorge Nicol and Samuel John Forster. The public in Bathurst was informed about who their sanitary commissioners were by official proclamations hung in public spaces as shown by the proclamation in Figure 8. S.J. Forster, whose name comes sixth on the proclamation was a Liberated African of Ibo ethnicity and one of the leading African merchants in Bathurst during

the mid to late 19th century.⁴⁶² George Nicol whose name comes second in Figure 8 was the colonial chaplain or the chaplain of the Anglican Church in Bathurst; he was a Liberated African appointed from Sierra Leone.⁴⁶³ Given the criticism from the press, it would seem the colonial government sought influential African leaders in Bathurst to act as sanitary commissioners. British officials most likely hoped to contain disease outbreaks more effectively with African sanitary commissioners.

Sanitary Commissioners were not only organized during disease outbreaks, as they were also important for preparing Bathurst for the rains. The most important part of seasonal preparations was the clearing out of drains and trash removal from homes. Colonial officials believed that miasma was heightened during the rainy season, where in the high heat and moisture trapped the miasma in the city. Thus, sanitary commissioners would seasonally remove trash from people's homes and clear out the drains with a group of prisoners who were "chained two and two".⁴⁶⁴ Starting with D'Arcy, prisoners were the primary sanitation workforce of Bathurst. The image of a roving group of prisoners headed by an African or European sanitary commissioner must have been a salient representation of the colonial state for many in this period. This image would have been a frightening or threatening one for the poorer African residents who were outside of elite Wolof and Liberated African networks. Poor African

⁴⁶² Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 69.

⁴⁶³ NRS, COS 1/80, letter from George Nicol to Colonial Administrator, 14th July 1885.

⁴⁶⁴ *The West African Reporter*, Gambia, June 27, 1877.

residents in places like Half Die, which is discussed in Chapter Two, were often the target of sanitary campaigns and blamed for the outbreak of disease.⁴⁶⁵

Elite Wolof and Liberated Africans in the position of sanitary commissioners view themselves as the go between for the colonial state's imposition of sanitary regulations on poorer African residents. Comments from the Sierra Leonean newspaper *The Watchman* produced before the 1878 yellow fever outbreak are illustrative here:

Up to now very little has been done, although we are in so perilous a position, especially those who are near the miserable hovels inhabited by the Serere where there are to be observed drains full of animal and vegetable refuse (decomposing surely into disease in other places), this refuse ran in an imperfect course about filling foul pits or spreading in stagnant pools whilst concentrating into various stations creating every species of desolving filth and soaking through the ground.⁴⁶⁶

The writer in the above quote aimed to represent the Serere in Bathurst as the source of disease and as a people who needed to be managed by sanitary commissioners. The Serere were settled by Governor D'Arcy in Half Die in 1863. Most of the Serere community came to Bathurst as refugees fleeing the civil wars that erupted in the Gambia River during the mid-19th century. D'Arcy settled the Serere in Half Die with the goal of using their labor and that of prisoners to drain the Half Die swamp. Half Die as described in Chapter Two was the site of the Half Die Swamp, which British officials believed to be a source of many epidemics. The writer in the above excerpt, like most colonial elites came to see the Serere much like their Half Die surroundings as agents of disease. In particular, the writer focuses on Serere's dumping of trash

⁴⁶⁵ NRS, CSO 1/20, Dr. Waters Report on the *Epidemic of Cholera in Bathurst, River Gambia, during May and June 1869*.

⁴⁶⁶ *The Watchman*, Monday September 16, 1878, 4.

into the drains to portray them as violators of sanitary laws. In the 1845 Public Nuisance Ordinance discussed above, households were responsible for cleaning the streets and drain adjacent to their property. As such, the writer was trying to convey that the Serere were able to violate sanitary laws due to the absence of sanitary commissioners to enforce them.

The use of newspaper quotes in this section, like the one about the Serere is not to suggest that the views in the newspapers aligned with those of the Bathurst African elites one to one. Rather, the newspapers provide access to some aspects of African elite discourse. The discourse that has been focused on here, shows the African elite as imagining themselves as enforcing a sanitary regime on an un-sanitary public. The un-sanitary public being represented by Serere or Africans brought into the colony as immigrants and refugees. Therefore, the appointment of African elites as sanitary commissioners did not remove tensions that arose from medicalized governance but displaced them. So, while Wolof and Liberated African elites might find it easier to inspect among individuals who were part of their friendly society or co-religionist, this was not the case for Africans outside these networks. For example, in 1886 Goremack Njie who was a Wolof trader and sanitary commissioner for Jollof Town “said it would be necessary to go to people’s yards with a police constable because at times difficulties are met with”⁴⁶⁷Njie’s request for armed police to accompany him indicates the resistance that Bathurst residents had towards sanitary commissioners entering their homes. But, at the same time we can imagine less resistance towards Njie when it came to people in his own community.

⁴⁶⁷ NRS, CSO 1/87, letter from Colonial Administrator to Governor in Chief, 11 February 1886, Enclosure No. 2, A Meeting held at Government House on the 9th February 1886.

For Njie's community members his role as sanitary commissioner represented their participation in municipal governance.

The African elite's self-perception as go-betweens for the colonial state is reflected in their demands for municipal control in 1883. J.D. Richards and other members of the Gambia Native's Association sent a petition to the Governor-in-Chief at Sierra Leone in January 1883 asking for a town council in the following:

Another subject to which we desire further to draw your Excellency attention is the establishment of a Town Council in this Settlement...In a Settlement like this with a heterogenous population of varied races, languages and interests, and where it is extremely difficult if not impossible at times to bring before the Government and the legislature the varied needs and requirements of the people a Town Council approved of by the Government may serve as a go-between the Executive and the public in all matters bearing upon the commercial and social welfare of the community.⁴⁶⁸

J.D Richards, who was the secretary of the Gambia Native's Association (GNA), like many heads of the GNA saw themselves as the natural leaders of Bathurst and its residents. The GNA like the organization that presented the principle "Black Inhabitants" in Chapter One, was an association of the heads of Friendly Societies.⁴⁶⁹ Hence, the GNA heads as a collective represented many people- especially those within the Liberated African and Wolof community. In the excerpt above, the GNA attempted to advocate for and legitimize their roles as the natural leaders of the "people" by portraying Bathurst society as too complex for the colonial government to manage. The colonial government however, generally resistant to giving more

⁴⁶⁸ *The West African Reporter*, Memorial to Governor Havelock by the Gambia Inhabitants on Married Women's Property, February 10, 1883.

⁴⁶⁹ NRS, CSO 1/70, Gambia Natives Association to the Administrator of the Gambia, 26 March 1884

power to African elites, ignored the demands for a town council. Unable to achieve representative municipal government, Liberated African and Wolof elites began demanding that they be organized as a Board of Health as many of them were already sanitary commissioners.

Boards of Health were a product of 19th century England, established in response to anxieties and desires around the control of cholera outbreaks.⁴⁷⁰ Ratepayers in mid-19th century England voted to give over control of urban governance to a Board of Health when a cholera outbreak became too threatening, or they were compelled to by the Imperial government.⁴⁷¹ The Boards of Health in England were comprised of local elites and medical professionals organized to tackle disease outbreak and sanitation. As such the Board of Health in the English context was a temporarily medicalized and alternative form of municipal government funded by ratepayers/taxpayers. A Board of Health in Bathurst from the perspective of African elites would have allowed for greater African participation as members and funders of the institution. Thus, the Board of Health was a potential site through which ratepayers could influence urban politics in Bathurst in the absence of municipal government. J. D Richards in 1886 advocated for a Board whose members were selected through votes by ratepayers.⁴⁷² Richards also wanted a Board that had full powers to act on its own resolutions without the approval of the colonial Administrator.⁴⁷³ Many of Richard's calls were initially ignored by the colonial administration until the outbreak of smallpox in 1886.

⁴⁷⁰ J.A. Chandler, *Explaining Local Government: Local government in Britain since 1800*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester 2007), 54.

⁴⁷¹ Chandler, *Explaining Local Government*, 54.

⁴⁷² Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 128.

⁴⁷³ Mahoney, *Creole Saga*, 129.

The reason the smallpox outbreak made the colonial government capitulate to African demands for a Board, was the need for extensive vaccination. Unlike yellow fever, smallpox had a vaccine which colonial officials hoped to give to all Africans to prevent further outbreak.⁴⁷⁴ After the first case of smallpox was noticed in 1886, the colonial administrator on the 9th February appointed sanitary commissioners and began a vaccination campaign.⁴⁷⁵ For the colonial government vaccinating the residents of Bathurst was a difficult task. The vaccination laws of the time show the colonial government using a mixture of coercion and incentive to get people vaccinated. Those who were successfully vaccinated got one shilling, while those who “resist, deceive or obstruct any Public Vaccinator” were fined three pounds with the possibility of “one months imprisonment”.⁴⁷⁶ A key complaint of colonial officials with regard to smallpox was the refusal of Africans to tell state officials whether there were infected persons within their household or neighborhood.⁴⁷⁷ Many residents in Bathurst likely disapproved of the Public Vaccinator legal right to enter any household between 12 noon to 6 for the “purpose of ascertaining who are unvaccinated and to vaccinate the same”.⁴⁷⁸ The scale of the smallpox outbreak and the need to convince so many people to be vaccinated likely pushed the colonial government to heed demands for a Board of Health with African members. From 1886 to 1887 smallpox spread to all parts of the colony which included the Ceded mile-the colonial territory

⁴⁷⁴ NRS, CSO 1/87, letter from Colonial Administrator to Governor in Chief, 11 February 1886.

⁴⁷⁵ NRS, CSO 1/87, letter from Colonial Administrator to Governor in Chief, 11 February 1886.

⁴⁷⁶ NRS, CSO 1/87, Public Notice, 10th February 1886.

⁴⁷⁷ NRS, CSO 1/62, A Meeting of the Legislative Council held at Government House on Friday, 18th February 1881.

⁴⁷⁸ NRS, CSO 1/87, Public Notice, 10th February 1886

on the Niimi shoreline- and British Combo, in the 1887 annual report the colonial administrator remarked “Smallpox, therefore was epidemic throughout the Settlement of the Gambia in 1887”.⁴⁷⁹ In response the colonial Administrator passed the 1887 Public Health Ordinance, which established the Board of Health. The 1887 Public Health Ordinance brought together all the policing powers, responsibilities, and provisions of all previous sanitary ordinances since 1845 into the constitution of the Board of Health.

For the Gambia Native’s Association, the Board of Health was the second-best option for their increased participation in municipal governance. Thus, African elites supported the increased medicalized governance in the form of the Board of Health even though it allowed for more state intrusion. Many of the African elites had served as sanitary commissioners and were therefore experienced in governing Bathurst through a sanitary framework. Importantly, the large scope and invasiveness of the Board of Health as described in the Board’s 1887 constitution required African elite participation to function. Hence while the Board represented greater control and domination by the British over people and space in Bathurst it also created avenues of power for African elites and politics.

4.5 The Board of Health and Early 20th Century Medicalized Municipal Governance

The Board of Health, established in 1887 and abolished in 1930, was the primary municipal authority responsible for urban life and space in colonial Bathurst. The Board was responsible for cleaning the streets and drains, cleaning public latrines, removing, and disposing

⁴⁷⁹ PP, Reports of Her Majesty’s Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1887, Gambia.

of refuse and sewage.⁴⁸⁰ In addition, the Board was also responsible for drainage, maintenance and creation of drains, street lighting, road construction and maintenance, clearing overgrown areas and sections of the mangrove forest and land reclamation. The Board controlled everything related to the Bathurst market, from food inspection to fees for stalls etc. More invasively, the Board's sanitation inspectors inspected almost all the homes in Bathurst weekly, gave permits for the construction of homes, destroyed unlawful homes and fumigated homes during campaigns against diseases. The Board fined and took people to court for violating sanitary laws. Lastly, the Board gave lectures to schoolteachers on sanitation and hygiene, after which they were evaluated and prepared to teach students on the same topics.⁴⁸¹ In 1900 the Governor of the Gambia wrote about the Board of Health as "The only institution of at all a municipal character is the Board of Health, which may be said to control the affairs of the town of Bathurst."⁴⁸² The Board had about five appointed members throughout its history. From 1907 until 1913 there were three or four Africans members and one or two European merchants. Then from 1920 to 1930 there were about one or two African members and three or four Europeans.⁴⁸³ The president and chairman of the Board of Health was the Chief Medical Officer, the other colonial officials on the Board were the Colonial Engineer and the Chief Inspector of Police.

⁴⁸⁰ NRS, ARP 15/1, The Annual Sanitary Reports from 1909-1929; These give details of all the activities that have been listed above.

⁴⁸¹ NRS, ARP 15/1, The Annual Sanitary Reports from 1909-1929; The reports discuss the annual educational activities of the Board of Health to school children.

⁴⁸² PP, Reports of Her Majesty's Colonial Possessions Past and Present, 1900, Gambia.

⁴⁸³ British Online Archives (BOA), Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Ch 3, 2.

The creation of the Board of Health in Bathurst coincided with the ascendance of mosquito theory as the explanation for the cause of malarial fever. The mosquito theory immensely influenced the sorts of projects that the Board of Health engaged in, and framed the Board's markers and understanding of successful governance. The Board of Health's almost thirty years long endeavor to eradicate the mosquito began in 1902, after the scientific investigations of Dr. Josef Everett Dutton to discover breeding sites of mosquitoes in Bathurst. During this period of the mosquito campaign, migrants in the city-some of whom served as the Board of Health's labor- were increasingly isolated and restricted in their movements. At the same time, African residents in Bathurst saw their city segregated along racial lines and their homes intruded upon to a degree unseen in the 19th century. To make sense of how the Board of Health governed Bathurst and how this governance was experienced by Bathurst residents this section will focus on two themes of the Board's medicalized governance: inspection and segregation. Segregation covers the most important spatial reorganization of Bathurst into a European and "Native" quarter, while inspection highlights the nature of residents weekly and monthly encounters with medicalized urban governance.

4.6 The 1902 Malaria Expedition

In 1902 a young medical doctor and researcher named Joseph Everett Dutton was sent to Gambia to conduct research on malaria as part of a larger malaria expedition by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine.⁴⁸⁴ The Liverpool School was at the center of research on malaria in

⁴⁸⁴ J. Everett Dutton, Report of the malaria expedition to the Gambia 1902, of the Liverpool

this time, being founded right after it was discovered that malaria was transmitted by the mosquito by the work of Ronald Ross. Ross was hired by the Liverpool school soon after its creation in 1897, the school after securing funding from imperial and stakeholder colonial governments tasked Ross with a West African Malaria expedition.⁴⁸⁵ The expedition went to Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. The malaria expeditions had huge consequences on colonial sanitary regimes in British West Africa, as the colonial understanding of malaria changed, and colonial sanitary efforts were redirected towards mosquito larvae destruction.

A key recommendation that came from the Malaria expedition in the Gambia and other British West African colonies was segregation.⁴⁸⁶ Joseph Everett Dutton, like his Liverpool School of Medicine colleagues, justified segregation in colonial cities by claiming that Africans were generally immune to yellow fever, but their children were carriers. According to malariologists of the time, it was suggested that Europeans be segregated with up to two kilometers between them and the closest African resident.⁴⁸⁷ This amount of spatial segregation being impossible on the small island city of Bathurst, Dutton recommended that half a mile would suffice.⁴⁸⁸ The Board of Health following Dutton's recommendation removed all Africans who lived close to European residents and rehoused them on reclaimed land to create an exclusively

School of Tropical Medicine and Medical Parasitology.

⁴⁸⁵ Raymond E. Dumett, The Campaign against Malaria and the Expansion of Scientific Medical and Sanitary Services in British West Africa, 1898-1910, *African Historical Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1968), 160-167.

⁴⁸⁶ Dutton, *Report of the malaria expedition*, 34.

⁴⁸⁷ Philip D. Curtin, Medical Knowledge and Urban Planning in Tropical Africa, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (Jun., 1985), 600.

⁴⁸⁸ Dutton, *Report of the malaria expedition*, 34.

white area. The Board of Health ramped up land reclamation in Half Die and Box Bar, as the only available space for the evictees was on reclaimed land. Many early twentieth century Africans like Cecil Ceesay -whose story is told below- experienced their city being divided into a “European” and “Native” quarter and found themselves in more flood prone areas as a result.

4.7 Segregation

Segregation in early twentieth century British and French West African colonial cities dominates much of the literature at the intersection of urban governance and colonial medical knowledge and policies.⁴⁸⁹ Philip Curtin in writing about African colonial cities in the early 20th century says “Urban segregation received new impetus from medical changes toward the end of the century” .⁴⁹⁰ French and British Colonial officials in the early 20th century began establishing segregated European quarters in cities like Dakar, Freetown, Lagos and Bathurst. Colonial officials justified the creation of these European quarters as necessary for preventing malaria and yellow fever spreading among ill-immune Europeans. What differentiates the segregation process in Bathurst, however, was that the ideal distance for segregating Europeans and Africans was impossible to achieve on the tiny island of St Mary’s. Therefore, the Board of Health

⁴⁸⁹ Odile Georg “From Hill Station (Freetown) to Downtown Conakry (First Ward): Comparing French and British Approaches to Segregation in Colonial Cities at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32:1 (1998):1-31; Janet Abu-Lughod, *Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 7, no. 4, 429–57; Robert K. Home, *Of Planting and Planning : The Making of British Colonial Cities*, (New York: Routledge, 2013); Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandahs of Power : Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*, (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow : The Production of a Global Culture*, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

⁴⁹⁰ Curtin, “Medical Knowledge, and Urban Planning”, 596.

establish some degree of segregation by picking up its reclamation project in the Box Bar area. The Board of Health reclaimed land in Box Bar to resettle the Africans it had evicted from the Clifton Road area. Clifton Road for much of the British colonial period in the Gambia was the location of European Bungalows, the Colonial Hospital and colonial government offices. Land reclamation became the primary means through which segregation was achieved in Bathurst, demonstrating land reclamation's use as a technopolitical tool by the Board of Health.

Although Dutton had recommended segregation in 1902 it was not till 1913 that the Board of Health made moves towards it.⁴⁹¹ The expropriation of Africans and the building of new European bungalows on Clifton Road was expensive, and hence the slow government action. However, a yellow fever outbreak in 1911 galvanized the move towards segregation. The African houses that were the target for the segregation plan were mapped out in the 1911 Urban Plan of Bathurst. The 1911 Plan became an important tool of the Board of Health's anti-mosquito campaign as it indicated "... the areas that are low and impossible to drain. The positions of cesspits and surface wells...".⁴⁹² Figure 4.2 which is a section of the 1911 Plan shows how the plan was also used to locate the African households targeted for removal from Clifton Road and Victoria Street.

⁴⁹¹ NRS, ARP 15/1, The Annual Sanitary Reports 1913,18.

⁴⁹² NRS, ARP 15/1, The Annual Sanitary Reports 1910, 12.

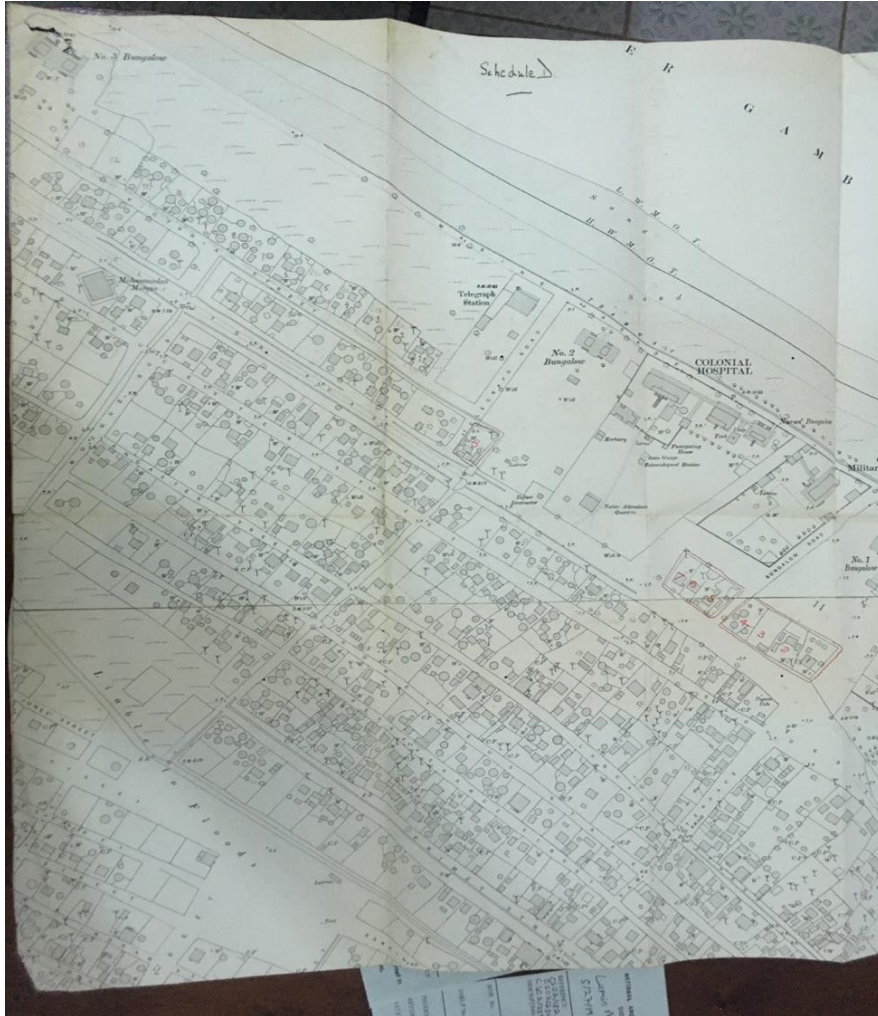


Figure 9 Map showing the plots (marked in red) that were African households that needed to move to the newly reclaimed area at Box Bar (Source: NRS, CSO 2/158 Plots on the Seaside of Victoria Street).

Cecil Ceesay occupied the plot numbered “5” in Figure 9 on “Victoria Street.” On December 15th, 1914, Cecil would have heard from her neighbors that a notice was published in the government gazette saying that her land was “required for the service of the Government.”⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ NRS, CSO 2/158, The Acting Legal Adviser to the Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1915.

Cecil perhaps confused and dismayed by what seemed to be a rumor, was soon assured that the rumors were true as she was directly served a notice by the colonial police two days later. Even more troubling for Cecil as she found out from the notice, was that in order to ensure that her and her family would not be homeless, she had to produce “a valid written title”. The colonial government policy for the “expropriation scheme” was that the occupiers on Victoria Street had to produce “valid written titles” to be compensated for the expropriation of their property and given new property on reclaimed land in Box Bar. Cecil was fortunate in that she had her title deed, but for eleven of her neighbors the colonial legal adviser reviewing the expropriation cases remarked “I am not able in respect of any of the remaining 11 plots to certify that a valid written title has been produced.”⁴⁹⁴ Questions of valid title deeds became major issues for the expropriation committee created by the colonial government to deal with the removal of Africans like Cecil from Clifton Road and Victoria Street.

The colonial government eager to move Africans out of Clifton Road area, ultimately ignored the absence of title deeds but made Africans pay for their relocation either directly or indirectly. It was suggested by S. J. Forster- who was one of the Africans on the expropriation committee and a descendant of the S.J. Forster mention in the earlier section- that in the case of doubtful title deeds “Government should undertake the work of removal and that the expense should be a charge against the amount of compensation.”⁴⁹⁵ The original policy for expropriation was that Africans after representing a valid title deed would be given half of the compensation

⁴⁹⁴ NRS, CSO 2/158, The Acting Legal Adviser to the Colonial Secretary, 19 January 1915.

⁴⁹⁵ NRS, CSO 2/158, Minutes of a meeting of the Expropriation Committee, 8 May 1914.

amount to help them move and then the other half to help them build in the new location. Forster therefore suggested that in cases of doubtful title deeds the government take over the cost of moving and charge it against the property owners in compensation if no one else claimed to own the expropriated property. Meaning that Africans without title deeds got paid less overall as they were charged on the amount that they needed to rebuild. Further, the compensation did not cover the cost of filling in the new land if there was more filling to be done after the reclamation work by the Board of Health. For example, Alieu N’Jie who occupied plot number “4” in Fig 4.2 was told by the expropriation committee “to complete the filling in of the new plot, already raised about 1 foot.”⁴⁹⁶ Many of the Africans evicted either paid for their move by not being properly compensated or paid for the land reclamation work the government was supposed to do.

By March 1915 all Africans were evicted and moved to the Box Bar area. After the “expropriation” of the Clifton Road area the neighborhood towards the beach became an exclusive white area. And the former African residents were moved to the flood prone Box Bar area. Not only were the evicted Africans exposed to flooding, but they were also paid very little as explained in the paragraph above. Cecil Cessay was given 30 pounds as compensation and moved to No.12 Rankin Street. The original amount drawn up as compensation for the Africans removed was 1500 pounds.⁴⁹⁷ At the end of the removal the colonial government only gave 379 pounds to the Africans evicted from Clifton Road and Victoria Street.⁴⁹⁸ In addition to being

⁴⁹⁶ NRS, CSO 2/158, Minutes of a meeting of the Expropriation Committee, 3rd November 1914.

⁴⁹⁷ NRS, CSO 2/182, Dutton Scheme (Kennan-Simms Report), Proposed Distribution of Work included in the Scheme for filling on a small scale.

⁴⁹⁸ NRS, CSO 2/158, letter from Colonial Secretary of State to Colonial Administrator, 3rd March 1915.

segregated, Africans in Bathurst also experienced the Board of Health's intrusions into their homes at a degree unseen in the 19th century.

4.8 Inspection

In 1914, the Board of Health's Sanitary Inspector gave 665 households notices to "remove conditions causing the breeding of larvae." Out of these 665 households 198 were fined for continuing to have "mosquito larvae on premises". While two out of 665 property owners were sent to prison for refusing to pay the fine.⁴⁹⁹ What may have confused or even surprised the prosecuted homeowners during their trial was the Sanitary Inspectors presentation of "White glass jam jars with gauze lids".⁵⁰⁰ In the jar were "samples of larvae-bearing water found in compounds."⁵⁰¹ The jar would have had the following label on it:

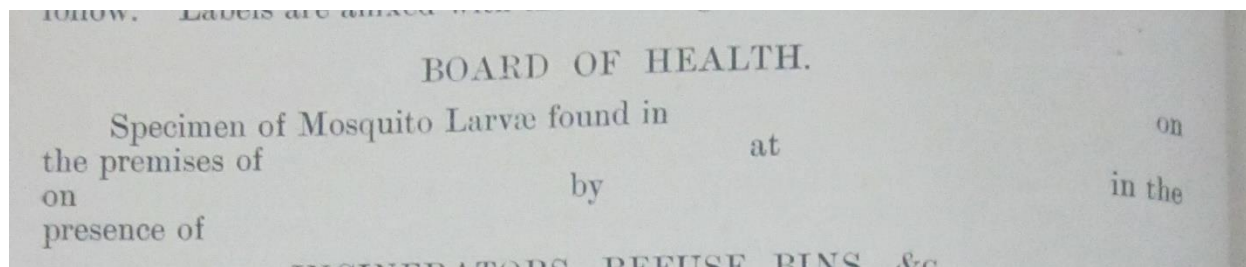


Figure 10 Example of the label that the Board of Health used to mark household water samples. (Source: NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1912, 20).

The Board of Health's campaign against malarial introduced new forms of evidence into the colonial court room- the homeowner's own household water. The presence of mosquito

⁴⁹⁹ NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1914 ,13.

⁵⁰⁰ NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1912, 20.

⁵⁰¹ NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1912, 20.

larvae in household water made them criminals in violation of the increasingly punitive sanitary laws enforced by the Board of Health. The sanitary laws in Bathurst became more punitive after 1912, with the passage of the 1912 Public Health ordinance by the legislature in response to the 1911 yellow fever outbreak. The ordinance made inspection more punitive as homeowners in Bathurst saw their own household water being used against them in court.

The accumulation of water in one place was always the enemy of the Gambian colonial state; for British officials in Bathurst water had to be in constant motion. The accumulation of water during the rainy season in Bathurst often resulted in floods, hampering colonial efforts to create dry land. Colonial attempts at creating dry land turned Bathurst into a city of drains as officials tried to keep water in constant motion. The colonial concern for the flow of water would however reach new heights in the 20th century, as the increasingly influential malariologist cast stagnant water as a favorable condition for mosquito propagation. As a result, water that stagnated anywhere was suspicious and so household earthen jugs, wells, and potholes in the Bathurst home came under the sanitary inspector's gaze.

In March 1902 R.M. Forde, the Chief Medical Officer and Chairman of the Board of Health wrote that after taking into consideration Dutton's investigations and recommendations the Sanitary Inspector was:

Instructed in the methods of looking out for and distinguishing the different varieties of mosquitoes, the fully grown insects, and their different appearances in the aquatic phase of their development and he has been specially detailed to at least twice a week visit all yards, gardens, and compounds and examine the wells, casks & c., for mosquito larvae

and also to warn the owners to keep their wells and tubs covered and to see that no stagnant water is left about.⁵⁰²

As part of the Board of Health's campaign to eliminate the mosquito from Bathurst the Sanitary Inspector was trained to see mosquito larvae in stagnant water. The Inspector's newly acquired skill of finding mosquito larvae would be exercised on Bathurst homes through intrusion and surveillance. The Inspector showed up in resident's homes twice a week and more if the home was suspected of harboring large amounts of larvae.

In 1912 the Liberated African press complained about the 1912 Public Health Ordinance and the intrusions of the Sanitary Inspector in the following:

By this provision the Inspectors may enter and intrude into people's bedrooms against the wish of the owner or occupier who dare not prevent such entry... my efforts may help to prove to the authorities that although the native community are quite ready to assist in the improvement of the Sanitation of the Town yet it will be very great hardship for them to be punished for the existence of mosquitoes larvae in wells and other places over which they have no control to prevent microbes to enter.⁵⁰³

The excerpt shows rising concerns in Bathurst about privacy and the violent nature of the state's intrusion into the home, as well as the impossibility of keeping out mosquito larvae from the household. The colonial state ignored calls to amend the 1912 Public Health Ordinance. The Board of Health's 20th century mosquito campaign turned colonial state intrusions into the Bathurst home from an exceptional act carried out during epidemics- as was the case in the 19th century- to a repeated act under a constructed state of permanent crisis. The Board of Health saw the very presence of a few mosquito larvae in stagnant water as an affirmation of an ongoing

⁵⁰² NRS, PUB 4/11, Colony Of The Gambia, Government Gazette, 237.

⁵⁰³ *The Sierra Leone Guardian*, Bathurst Gambia, May 24, 1912.

war. The Board to win the war against the mosquito justified the constant inspection and intrusions into any Bathurst home. Inspection became an everyday feature of medicalized governance under the Board of Health, as the Board was concerned with threats that could not be seen by the untrained eye. Equally concerning to the Board and its governance over Bathurst were the migrants coming into the city, believed by officials to be carriers of disease.

4.9 Citizens and Migrants under Medicalized Governance

This section describes how the Board of Health professionalized sanitation workers in Bathurst by isolating and segregating them in the mangroves. In 1913, the Board began building the sanitary laborers' lines on reclaimed land in the mangroves.⁵⁰⁴ Sanitation workers for much of the first decade of the 20th century were a changing mix of seasonal migrant workers who came to Bathurst mainly at the end of the groundnut trading season. The Board's sanitary laborers lines were designed to fixed and control its sanitation workforce. Consequently, as sanitation work was fixed it also become ethnicized. The best evidence for the ethnicization of sanitary work as this section will show is found in children's rhymes that were meant to taunt sanitation workers as they collected night soil. The children's rhymes act as historical artifacts of the Board of Health's professionalization and subsequent ethnicization of sanitation work on the one hand, as well as the emergence of new modes of belonging and citizenship that came from the Board's provision of new municipal services. As such, the Board of Health's mode of governance created divisions along many lines in Bathurst society, ones between races and

⁵⁰⁴ NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1913, 18.

another between migrant and citizen. This section explores the division between migrants and citizens under the Board through sanitation workers in Bathurst.

Organizing sanitation work was a central part of mid-19th century and early 20th century British colonial government's ability to implement its sanitary campaigns. In Vijay Prashad's work on Delhi's sweepers or sanitation workers, he explores how the Delhi Municipal Council (DMC) organized and controlled the city's sanitation workers.⁵⁰⁵ The Delhi sweepers were all from the Dalit caste, which was the lowest caste within the Hindu caste system. However, as Prashad notes the nature of the patron-client relationship between sweepers and householders, as well as the sweepers control of sanitation over specific neighborhoods gave the sweepers a lot of power. Sweepers could easily protest by refusing to pick up a certain client's trash because of disrespect or bad treatment. Prashad shows how the introduction of a wage from the DMC and assignment of sweepers to random neighborhoods essentially destroyed the sweepers' power. In other words, when the sweepers became permanent municipal employees their influence in Delhi was diminished. As discussed in an earlier section, D'Arcy created an organized sanitation work force through the Bathurst prison. The Board of Health, unlike the DMC or D'Arcy however, had to find a way to form a permanent work force out of seasonal migrants.

Sanitation work in 20th century Bathurst was carried out primarily by migrants coming from the Gambia Protectorate and French West Africa. From 1891 to about 1912 migrant labor for sanitation was not regularized. The Board of Health like some colonial departments sent out a

⁵⁰⁵Vijay Prashad, Marks of Capital: Colonialism and the Sweepers of Delhi, *International Review of Social History* 40, no. 1 (1995): 1–30.

Time checker, who went to the places where migrants would congregate and offered them work.⁵⁰⁶ From the mid-19th century onwards, many migrants came to Bathurst to take advantage of the large labor needs at the end of the groundnut trading season. When groundnut trading ended in the Gambia River, traders brought their groundnuts to Bathurst to be processed, packaged, and transported out of Bathurst. Many migrants worked as porters for the major British and French groundnut trading companies.⁵⁰⁷ The colonial government also benefited from the influx of migrants, as the state could also recruit them. However, as this recruitment was seasonal, the labor that the Board of Health could access would constantly fluctuate. The large number of planned projects that the Board of Health started with the anti-mosquito campaign made labor fluctuations undesirable. And so the Board of Health built a sanitary laborers compound in the farthest part of the mangrove swamps on reclaimed land, to maintain a permanent sanitation workforce. Originally the sanitary workers and their carts and equipment were stationed next to McCarthy square at the center of Bathurst.

In the 1914 medical and sanitation report, the Chief Medical Officer and president of the Board of Health celebrated the completion of the sanitary laborer's lines and the removal of the sanitary workers from central Bathurst in the following:

The sanitary labourer's buildings were completed and taken over in March. They consist of four blocks, capable of housing sixty men, and have proved of considerable value in maintaining and controlling the gangs.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ NRS, CSO 2/ 712, Subject D. Labour, Methods of Recruitment, 1926.

⁵⁰⁷ Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate : The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834-1934*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 120.

⁵⁰⁸ NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1914, 11.

The quote explicitly shows that the sanitary laborer's lines were not just about housing migrant workers but also about controlling them. In the Bathurst context, the language of the "gang" to describe sanitation workers evokes connections to the "chain-gang" or prisoners originally used for sanitation work and land reclamation. The sanitary laborer's lines were a carceral apparatus much like the prison; designed for constant surveillance and isolation from society. Sanitation workers in the Sanitary Laborers Lines were regularly surveilled by the sanitary inspector and other officials and physically outside of Bathurst society. Below is a map from the 1911 Plan of Bathurst, which shows the sanitary laborer's' lines beyond Bathurst's main embankment at Box Bar. The Box Bar embankment, which is described in Chapter One, acted as a city wall designed to keep out water from overflowing creeks. The Box Bar embankment also marked the city limits of Bathurst. The Board of Health used the mangrove swamp beyond Box Bar as a dumping ground, the accumulation of trash was gradually used to



Figure 11 Map showing the sanitary laborers' lines beyond the Box Bar embankment in brown. (Source: Ministry of Lands, Regional Government & Religious Affairs)

create land for the Sanitary Laborers Lines. And so, the sanitation workers housed in the Sanitary Laborer's Lines essentially lived on the trash that they and others had collected over the years.

Figure 11 above shows the Sanitary Laborers' Lines beyond the Box Bar embankment colored brown. The lines in Figure 11 were the furthest buildings in the mangrove swamp, indicating the isolation and marginalization of sanitation workers. The empty plots colored in green close to the West African Frontier Force Lines were all reclaimed areas, created to house the evicted residents from Victoria Street like Cecil Cessay. Colonial officials never considered these empty plots for the sanitation workers rather they put them in the most flood prone areas within the mangrove. British officials justified the isolation of sanitation workers as necessary because migrants who made up the sanitation workforce were carriers of disease. The Chief Medical Officer wrote "It is often from this floating class that infectious disease is introduced to Bathurst. On occasion it has been found expedient to vaccinate these labourers wholesale."⁵⁰⁹ Sanitation workers although employees of the Board of Health, were at the sharpest end of its needle. Sanitation workers were the most inspected and segregated in Bathurst, those two elements being key modes of medicalized urban governance under the Board of Health as so far described. However, it was not only the Board who denigrated and outcasted sanitation workers, so too did Bathurst's property owners who benefited from sanitation worker's services.

D-p -daddy po- mafo- deggeh ⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ NRS, APR 15/2, Annual Medical & Sanitary Report 1926, 1.

⁵¹⁰ Interview with Fatou Bin Jobe January 2018, Fajara, Gambia. Fatou was born in colonial Bathurst in 1959.

Children would sing this rhyme to taunt the sanitation workers as they removed the pails from the pail latrines provided by the Board of Health to Bathurst rate/taxpayers. Sanitation workers annoyingly or jokingly responded to the taunts by spraying the children with dirty water from the pails, chasing them away. The taunting and the response would occur in the dead of night or at the break of dawn. The rhyme used to taunt sanitation workers is often the first thing recalled by informants when asked about sanitation during their childhood in the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The rhyme very effectively articulates the relationships between ethnicity, labor, and access to municipal services that began under the Board of Health. In ethnic terms the rhyme identifies those who did sanitation work as Mande Bambara speakers and the residents who benefit from their labor, as Wolof speakers by playing on the relationship between “Mafo” and “Deggeh”. “Mafo” and “Deggeh” in the rhyme euphemistically referred to the feces that were collected by sanitation workers. Deggeh, a Wolof word for peanut butter acts as a translation for mafo/mafe, a Bambara dish composed of a peanut stew sauce. The rhyme paints the picture of Mande Bambara speakers-sanitation workers collecting their ethnic dish in the form of the pail latrines filled with feces from residential toilets, hence, the very denigrating joke. Daddy po, the phrase at the beginning of the rhyme was the name given to sanitation workers, “po” being the letters on pails in which human feces were collected, detached, and emptied. While “Daddy”, worked as a possessive that indicated ownership by the colonial government and comes out of the creole dialect spoken by the descendants of Liberated Africans in Bathurst.⁵¹¹ The children’s rhyme

⁵¹¹ Liberated Africans in Bathurst were originally comprised of many different groups of West Africans, with a large majority coming from the regions in modern day Nigeria. By the 20th century most

which is read here as a historical artifact encapsulates the relationships of power and alienation in colonial Bathurst, marking through language and rhyme who had the right to municipal services and belonged to Bathurst and who didn't. Access to municipal services provided by the Board of Health became an important marker of belonging in Bathurst, as it was a service people got because they owned property and paid taxes.

The services provided by sanitation workers is described in a Liverpool School for Tropical Medicine report for the Gambia in the following:

The scavenging is done by a gang of twenty labourers and two horses and carts, under the supervision of an Inspector and Assistant Inspector of Nuisances. All rubbish, consisting of house refuse and leaves raked up in the streets, is carted to the back of the town where it is burnt and utilized for the filling in the swamp and levelling up depressions in the open areas.⁵¹²

The removal of trash in Bathurst had a double function to improve hygiene and provide fill for land reclamation. Trash from African homes would ultimately be utilized in helping segregate households like those of Cecil Ceesay from their European neighbors. Under the Board of Health all sanitary operations from land reclamation, trash collection and drainage became connected and were performed by the migrant sanitation laborer.

The Board of Health provided new municipal services such as household trash collection in response to Dutton's findings, and so these services were part of the Board of Health's anti-mosquito campaign. Dutton identified the cesspits and trash in people's homes as major breeding

descendants of Liberated Africans became known as Aku although Akus were originally a Yoruba subgroup of Liberated Africans. The political and commercial dominance of the Akus from the mid-19th century onwards most likely led to other Liberated African residents identifying themselves as Akus.
⁵¹²Liverpool School Of Tropical Medicine, Memoir XIV, On Bathurst, Conakry and Freetown, 1905, Report on Sanitation in Bathurst, 4.

sites for mosquitoes and flies and so the Board of Health provided refuse and sewage removal to property owners who paid the rates/taxes on property. Subsequently, the Board of Health introduced a pail system in which each rate payer was provided with a galvanized copper pail from the Board of Health and these pails collected daily by sanitation workers.⁵¹³ Sanitation workers were then tasked with collecting, emptying, cleaning, and returning the pails back to the households. The rhyme quoted above is a commentary on what happens to the pails between their collection and return to the household, as the rhyme insultingly asserts that when the migrant Bambara sanitation workers took the pails, they ate its contents. Tied to this is the idea that while the migrants were essential in keeping households clean, they themselves were not clean. These dynamics are still present in the current period, as Frederick notes in her study of sanitation workers in present day Dakar. According to Frederick a major form of resistance of Senegalese sanitation workers is to advocate for their self-understanding as spiritually clean and doing God's work by cleaning. The Senegalese sanitation workers resistance, however, shows how dehumanizing sanitation work can be despite its essential requirement for keeping the city clean.⁵¹⁴ Migrants took up sanitation work in Bathurst despite its dehumanizing element because the immigration laws in Bathurst often forced them to.

The colonial policing of migrants increased after the end of World War One. The number of French West African migrants such as Bambara speakers increased during World War One as

⁵¹³ NRS, APR 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1910, 11.

⁵¹⁴ Rosalind Fredericks, *Garbage Citizenship: Vital Infrastructures of Labor in Dakar, Senegal*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 4.

they attempted to escape the draft and engage in the wartime economic boom.⁵¹⁵ Colonial officials in Bathurst concerned with the large influx of migrants during the war passed a series of anti-immigrant laws. The first major anti-immigration law to target French subjects was the ordinance to provide for the removal of vagrant aliens.⁵¹⁶ This law essentially had the goal of removing poor people from the colony who could not prove that they were British subjects and had regular work. In addition to the vagrancy law the colonial government also passed the 1924 Immigration Restriction ordinance. The 1924 ordinance created categories of migrants who could not enter Bathurst such as “an idiot or insane”, “a prostitute”, and anyone deemed by the Governor as “undesirable” and those “likely to become a pauper or a public charge”.⁵¹⁷ Anyone who showed up of the immigration officer without visible means of support had to deposit 60 pounds or “give security by bond in that amount.”⁵¹⁸ As such, poor migrants showing up on the Island of St Mary’s had to be able to deposit sixty pounds to enter or quickly find work to avoid being deported. As French subjects became the target of the colonial immigration system in Bathurst, sanitation work for the labor hungry Board of Health became a means of escape.

Over the course of the Board of Health’s anti-malarial campaign, 20th century sanitation workers much like the prisoners used for the same purpose would be increasingly surveilled and isolated through land reclamation. Sanitation workers were primarily migrants from the Gambia

⁵¹⁵ Swindle and Jeng, *Migrants and Credit*, 167-168.

⁵¹⁶ NRS, CSO 2/527, An Ordinance to provide for the deportation of vagrant aliens, 22nd November 1922.

⁵¹⁷ NRS, CSO 2/594, An Ordinance to amend the law relating to the entry of persons into the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia, 16th October 1924.

⁵¹⁸ NRS, CSO 2/594, An Ordinance to amend the law relating to the entry of persons into the Colony and Protectorate of the Gambia, 16th October 1924.

Protectorate and French West Africa. Therefore, the Board of Health's isolation/segregation imposed on and control of migrant sanitation workers through housing in the Sanitary Laborers Lines was also about the fear of migrant as spreaders of disease. The sanitation work that these migrants did in colonial Bathurst became a marker of their vulnerability and exclusion. Bathurst's migrants providing municipal services such as household trash and sewage collection for rate-paying households was a phenomenon that came into being under the Board of Health. The sanitation services that migrants provided created new dimensions of belonging and citizenship that distinguished migrants in Bathurst from Wolof and Aku residents and property owners in Bathurst. None-the-less as the next section discusses elite Wolof and Aku residents gradually lose influence over the Board of Health, and as a result the Board eventually collapsed.

4.10 The collapse of the Board of Health and labor strikes

From the appointment of sanitary commissioners to the creation of the Board of Health, the role of elite Africans was always necessary for the functioning of medicalized municipal governance. The scope and invasiveness of the Board of Health required African elite involvement to convince Bathurst inhabitants not to attack sanitary inspectors who walked into their homes poking around and collecting samples or using needles to vaccinate African children with unknown substances. Elite Africans also wanted to be at the top of positions of the Board of Health so that they could influence matters that concerned them and their communities. By the beginning of World War one, European Medical officials on the Board of Health began to see the presence of African elites on the Board as an obstacle rather than a resource. This section

argues that the marginalization of African elites on the Board of Health lead to its collapse, marking the end of medicalized municipal governance in Bathurst.

Medical Professionals wanting to carry out sanitary policies without the hinderance of African and other non-medical representatives on the Board of Health, made it impossible for the Board to function as a municipal government. An early example of this dynamic between medical officer's vis-a-vis the Board of Health in 1914. 1914 was an extremely wet rainy season which led to a lot of inundation, as the governor explained "grumbles by the townfolks, from time to time, as to the state of the streets, accumulation of water, overflow of drains etc."⁵¹⁹ Due to the inundation, many African elites questioned the effectiveness of the Board. African elites blamed the problems on the Board not meeting enough and hence a shortage on their input on municipal matters. A deputy of "Mohammedans of the Town"- which meant Wolof Muslim leaders in the Bathurst context- met with the governor to complain about the Board which according to them had not met since July 1913.⁵²⁰ When the Senior Medical officer and chairman of the Board of Health Dr. Horn was approached by the governor and his response was the following:

The town is practically a Government concern altogether... And that it is best worked altogether as such; that any Board comprising a quota of local residents is likely to be of very little constructive use while it may prove obstructive and conceivably, destructive, besides affording possibilities for friction which is at present absent, that regular Board meetings will absorb a proportion of the time and energies of himself and his brother officials which they can ill spare.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ NRS, CSO 1/155, letter from Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1914.

⁵²⁰ NRS, CSO 1/155, Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1914

⁵²¹ NRS, CSO 1/155, Governor to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1914

The Board of Health for the African residents and elite of Bathurst was a means through which they gained municipal control and voiced their positions and influenced decisions on Bathurst. However, medical professionals such as Horn saw the Board more as a department within the government that was specifically concerned with sanitation. Dr Horn's position ignores struggles between the colonial state and Africans over municipal governance which in part led to the creation of the Board. With individuals like Horn in charge, the Board gradually offloaded many of its municipal powers and responsibilities. In the 1916 Sanitary Report by the Board of Health, Horn writes:

The most important incident during the past year was the termination of the long "divorce" proceedings between the Board of Health and Rate Collection. The later has now been transferred to another Department and consequently the Board of Health is purely a Sanitary body, and it is to be hoped that in the future the change will result in increased attention to the question of Public Health.⁵²²

In 1918 the government grant was withdrawn, and the rates and market fees became part of the government revenue and the Board's expenditure came directly from a government grant.⁵²³ The Board essentially lost its financial powers and the relationship between taxes and representation was broken. Towards the 1920s the Board of Health ceased to be a body through which African elites and communities could have meaningful influence.

Just as African elite influence on the Board of Health diminished in the 1920s, so did African elite labor mobilization in Bathurst gain momentum. The 1920s in Bathurst was a time

⁵²² NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1916, 11.

⁵²³ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Ch 4, 2.

of important labor organizing, leading to two major labor strikes in 1921 and 1929.⁵²⁴ Labor organizers such as Francis Small who is viewed as a fore-father of Gambian Independence, became prominent in the 1920s.⁵²⁵ Small's early years in the labor movement reached its peak with the general strike of 1929 and the creation of the Bathurst Trade Union in the same year.

The general strike of 1929 which is well documented by David Perfect (1987) was the longest strike in Gambia's colonial history.⁵²⁶ The strike lasted for six weeks and organized all the skilled labor in Bathurst which included sailors, motor drivers, carpenters, blacksmiths, painters, shipwrights etc. The 1929 general strike was among the most successive labor strikes in colonial Africa prior to World War Two. The strike brought together the Aku and Wolof leaders of various friendly societies and therefore represented a significant threat to the colonial state and commercial enterprise. The colonial state reacted by pushing the commercial firms to accept the demands for wage increases and abolished the Board of Health. The Board of Health was abolished by the 1930 Public Health Ordinance and replaced by the Bathurst Urban District Council (BUDC). On the BUDC were six seats which were filled by Africans elected by voting in the six wards of colonial Bathurst.⁵²⁷ The 1929 strike therefore led to the reintroduction of the franchise for property owners since the abolition of the Ratepayers council in 1855. The 1929

⁵²⁴ David Perfect, *Organised Labour and Politics In The Gambia: 1920-1984*, (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1987).

⁵²⁵ Nana Grey Johnson, *Edward Francis Small: Watchdog of the Gambia*, (The Gambia, BPMRU, 2002)

⁵²⁶ David Perfect, *Organised Labour and Politics In The Gambia: 1920-1984*, (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1987).

⁵²⁷ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 100.

strike was a death nall to medicalized municipal governance, as African elites found new political institutions to direct their energies towards.

In 1930 just after the strike the Governor said about the Board of Health:

The proceedings of the Board as at present constituted have not aroused a degree of municipal enthusiasm and unofficial co-operation which is badly needed.⁵²⁸

The BUDC was established to restore “municipal enthusiasm and unofficial co-operation” of the African public in Bathurst. The general strike organized by Aku and Wolof elite however ignored the large number of unskilled laborers who entered Bathurst as migrants and often ended up doing portage work for commercial firms or sanitation work for the Board of Health. While sanitation workers were left out of the 1929 strike, they had led their own strike many years earlier during World War I. In 1917 just a few years after the sanitary workers were pushed to the edge of Bathurst in the Sanitary Labourers Lines, they led a strike. As a result of the strike the sanitary laborers were able to increase their wages from 1s. 3d to 1s. 6d.⁵²⁹ The Board of Health, by putting the sanitary laborers together in a single housing complex unintentionally provided them space to organize. Further research will, however, need to be conducted to analyze the strike in further detail as well as its politics and form.

⁵²⁸ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Ch 4, 2.

⁵²⁹ NRS, ARP 15/1, Annual Medical and Sanitary Report: For the Year 1917, 20.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter follows the gradual medicalization of municipal government in Bathurst to its culmination in the Board of Health in 1887. By so doing the chapter shows how municipal government evolved since the abolition of the Ratepayers council in 1855. Governance at the municipal level in Bathurst transformed from a very legalistic form in which courts and court officials managed what happened in the streets and drains of Bathurst, to one managed by doctors, sanitary commissioners, and sanitary inspectors. This transformation in governance increased state intrusion and management of the Bathurst home. Over the course of the late 19th century to the early 20th century the antimalarial campaign launched by the Board of Health in 1902 made every private well, earthen water jug and other household water containers a battle ground against the mosquito. In addition to the Bathurst home, the migrant also became a target of medicalized governance, as Board of Health officials saw them as the primary carriers of disease into Bathurst. The main tools that the Board of Health used to manage and control the spread of disease in the Bathurst home and by migrants was inspection and segregation. The chapter has attempted to show that inspection and segregation represented the mechanisms through which medicalized governance operated and was experienced.

While many Africans in Bathurst detested the invasion of their privacy by sanitary inspectors, the Board of Health continued to function because of elite Aku/ Liberated African descendants and Wolof support. After the abolition of the Ratepayers Council, many Liberated African and Wolof elites regained their official political roles as functionaries for medicalized governance. These elites first became sanitary commissioners, then Board of Health members

and its sanitary inspectors. The continuous outbreak of disease in Bathurst and British officials' association of Bathurst with disease because of its mangrove environment justified the passage of increasingly comprehensive and punitive sanitation ordinances. These ordinances to be enforced relied on elite African support and participation in the roles described above. However, by the 1920s the Board of Health no longer became a viable institution through which African elites could do politics and participate in governing Bathurst. The medical professionals on the Board of Health preferred to carry out sanitation campaigns without elite African input. As a result, African elites focused their energies on the emerging labor movement of the 1920s leading to the 1929 strike. The strike led to the abolition of the Board of Health and the end of medicalized governance that began in 1845.

Chapter 5

Developing the Divide Between Colony and Protectorate, 1943-1965

5.1 Introduction

In the middle of World War II, the British imperial government tasked its colonial governments with drawing up new development plans for their colonies.⁵³⁰ In 1943 the colonial government of The Gambia responded to the imperial government's call by publishing the "Development and Welfare in The Gambia" report in June 1943. The report laid out the colonial government's post-war development plan for British Gambia. A key aspect of this plan was the abandonment of land reclamation in Bathurst and the relocation of the "surplus population" of Bathurst to the mainland in Kombo St. Mary. Kenneth W. Blackburn, the colonial secretary and the British official responsible for writing the plan argued that reclamation was "...undesirable on financial grounds as funds are needed more urgently to facilitate the development of new suburbs for the surplus population of Bathurst."⁵³¹ Blackburn argued that the maximum population that could reside in Bathurst was between 7,000 and 8,000 people, at the time of Blackburn's report the population of Bathurst was about 20,000.⁵³² Blackburn's argument for relocation to Kombo St. Mary hinged on the claim that Bathurst was overcrowded and that there

⁵³⁰ British Online Archives (BOA), Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Introduction, 1.

⁵³¹ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 16, 15.

⁵³² BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 16, 15.

was not enough available land in Bathurst even with land reclamation to house the so-called “surplus population.”⁵³³ Blackburn’s solution to overcrowding was to move Bathurst residents as well as the majority of government offices to Kombo St Mary.⁵³⁴ The 1940s brought about two significant transformations in colonial urban management, including the further restriction of the number of residents in Bathurst, and the goal of shifting the center of political power from Bathurst to Kombo St. Mary. Given their long-term struggles for access to land and political participation, many Akus—the descendants of Liberated Africans—and Wolof elites were opposed to the 1943 plan. The Aku elite understood that the process of relocation would entail their political minoritization in British Gambia, as Mandinka people formed the majority outside of St Mary’s Island.⁵³⁵ According to colonial census figures for the 1930s, the Mandinka population in the protectorate was about 85,000 to 86,000 people out of a total protectorate population of 200,000.⁵³⁶

Blackburn’s proposal to move the seat of government out of Bathurst was not a simple relocation of the capital from one part of the colony to another. Bathurst and the island on which it stood—St. Mary’s Island—were the legal and political limits of “The Gambia Colony.” The rest of the territory that made up British Gambia including Kombo St. Mary were not part of the

⁵³³ BOA, *Development and Welfare in the Gambia*, June 1943, *Gambia Under Colonial Rule*, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 16, 15.

⁵³⁴ BOA, *Development and Welfare in the Gambia*, June 1943, *Gambia Under Colonial Rule*, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 17, 15.

⁵³⁵ NRS, ARP 10, *Annual Report on the social and Economic Progress of the People The Gambia*, 1930-1936; These reports contain demographic data for most of the 1930s.

⁵³⁶ NRS, ARP 10, *Annual Report on the social and Economic Progress of the People The Gambia*, 1930-1936.

colony but “The Gambia Protectorate.”⁵³⁷ Bathurst held a special place in what is commonly referred to as British Gambia, composed of both colony and protectorate. Bathurst was a British Crown Territory and the people born or naturalized in that territory were British subjects. Much like British subjects in the Sierra Leone colony, British subjects in Bathurst shared all the rights and privileges of British settlers throughout the British Empire.⁵³⁸ In contrast, “protectorate people”—people born outside of Bathurst but within British Gambia, were foreigners in the colony and were ruled “indirectly” by a political hierarchy of African chiefs administered by a European district commissioner.⁵³⁹ Due to the political division of British Gambia into colony and protectorate, the seat of government could only be moved to Kombo St. Mary by *recolonizing* or dismantling the “Native Administration” of the area as it was under the protectorate system since 1902.

This chapter examines the gradual incorporation of Kombo St. Mary into the colony between 1941 and 1947 to show what the political stakes of the post-war development plans were for Aku political dominance in British Gambia. First, the incorporation of Kombo St. Mary changed the demographics of the Gambia colony. In Kombo St. Mary, Mandinkas and Jolahs formed the two largest groups, demographically speaking. For Akus in Bathurst, the incorporation of Kombo St. Mary into the colony transformed them into an even smaller political

⁵³⁷ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 1, 1.

⁵³⁸ Patrick S. Caulker, *The Autochthonous Peoples, British Colonial Policies, And the Creoles in Sierra Leone: The Genesis of The Modern Sierra Leone Dilemma of National Integration* (unpublished PhD Dissertation, Temple University 1975), 8-9.

⁵³⁹ For a more detailed discuss on indirect rule see Michael Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule*, (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1968), 217-235.

minority. By 1901 there were 819 Aku residents in Bathurst out of a total population of 8,807 Bathurst residents, Wolof residents made up the overwhelming majority with 3,666.⁵⁴⁰ Other significant populations in Bathurst included Jolas, Sereres and Mandinkas, whose population figures in the 1901 census were 493, 715 and 350 respectively. Despite the Wolof majority however, government and political positions were largely filled by Akus.⁵⁴¹ The threat of the Akus political minoritization in British Gambia became more salient after the introduction of universal suffrage for legislative elections in 1947, which coincided with the advancement of Kombo St. Mary to full colonial status. After the 1947 legislative elections no Aku person would win a legislative seat until the end of British colonialism in 1965.⁵⁴² Foreseeing the eventuality of their political minoritization if the transformations laid out in the 1943 development plan came to pass, Akus advocated for further land reclamation in Bathurst. As such, this chapter argues that the elite Aku calls for land reclamation was an attempt at limiting the extension of political rights and participation to protectorate peoples. Whereas Liberated Africans advocated for land reclamation in the early 19th with the aims of guaranteeing a place for them in the colony physically and politically, by the mid-20th their Aku descendants advocated for land reclamation as a last-ditch attempt to exclude the vast majority of The Gambia's African population from participating in the colony's decision-making processes.

⁵⁴⁰ Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia, 1816-1994*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006),11.

⁵⁴¹ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 21.

⁵⁴² Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 21.

By investigating the division between colony and protectorate in British Gambia, and the eventual expansion of the colony to Kombo St. Mary in the mid-20th century, this chapter expands the focus of this study beyond the city of Bathurst. Much like Chapter Two, this chapter is concerned with the broader contexts within which Liberated African/Aku politics and belonging was shaped. As discussed in Chapter Two, in 1859 Liberated Africans demanded that they be given land in Bathurst for safety and protection from war-torn Kombo. These demands were met, which resulted in the creation of new land in Bathurst. The inability of the British to defend territory in the Kombo during this period also led to a gradual abandonment of an older colonial goal of territorial expansion into Kombo. Consequently, Kombo and the people who lived there experienced a much different 19th and 20th century from the colonial subjects in Bathurst who have been the focus of this study.

To briefly return to Kombo in the 19th century, in 1853 the British invaded Kombo and declared the area of Kombo St. Mary to be part of the Gambia colony. As described in Chapter Two, the British expanded into northern Kombo in search of agricultural land on which to settle the large numbers of Liberated Africans brought into the colony in the 1830s. Furthermore, in Chapter Two it was discussed how most of the Liberated African villages established in the conquered territory of Kombo St Mary were militarized and dangerous spaces due to civil war in Kombo. From then until 1902, Kombo St. Mary was, from a British perspective, a marginal space within the colony. The people of Kombo St. Mary were primarily Mandinka and Muslim who the British had grown increasingly suspicious of after the Sabajee War of 1853 to 1855. By

the late 19th century, the political situation in Kombo St. Mary generally resembled British military occupation of a feared and marginalized people.

British occupation in Kombo St Mary led to greater resistance, instability, and warfare in the Kombo region more generally. Eventually, the continuous warfare in Kombo and other parts of the Gambia River badly affected the colonial economy as groundnut cash crop production declined.⁵⁴³ British merchants and colonial officials worried about economic decline on the one hand, as well as French territorial expansion close to the Gambia River asked for more military assistance from the Colonial Office- which was granted in the late 1880s. In 1889 a better armed and more expansionist Gambian colonial government declared and violently imposed a protectorate over the rest of the Gambia River, corresponding to the contemporary boundaries of the modern Gambian nation. And in 1902, the British demoted the region of Kombo St. Mary from a marginal colonial hinterland to part of the Gambia Protectorate, to be administered by colonial-appointed African headmen. Aside from land reclamation that extended the territory of Bathurst into the sea, the colony remained limited to Bathurst until 1947 when Kombo St. Mary was re-incorporated into the colony, which forms the subject of this chapter. This re-incorporation resulted in the extension of many political rights to the people of Kombo St. Mary, including the ability to vote in municipal and legislative elections. In terms of periodization, this chapter argues that 1947 marks the beginning of decolonization in the British Gambia and the move towards political participation and inclusion for the rest of the communities living within

⁵⁴³ Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng, *Migrants, Credit and Climate: The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834-1934*, (Boston: Brill, 2006), 27-28.

the Gambia Protectorate. What was a major political win for many protectorate peoples signaled, for Akus, the end of their political dominance in British Gambia.

The chapter opens with a discussion of the history of the division between colony and protectorate, followed by a consideration of what it meant to be a British subject in the Gambia in the 1940s as compared to a “protected” subject. The chapter then moves back in time to the 1930s to locate the starting point for African political elites’ interest around the nature of their electorate. After this, the chapter looks more closely at the process of incorporating Kombo St. Mary into the colony starting in 1941. Then the chapter discusses the 1943 Development Plan, and its framing of Bathurst as overcrowded and the proposal for relocating half of Bathurst’s population to Kombo St. Mary. The chapter then follows the colonial government’s attempts at convincing the residents of Bathurst to relocate, and Aku and Wolof elite’s responses to this turmoil. The chapter ends with a discussion on how the slow urbanization of Kombo St. Mary due development resources being allocated for land reclamation in Bathurst affected the evolution of political parties in the Gambia. The main political parties that developed at the end of the colonial era were divided into urban based parties coming out of Bathurst and rural based parties that represented the rest of the protectorate. The land reclaimed at the end of British colonialism thus stands as a symbol of the exclusionary logics and practices tied to land ownership in colonial Bathurst. The land reclamation project that began in 1948 created the Campama Estate (better known as Tobacco Road neighborhood), the last land reclamation in Bathurst under colonial rule.

5.2 Division Between Colony and Protectorate

It had no political and ethnological connection with the remainder of the Gambia, and it is perhaps hardly surprising that there still exists to-day a wide gulf between the population of Bathurst and the people of the rest of the Gambia- a gulf which must be bridged if real progress in the development of the Colony is to be made in the future.⁵⁴⁴

This is how Kenneth Blackburn described the relationship of Bathurst to the rest of the Gambia in the 1943 development plan. Blackburn expressed concern for the effects of the political and territorial division of British Gambia into colony and protectorate, yet it was the colonial government that was responsible for creating and perpetuating this division. The British first declared a Protectorate over the Gambia River in 1889, but it was only through a series of violent wars over numerous years that the British were able to cement their power in the region in 1894. It was after this that the British wrote and enforced laws, and created an administrative organization for the region.⁵⁴⁵

In 1889 the British and French Imperial governments signed a treaty deciding their spheres of influence in Senegambia. While a treaty may have existed on paper, determining the boundaries of any delineated territory was difficult work on-the-ground. The Anglo-French Boundary Commission of 1890 created a border between British Gambia and French Senegal. As part of this process, the colonial state also waged wars on African Muslim leaders who controlled the riverine states along the Gambia River. After 1889, British officials labelled Muslim leaders

⁵⁴⁴ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 1, 3.

⁵⁴⁵ Assan Sarr, *Islam, Power, and Dependency in the Gambia River Basin: The Politics of Land Control 1790-1940* (New York: University of Rochester Press 2016), 165-172.

as “adventurers” or “marauding chiefs” who engaged in slave-trading while fashioning themselves as the main anti-slavery force in the region.⁵⁴⁶ Colonial officials used these ideas to justify their removal of Muslim leaders from their positions of power, and their replacement with African leaders who had agreed to the Protectorate.⁵⁴⁷ The new Protectorate system was formalized with the passage of the Protectorate Ordinance of 1894.⁵⁴⁸ A few years later, the colonial state passed the Protectorate Ordinance of 1902 that divided the territory of British Gambia distinctly into the colony at St. Mary’s Island and the Protectorate that encompassed the whole Gambia River.⁵⁴⁹

In contrast to Bathurst, where Liberated Africans and their Aku descendants had achieved political dominance over the course of the 19th century, the Protectorate was politically dominated by a Mandinka elite who were either appointed by the colonial government or came from aristocratic families that had sided with the British during periods of imperial expansion.⁵⁵⁰ The limited power that Aku and Mandinka elites held in their separate spheres under British rule was maintained by the territorial division of the Gambia into colony and protectorate.

By the outbreak of World War II, there were significant differences in the lived experiences of British subjects who gained their status through their parents, naturalization, by birth in colony, or in the protectorate. The protectorate was primarily a rural area with a few

⁵⁴⁶ NRS, MP1/1, Letter from Samuel Rowe to Sir. H.T. Holland, October 22, 1887.

⁵⁴⁷ Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, *A Political History of The Gambia, 1816-1994*, (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 51.

⁵⁴⁸ Sarr, *Islam, Power, and Dependency*, 166.

⁵⁴⁹ NRS, PUB 5/6, An Ordinance to Make Better Provision For The Management of The Protectorate, And For The Administration of Justice Therein, 11 April 1902.

⁵⁵⁰ Sarr, *Islam, Power, and Dependency*, 165-176.

wharf-town enclaves where most of the commercial activity related to the groundnut trade took place. Prior to the late 1940s and the 1950s, the colonial state invested little in roads, medical, and educational infrastructure in the protectorate.⁵⁵¹ Most of the colonial state's infrastructural investments were concentrated in Bathurst, which meant that access to medical services, education and economic opportunities had been limited to a few privileged British subjects.

The "Protectorate System," the term British officials used to describe the administrative and social structure of the protectorate was a form of "indirect rule" that only applied to Africans born outside the colony. The native tribunals were one of the most important dimensions of the Protectorate System, as they were responsible for adjudicating the majority of cases in the protectorate. The native tribunals were presided over by Head Chiefs and Headmen appointed by the colonial Governor. Although important for protectorate peoples, the native tribunals had no jurisdiction over British subjects. British subjects who found themselves before a native tribunal comprised of only "natives"—protectorate Africans—could request for their case to be adjudicated by the British commissioner instead.⁵⁵² The privileged status of British subjects also meant that they were able to move around British Gambia in ways that protectorate peoples were not.

⁵⁵¹ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Introduction, 1.

⁵⁵² NRS, Pub 5/6, An Ordinance to Make Better Provision for The Management Of The Protectorate And For The Administration Of Justice Therein, 11th April 1902.

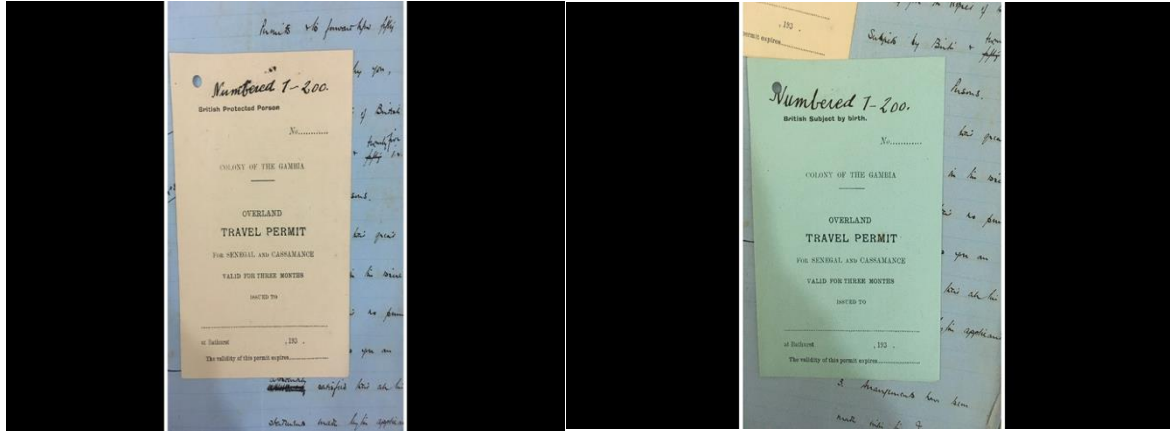


Figure 12 Travel permits issued to British Subjects (left) and Protected subjects (right) (Source: NRS, CSO 2/629, Identity cards, Colonial Secretary to Commissioner of Upper River Province, 27 December 1933).

French and British anxieties around labor and cash crop production for the colonial economy led to the creation of a bifurcated immigration system that restricted movement for protectorate peoples. In 1915 the British introduced the passport in colonial Gambia.⁵⁵³ This passport was expensive, difficult to obtain, and explicitly off limits to most Protectorate people, but it was required for any long-term stay across the Anglo-French border.

The austerity and lack of capacity of the British colonial state meant that border crossing for short stays was feasible, and largely out of the control of the colonial government. However, the borders were enforced and real especially around economic areas such as the wharf towns and *seccos* where groundnut trading occurred.⁵⁵⁴ Often Protectorate Gambians who attempted to cross the border with simple paper permits issued by the British commissioner were turned back

⁵⁵³ NRS, CSO 2/1116, Passport Fees, An Ordinance to Amend the Passports Ordinance, 1915. In 1932 the colonial government increased passport fees from “seven shillings and six pence” to “fifteen shillings”

⁵⁵⁴ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Background, pg. 5

by French officials.⁵⁵⁵ The different travel permits that were separately issued to Protectorate and British subjects are shown in Figure 12 above. British subjects, unlike their Protectorate counterparts, did not require a visa to enter French territory. Protectorate Chiefs played a key role in keeping Protectorate people from crossing the border to sell their produce at higher prices in French territory. Colonial economic incentives determined where the colonial border was hard and soft for protectorate peoples. British subjects of the Gambia armed with their green passports were look upon more favorably at immigration stops.

Prior to the Second World War, the divisions between Protectorate and Colony in British Gambia were relatively easy to maintain because of the physical limitations and locations of the colony. With one bridge serving as the access to the island of St. Mary's, Denton Bridge, British officials could keep a firm hold and watchful eye over who entered and belonged in the colony. As has been established in Chapter Two, this belonging was defined by birth, and property ownership. British officials could and did easily expel people who they did not want in the colony, limiting the size of the colony in terms of population and which individuals could access the rights of British subjects.

As an already marginal and under-funded colony of the British empire, it was important for the colonial government to limit the number of people who could make claims on the state. In the 1943 report, Kenneth Blackburn called The Gambia an "economic absurdity" because of its

⁵⁵⁵ NRS, CSO 2/2265, Alien Restriction Ordinance Identity Card

borders and the economic domination of the neighboring French territory of Senegal.⁵⁵⁶ He noted:

The small size of the Colony, the lack of financial resources, the small population and the variable rainfall are difficulties which no amount of economic development can completely overcome, and it is not possible to hope that the Gambia will ever attain a sufficiently firm economic position to enable it to carry out without external aid the developments in the social services to which its people are entitled.⁵⁵⁷

Blackburn's statement points to the ways in which the Gambian colonial state oversaw a colonial economy that was extremely austere and primarily extractive. Maintaining the division between Colony and Protectorate had allowed the colonial state to control, although never fully, a territory that was otherwise neglected within the larger British Empire. The colonial government by physically limiting material and political privileges to the Island of St. Mary's could more easily manage labor in the protectorate with the authoritarian rule of its appointed chiefs. In the 1930s, colonial officials sought to further limit who could participate in colonial politics through further land reclamation.

5.3 Land Reclamation in the 1930s: colonial slum clearance projects

In 1938 the colonial government proposed a new land reclamation project that would enable the government to get rid of the so-called "derelict" housing in Bathurst.⁵⁵⁸ Much like the

⁵⁵⁶ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Background,

⁵⁵⁷ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Background, pg. 5

⁵⁵⁸ Kew, CO 879/ 144, The Gambia Bathurst Reclamation and Drainage, Papers 1938-1939.

era of the Board of Health discussed in the previous chapter, this land reclamation project was designed as a means of social control and reorganization. There was, however, an important difference between that era and the 1930s, namely that property owners had been enfranchised and Africans had been elected to seats on the Bathurst Urban District Council (BUDC) and its successor institution, the Bathurst Advisory Town Council (BATC).

Elected African members of these municipal bodies were vocal against government policies that were against their interests and that of their electorate. In this period of lively municipal politics in the 1930s, the first political parties were formed in Bathurst. Among the most important of these was the Rate Payers Association (RPA), not to be confused with the Ratepayer's Council of the 1850s discussed in Chapter One. Despite its name, the Rate Payers Association was an association of ratepayers (property owners) *and* renters.⁵⁵⁹ Many of the renters in the RPA were often the individuals who lived in the simple housing that the colonial government viewed as "derelict." Typically, Bathurst compounds were multi-generational households, and most of the city's residents lived in them.⁵⁶⁰ Within these compounds were additional houses made of bamboo and mangrove wood, referred to as *krinting*, where younger family members and renters lived, these types of homes are represented by "A" in Figure 13. The *krinting* houses enabled homeowners to cheaply provide housing for younger family members while also supplementing household income through rents paid by workers coming into Bathurst. In the mid-1930s, RPA members elected to municipal council seats began to mobilize to extend

⁵⁵⁹ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 101.

⁵⁶⁰ H.R. Jarrett, Bathurst: Port of The Gambia River, *Geography*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 1951), 102.

the franchise to renters living in Bathurst. The RPA undertook this enfranchisement project at a time when the colonial government was trying to remove these renters from Bathurst and destroy their *krinting* housing. Whereas colonial officials viewed the 1938 land reclamation project as a slum clearance project, the RPA actively organized to prevent this project and the expulsion and denigration of renters more broadly.

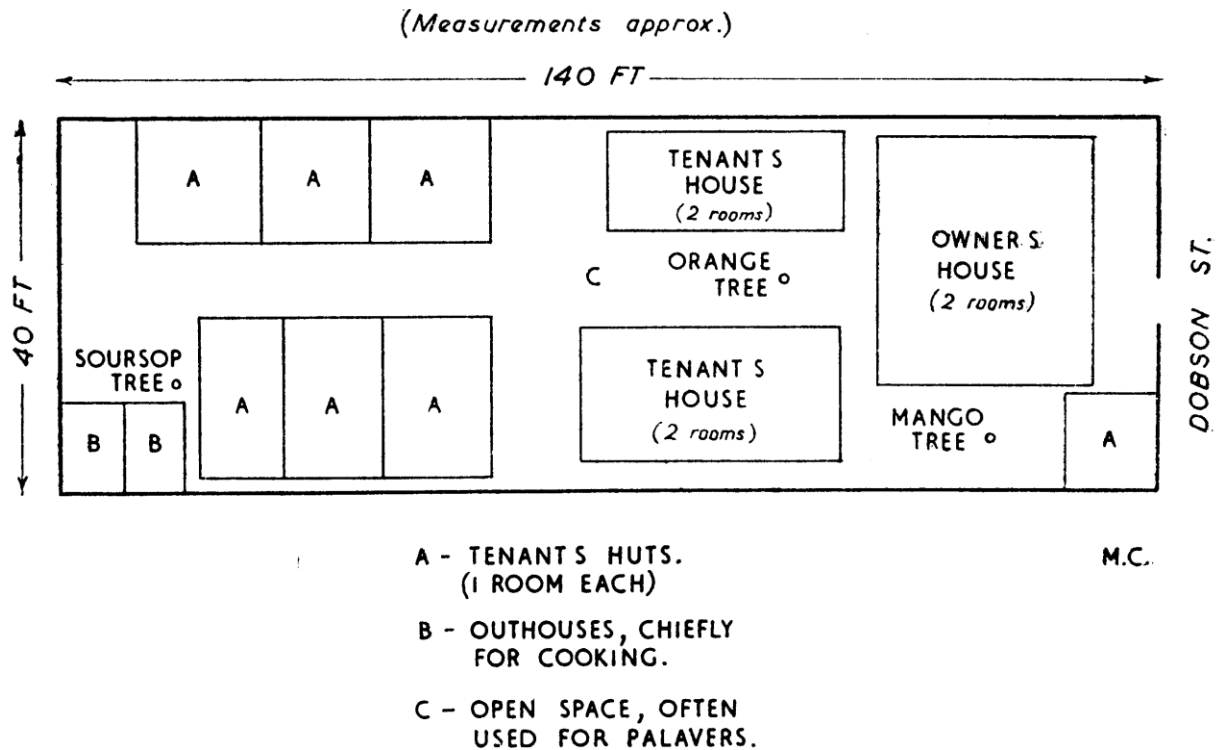


Fig. 3.—A typical Bathurst compound.

Figure 13 A drawing by geographer H.R. Jarrett of a popular arrangement and composition of multigenerational household with renters in Bathurst. (Source: H.R. Jarrett, "Bathurst: Port of The Gambia River," *Geography*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 1951), 99).

In the late 1930s British officials sought to remove all forms of semi-permanent and temporary housing from Bathurst.⁵⁶¹ They justified this drive on the false grounds that “slums”—neighborhoods built in materials that colonists categorized as “temporary,” such as bamboo, straw, and tin—as opposed to concrete and bricks—were home to the people who brought yellow fever to Bathurst leading to the 1934 outbreak.⁵⁶² As such, both the people who lived in these neighborhoods and the materials they used to build homes became targets of the state. In particular, this included African migrants from French territories and protectorate peoples.

During the 1934 yellow fever epidemic five people were confirmed dead due to the disease, four of whom were Europeans, this fact heightened officials’ desires for slum clearance.⁵⁶³ In response to the outbreak police were charged with preventing anyone entering or leaving the island except under observation. An isolation of six days was imposed for anyone leaving to the Protectorate. All European women were evacuated to the Cape St. Mary, as described in Chapter Two, the Cape with its higher elevation was consider healthier than Bathurst. Lastly, a vaccination regime was established to inoculate everyone especially those trying to enter the colony.⁵⁶⁴ In addition to restricting movement and vaccination campaigns,

⁵⁶¹ Kew, CO 879/ 144, The Gambia Bathurst Reclamation and Drainage, Papers 1938-1939, Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20th April, 1938.

⁵⁶² Kew, CO 879/ 144, The Gambia Bathurst Reclamation and Drainage, Papers 1938-1939, Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20th April, 1938.

⁵⁶³ G.M. Findlay and T.H. Davey, *Transactions of The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. Vol XXX. No. 2. July 1936

⁵⁶⁴ BOA, The Annual Medical & Sanitary Report, 1934, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, 56-57.

scientific studies were conducted by researchers from the Liverpool School of Medicine on the yellow fever epidemic. These studies were important for arguments and positions that linked the yellow fever outbreak to outsiders who settled in the city. The conclusions of scientific studies by Findlay and Davey on the 1934 yellow fever epidemic declare that:

From evidence it is suggested that yellow fever is not endemic in the town of Bathurst, but that the virus is periodically reintroduced, either by means of an infected human being, in the blood of an infected animal or possibly even by the immigration of infected mosquitoes. Whether an epidemic actually occurs will depend on the proportion of non-immunes in the population and on the stegomyia index.⁵⁶⁵

The importance of these findings was its claim that yellow fever came from the “surrounding country.”⁵⁶⁶ Furthermore, the paper argued that epidemics occurred based on the number of “non-immunes” present. “Non-immunes” referred to Europeans; the paper also concluded that, “The racial resistance of the African to yellow fever as a result of which the disease is usually mild or inapparent and the mortality rate low.”⁵⁶⁷ These findings contributed to, and were used to justify the prejudice in the minds of colonial officials that immigrants from the Protectorate and the French territories were the cause of the colony’s yellow fever troubles.

Findlay and Davey were not the only scientist from Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine who conducted research in The Gambia. As Park (2016) shows, the most popular assessment of the situation came from Professor Warrington Yorke also of the Liverpool School

⁵⁶⁵ G.M. Findlay and T.H. Davey, *Transactions of The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. Vol XXX. No. 2. July 1936, 162.

⁵⁶⁶ G.M. Findlay and T.H. Davey, *Transactions of The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. Vol XXX. No. 2. July 1936, 162.

⁵⁶⁷ G.M. Findlay and T.H. Davey, *Transactions of The Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. Vol XXX. No. 2. July 1936, 162.

in 1936.⁵⁶⁸ Yorke’s scientific analysis is questionable at best, due to his description of Bathurst as a slum and a disgrace to the empire. He infamously and controversially called Bathurst a “waterlogged sponge floating in a sea of its own excreta.”⁵⁶⁹ Like most of the medical reports being written about Gambia in the mid-1930s, Yorke proposed a massive reclamation and housing project to solve Bathurst’s sanitary problems.

Following the yellow fever outbreak and the bad reputation that The Gambia received internationally, the new Governor Thomas Southorn (1936-1942) proposed a new land reclamation project to the Secretary of State that would “bring with it relief from the menace of yellow fever.”⁵⁷⁰ The project proposed both to make drainage in Bathurst more effective by raising the entire town and to reclaim Bathurst in a symbolic and physical sense. Southorn imagined reclaiming Bathurst from the large populations of lodgers and renters who he believed were the cause of disease and who constructed the undesirable “temporary” housing in the city.

Southorn proposed that an area of Bathurst’s mangrove forests be reclaimed for the construction of a temporary model village, into which residents would be moved while their part of the city was raised. Neighborhood by neighborhood, this is how Southorn proposed raising Bathurst.⁵⁷¹ The government also proposed to offer each freeholder-perpetual land tenure-, free of charge, a concrete house built by the state to accommodate eight persons. In this scheme, in

⁵⁶⁸ Matthew Park, *Heart of Banjul: The History of Banjul, The Gambia, 1816-1965* (unpublished PhD diss. Michigan State University 2016), 274.

⁵⁶⁹ Matthew Park, *Heart of Banjul: The History of Banjul, The Gambia, 1816-1965* (unpublished PhD diss. Michigan State University 2016), 274.

⁵⁷⁰ Kew, CO 879/ 144, The Gambia Bathurst Reclamation and Drainage, Papers 1938-1939, Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20th April, 1938.

⁵⁷¹ Kew, CO 879/144, The Governor to the Secretary of State, 20th April 1938

return the freeholder would give up their freehold in exchange for a twenty-one-year lease from the government. Those with more than one property would be able to retain one as freehold but would be required to give up the others to become leaseholds. There was no place for lodgers in the model village. Through the reclamation project, the colonial state imagined that they could dramatically transform the city by forcing people to trade bamboo houses for concrete, remove lodger and renters, and reduce the amount of freehold property. In essence, the proposed land reclamation project of 1938 used the yellow fever epidemic as a pretext to consolidate the state's control over property and to make it impossible for poorer renters and lodgers to live in the city.

For the Bathurst elite, the political stakes of Southorn's proposed land reclamation project included the potential loss of their freeholds, and for organizations like the RPA it meant the loss of a significant part of their political base. This electoral concern of the Bathurst elite became important with the emergence of the Ratepayer's Association in 1932. The Rate Payer's Association was a new type of political institution in the Gambia that came out of trade union politics and the mobilization of a broad political base in Bathurst.⁵⁷² Prior to the proposed reclamation project, the Rate Payer's Association was attempting to broaden the definition of ratepayer to include lodgers and renters into the franchise.⁵⁷³ This move went explicitly against the colonial state's land reclamation project, which had the stated goal of controlling the number of renters and lodgers. The colonial ideal was for Bathurst to be transformed into a city of single-

⁵⁷² Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 101.

⁵⁷³ NRS, Minute Book Bathurst Urban District Council, Minutes of a Meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee held in the Colonial Secretary's Office at 2.30 pm on the 24th March, 1936.

family homes with temporary housing on the city's margins for short-term workers. Thus, Governor Southorn's proposed reclamation project was a technopolitical means of limiting any potential expansion of the franchise in municipal elections, which the Rate Payers were simultaneously advocating and organizing around. The Southorn proposal in many ways also foreshadows later colonial attempts at moving people out of Bathurst in the 1940s. Further, we can trace back to this period the adoption of language which described Bathurst as slum-like and overcrowded, as well as policies for modernizing Bathurst through the removal of a percentage of its population.

5.4 The 1930s reclamation proposal and the restriction of the franchise

The Rate Payer's Association was headed by Francis Small, one of the founders of the Gambia Trade Union, the first modern trade union in West Africa.⁵⁷⁴ Much like the Gambia Trade Union, the Rate Payer's Association was comprised of both Akus and Wolofs in Bathurst, and its membership was open to property owners and renters. Highly popular among the working class, Small would go on to become one of the first Africans elected to the legislative council in 1947. By then, Small had become a major advocate for land reclamation in Bathurst and opposed colonial plans to concentrate major developments in Kombo St. Mary. In the mid-1930s however, Small and the RPA opposed Governor Southorn's proposed land reclamation scheme. The members of The Rate Payer's Association opposed land reclamation because of the social

⁵⁷⁴ David Perfect, *Organized Labor and Politics In The Gambia: 1920-1984*, (Unpublished Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1987).

and economic effects it would have on Bathurst inhabitants' political position in the colony, as well as on their electoral base which they were trying to expand.

In 1934, the RPA won four out of six elected seats on the Bathurst Urban District Council. Created in 1930, the Bathurst Urban District Council (officially the "Bathurst Urban District Council and Board of Health") took over from the Board of Health, as described in Chapter Four. The membership of the body consisted of four appointed government officials, four appointed representatives of the commercial community and six elected African members from each of the city's six wards.⁵⁷⁵ Much to the dissatisfaction of the members of the Rate Payer's Association, the BUDC had a European majority and almost no executive powers. It was, however, still an important platform for voicing popular concerns.

One of the elected members of the BUDC in 1936, Francis Senegal (not to be confused with Francis Small) , exemplified the Rate Payer's agenda by pushing for the inclusion of lodgers and renters onto the voting list.⁵⁷⁶ Senegal argued for an expanded franchise firstly by showing the problems with the use of the Rate Payer's list as a voting register.⁵⁷⁷ In the 1930s, the Rating List was comprised of about 1500 names. In 1931, the population of Bathurst was officially 14,185. Senegal stated that many of the names on the Rating List were not the actual owners nor occupiers of the premises but were rather agents for former. Some on the list were also dead, according to Senegal. Most importantly for Senegal, there were agreements between

⁵⁷⁵Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 100.

⁵⁷⁶ NRS, Minute Book Bathurst Urban District Council, Minutes of a Meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee held in the Colonial Secretary's Office at 2.30 pm on the 24th March, 1936.

⁵⁷⁷ NRS, Minute Book Bathurst Urban District Council, Minutes of a Meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee held in the Colonial Secretary's Office at 2.30 pm on the 24th March, 1936.

landlords and renters or occupiers wherein the renter paid the entire rate in addition to rent. As a result Senegal argued, “it is obvious that the bulk of the rates are contributed and paid indirectly by the Occupiers, who are disregarded as Ratepayers, a fiction that deprives 10,000 or more citizens, their legal and municipal rights...”.⁵⁷⁸ As a solution Senegal, motioned that a voting register be created that contained both the Ownership List and Occupiers List. The motion was defeated by a 4 to 6 vote.

The colonial secretary, who chaired the Bathurst Urban District Council, responded to Senegal’s motion by defining a ratepayer as a “person upon whom the liability to pay rates is imposed by law and against whom proceedings may be taken for their recovery”.⁵⁷⁹ Further adding that the implications of Senegal’s proposal:

...would lead to the inclusion on the list of voters, if it could be prepared and it would be no easy matter, of scores of illiterates and persons merely because they happen to have an arrangement with their landlords to pay a shilling or two to the rates!⁵⁸⁰

Senegal and the members of the Rate Payer’s Association were promoting a democratic ideal in which if a person contributed to the rate, even small amounts, then they should have a say in how municipal resources and goods would be managed, regardless of whether they owned property. This ideal directly conflicted with Governor Southorn’s plans for the transformation of Bathurst into a city of single-family homes, wherein the state had an increased control over

⁵⁷⁸ NRS, Minute Book Bathurst Urban District Council, Minutes of a Meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee held in the Colonial Secretary’s Office at 2.30 pm on the 24th March, 1936.

⁵⁷⁹ NRS, Minute Book Bathurst Urban District Council, Minutes of a Meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee held in the Colonial Secretary’s Office at 2.30 pm on the 24th March, 1936.

⁵⁸⁰ NRS, Minute Book Bathurst Urban District Council, Minutes of a Meeting of the Interim Advisory Committee held in the Colonial Secretary’s Office at 2.30 pm on the 24th March, 1936.

property as most land would be transformed into leasehold rather than freehold land, as described above. In the wake of the 1934 yellow fever outbreak, colonist's concerns about infected African bodies as a threat to white survival created the context for Governor Southorns plans to increase governmental control of the population of the colony and the exclusion of "occupiers," lodgers, and migrant workers.

These communities, however—renters—comprised approximately thirty percent of Bathurst's population in 1938. About them, Governor Southorn wrote:

Large numbers of these tenants are in useful employment and cannot be spared from the town. They reside in the better houses. There are however, a great number who come from the Protectorate and possibly from neighbouring French territory, who combine improvidence and poverty with an abhorrence of work. They leave the Protectorate to escape the work on their family farms. But they have homes, though they dislike them, and they will suffer no hardship from being kept out of the town. No attempt will be made to refuse them admittance to Bathurst; they may come and go as they please, but they will have difficulty in finding a bed.⁵⁸¹

In Southorn's quote there is the fear of protectorate people's movement, as they were supposed to be farming to produce the food and cash crops that the colonial economy needed. Southorn's anti-immigration tactic was to make migrants stay in Bathurst unpleasant with the goal of making them leave. The RPA for political reasons wanted migrants to stay, to expand their political base. It became especially important for the Rate Payer's Association to expand the franchise and their political base in 1936, as the Bathurst Urban District Council was being

⁵⁸¹ Kew, CO 879/ 144, The Gambia Bathurst Reclamation and Drainage, Papers 1938-1939, Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20th April, 1938.

replaced by the Bathurst Advisory Council. The 1936 elections for Bathurst Advisory Council would establish a municipal body with increased African representation, the body had six elected seats, an appointed seat for merchant interest and no appointed government officials. All the councilors elected in 1936 opposed Governor Southorn's proposed land reclamation project in 1938, including the merchant representative Councilor V. Bottomley who forwarded a motion to abandon the project. Councilor Lloyd Evans, an African elected member, seconded the motion, adding that Governor "had definitely told them that all unemployed, squatters and lodgers would be driven to the Kombo for settlement." Evans argued that this plan would lead to a "disorganization of the communal life of the people and the breaking up of many families who had lived together." With opposition from both the commercial and African community in Bathurst, coupled with the challenging financial situation created by the start of World War II, the reclamation project was abandoned. Land reclamation, however, would continue to play a role in the electoral politics of the Gambia Colony and Protectorate that emerged towards the end of WWII.

5.5 Pretext for Relocation: fly boat base, too many migrants and colonial conclaves 1940-1942

As part of the war effort Bathurst was transformed into a flying boat base for the Royal Air Force (RAF). Bathurst became a key point on the medium bomber air routes to the Middle

East and India from Europe and the Americas.⁵⁸² The fly boat base was built on the southeastern part of Bathurst at Half Die, the boat base included flying boat control units, fueling depots, officer quarters and other military structures. The militarization of Bathurst led to increased economic activity in the city which subsequently drew in labor from the Gambian protectorate. Protectorate Young men flocked to Bathurst to take advantage of the increased work opportunities. For the first time in Gambian colonial history, young people from the Protectorate made up the largest percentage of migrant labor in the city.⁵⁸³ Prior to the war, most migrant laborers in Bathurst were typically Africans from French territory, however the wartime ban on immigration from French territory which was under Vichy France ended this pattern.⁵⁸⁴ The new, youthful wave of Protectorate migrants (“surplus” populations in colonial discourse), became a source of anxiety for colonial officials in Bathurst.⁵⁸⁵

Increasing especially after 1940, these youthful migrants tended to stay longer in Bathurst and began to acquire more skills and connections that tied them more closely to the urban economy. Colonial officials grew anxious that they might become a permanent presence in the colony, about the supply of labor for food production in the Protectorate, and the weakening authority of Protectorate chiefs. In response, British officials imposed new restrictions on immigration and began attacks on poverty in Bathurst. For example, the 1942 defense regulation

⁵⁸² Ashley Jackson, “African Ports and Islands during the Second World War”, 180, in *African Islands: Leading Edges of Empire and Globalization*. University of Rochester Press, 2019 ed. Falola, Toyin, R. Joseph Parrott, and Danielle Porter Sanchez.

⁵⁸³ Gambia National Record Service (NRS), PUB 10/5, Annual Report of Labour Department 1942.

⁵⁸⁴ Gambia National Record Service (NRS), PUB 10/5, Annual Report of Labour Department 1942.

⁵⁸⁵ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Ch 16, 9

gave the Government the power to order the departure of any person not ordinarily resident in the town who were not in “useful employment”. Further, in 1943 the government passed a vagrancy bill to remove destitute migrants.⁵⁸⁶ These laws targeted the poor and migrant workers from the Protectorate. In the 1940s there were periodic incidents of police rounding up and deporting large numbers of migrant workers from the island of St. Mary’s. One of the key arguments that British officials mobilized to defend the expulsion of migrants and poor people from Bathurst was the claim that the city was “overcrowded,” and that the available land on the island was insufficient to house the population.

The Colonial Government’s construct of the RAF flying boat base displaced many Bathurst residents from Half Die, adding to the colonial official’s perception of overcrowding. Approximately 3,000 Bathurst residents who had been living in Half Die on the southeastern side of Bathurst were evicted to make space for the base.⁵⁸⁷ Unlike the protectorate migrants who were periodically removed from Bathurst, the colonial government in 1941 decided to resettle the displaced property owners of Half Die in Kombo St. Mary. And thus, initiating a colonial government project to settle British subjects outside of Bathurst for the first time since the 1850s- when Governor O’Connor established Liberated African villages in Northern Kombo. This project led to the establishment of Churchill’s Town in Kombo St. Mary. The Churchills

⁵⁸⁶ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Chapter 16, pg. 9

⁵⁸⁷ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Ch 16, 8-10.

Town project represented a significant break with former colonial policy in which land and housing needs were met through land reclamation in Colonial Bathurst.

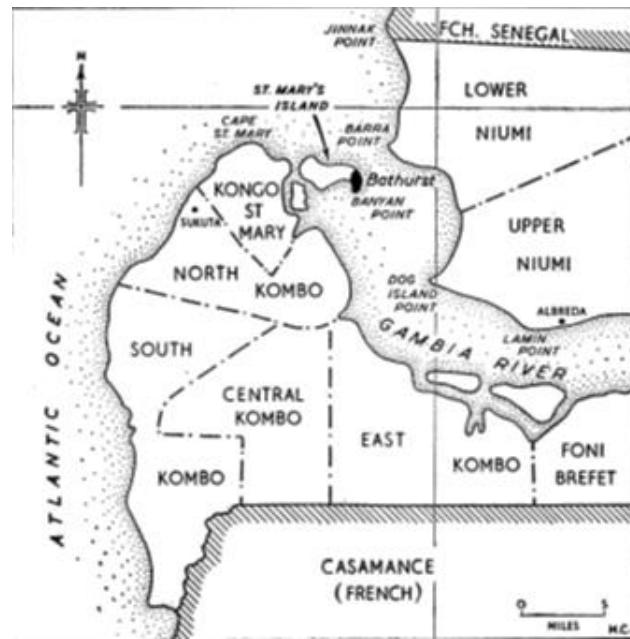


Figure 14 1940s Map showing the relationship of Bathurst on St. Mary's Island to Kombo St. Mary (misspelled on the map). (Source: H.R. Jarrett, "Bathurst: Port of The Gambia River," *Geography*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 1951), 99).



Figure 15 1940s detailed map showing some of the towns in Kombo St. Mary such as Bakau and Latrikunda in relationship to Bathurst. (Source: H.R. Jarrett, "Bathurst: Port of The Gambia River," *Geography*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 1951), 99).

Moving Bathurst residents to Churchills town was not a simple matter of physical relocation, Kombo St. Mary in 1941 was part of the protectorate system, meaning that it was administered by head men and its judicial matters handle by Native Tribunals. Figures 4 and 5, show the location of Kombo St. Mary in relation to Bathurst, the two places were divided by a creek and mangrove swamps. This was however not a very long distance-about 6 miles- but the political arrangements of British Gambia into Colony and Protectorate made Bathurst and

Kombo St. Mary worlds apart. Colonial officials understanding the legal and political divisions turned Churchills town into a colonial island within a protectorate sea. In 1941 the area of Churchills town was removed from native authority, colonial officials arguing that “as it was clear that the protectorate system could not be applied to the people of Bathurst who would be among the first residents in this new township”⁵⁸⁸. In 1942 Kombo St. Mary was removed from the South Bank Division-which encompassed all of Kombo- and put under a new Commissioner of the Kombo St. Mary Division.

The colonial government took the construction of the RAF flying boat base and eviction of Bathurst residents as a pretext for its new urbanization and political project in Kombo St. Mary. Throughout the 19th century Kombo St. Mary was viewed by colonial officials as healthier than Bathurst, and a more preferred site of settlement. But the Sabijee War of 1853-55, subsequent civil war in Kombo St. Mary and lack of support from the Colonial Office made settling Kombo a difficult option. Furthermore, from the 1860s onwards land needs were answered through land reclamation projects, forestalling discusses about limitation on land and expansion into Kombo St. Mary. The establishment of Churchills town created an isolated colonial conclave within a larger area under the Protectorate System. The colonial government through Churchills town was beginning the gradual re-incorporation of Kombo St. Mary in the Colony, which it hoped to fulfil with full relocation of the colonial capital to Kombo St. Mary. The full extent of the Colonial Government’s Plans for Kombo St. Mary first came into the Aku

⁵⁸⁸ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Chapter 4, 8.

and Wolof elites notice through the 1943 Development Plan. Which will be discussed in the next section.

5.6 The 1943 Development Plan: relocation and surplus populations

As has already been described in the introduction of this chapter the Imperial Government in England tasked its colonial government to come up with development plans that would be paid for by the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. In 1943 British officials in the Gambia had completed and submitted the Report on Development and Welfare to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.⁵⁸⁹ The Development Plan encompassed everything from agriculture, education to new town plans for Bathurst and urban development in Kombo St. Mary. Kenneth Blackburn who was the British officials responsible for the 1943 proposal started the chapter on Bathurst's develop, by questioning the decisions of past Colonial Officials to build the colonial capital on St. Mary Island:

the problem of Bathurst as a town is , and always has been one of sanitation and drainage to which must now be added overcrowding. The problem is due to a policy of *laissez faire* which allowed what was intended to be only a military post to grow first into a port and then into a Colonial capital, apparently oblivious of the fact that the site was no more than a malarial sandbank at the mouth of a malarial river.⁵⁹⁰

Kenneth Blackburn's from his comments erases the history of Bathurst as a site of Liberated African. As this dissertation has shown It was primarily to protect, incorporate and

⁵⁸⁹ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Memorandum on Development, 1946,1.

⁵⁹⁰ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Chapter 16, 2.

maintain the loyalty of Liberated Africans that Colonial Officials expanded Bathurst over the course of its history. Blackburn makes these comments to argue for the relocation of residents and the government from St. Mary's Island. Importantly his primary argument for why relocation should happen was overcrowding. According to Blackburn the population of Bathurst had to be limited to 7,000 to 8,000 "if the Town of Bathurst is to become a modern township." The population limit was calculated by Blackburn and other colonial officials based on the amount of space that would be needed for the expanded flying boat base and modern amenities. The 1943 proposed Town Plan below (Figure 15) shows some of these amenities and how space would be used differently for transportation and military purposes.

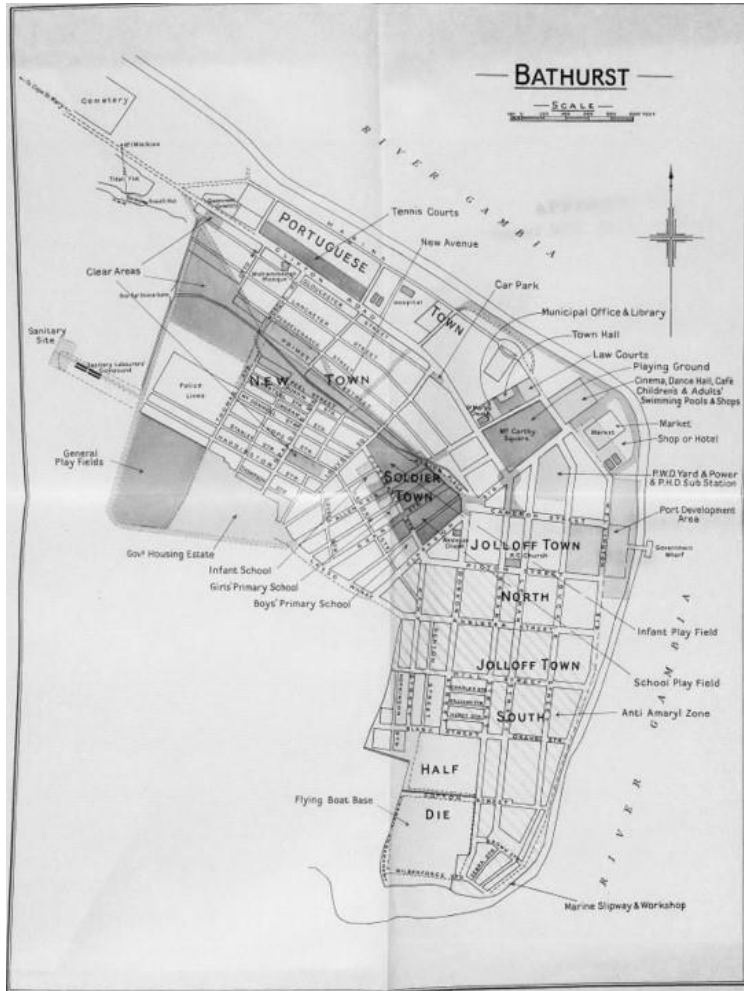


Figure 16 Proposed 1943 Town Plan for Bathurst showing new amenities such as swimming pools, cinema, playing grounds and a major avenue through Soldier Town. (Source: BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Ch 16, Appendix III, Bathurst Town)

In the 1943 proposed plan in Figure 15, notice some of the new amenities such as playing fields, tennis courts, cinema, dance hall, swimming pool. Also notice the complete clearance of

Half Die and its replacement with the flying boat base, also note the avenue that would be created through Soldier Town to the Box Bar embankment. And finally, the Government Housing Estate for government officials on reclaimed land. The proposed development for Bathurst was to turn Bathurst into a place of government officials and soldiers with access to a variety of amenities and small African labor force. Hence, for the 1943 plan to become a reality between 12,000 and 13,000 people had to be evicted from Bathurst, as its population in 1944 was about 20,000.⁵⁹¹ The evicted population from Bathurst would be move to a new city in Kombo St Mary, which was segregated and organized around an aerodrome or airport. There was, however, no discussion of what types of amenities would be available to Africans in the new Kombo St. Mary city.

The importance of this report is that it created the idea that there was an antagonistic relationship between the number of people in Bathurst and the possibility of it attending a certain level of development or modernization. As such, the African population beyond 8,000 became “surplus”. The 1843 Plan in describing Africans who had long lived and made their homes in Bathurst as surplus was racist. The plan was racist because it envisioned segregated communities and primarily saw Africans as labor. It was also racist because it was not attuned to the wants and needs of African residents in Bathurst and did not involve them in the planning process. As we will see in the next section, the government over three years after the 1943 plan, would try to convince Africans residents of Bathurst to move to Kombo St. Mary.

⁵⁹¹ NRS, Pub 10/54, Report of the Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to Be Adopted to Deal With Overcrowding in Bathurst, Appendix I, Notes on the Bathurst Census: 1944.

As I will also argue in the next section, despite the racism embedded in the 1943 Plan, it is also important to understand its larger political ramifications of the plan, specially from the perspective of Wolof and Aku elites in Bathurst. The 1943 Plan was proposed at a time when introducing the franchise for legislative election was being debated and formulated. This franchise would only be given to British subjects within the colony. Hence, the incorporation of Kombo St. Mary into the colony was an important political and electoral issue for Aku and Wolof politicians. I argue that it is within this framing of voting rights and electoral politics that we should understand Aku and Wolof elites' proposal of land reclamation in Bathurst as an opposition to the 1943 plan.

5.7 Seeking Land Reclamation: Aku and Wolof elites' opposition to the 1943 Development Plan, 1943-1946

After the 1943 Development Plan was submitted, the Colonial Government acted quickly to resolve overcrowding which the 1943 Development cited as a major hinderance to Bathurst's development. The Colonial Governor, Hilary Blood (1942-1946) in an address to the Legislative Council on the 25th of January 1944 stated that "2000 undesirables were removed from Bathurst during 1943".⁵⁹²The Colonial Government used the police to round up and deport migrants and poor people living on the streets of Bathurst. The Colonial Government justified the deportations under the 1942 Defense Regulation which gave the Government the power to order the departure

⁵⁹²Robert René Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 313.

of any person not ordinarily resident in the town who were not in “useful employment” or sleeping on the streets.⁵⁹³ The majority of those deported through this measure were young men from the protectorate.⁵⁹⁴

While it was relatively easy for the Colonial Government to remove migrants and poor people with brute force, convincing property owners and long-time residents to leave Bathurst would be a harder task. To sure up support for the 1943 Development Plan the Colonial Government organized a committee of government and non-government officials to review the 1943 Development Plan and give their opinion. The Committee selected was according to the Governor “representing a commercial and African interest in the town”.⁵⁹⁵ Among the committee members were Edward Francis Small, who in 1943 was serving as an unofficial member of the Legislative Council. Cyril Richards was also part of the committee, he was an Aku member of the Bathurst Advisory Town Council (BATC) and the son of J.D. Richards who I discuss in Chapter Three.⁵⁹⁶ Another BATC member of the committee was. M Garba-Jahumpa, a Wolof member whose father along with Small organized the 1929 labor strike discussed in Chapter Four. And importantly two women were also part of the committee, Mary Ellen Faye, and Cecilia Davies. The women on the committee were both selected through a vote in the BATC.

⁵⁹⁷Faye and Davies were, however, not members of the BATC. The government wanted women

⁵⁹³ NRS, Pub 10/5, Annual Report of Labour Department, 1942.

⁵⁹⁴ NRS, Pub 10/5, Annual Report of Labour Department, 1942.

⁵⁹⁵ NRS, Pub 10/12, Correspondence with the Secretary of For the Colonies and Notes on the Replanning of Bathurst and The Development of the Kombo,2.

⁵⁹⁶ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 86.

⁵⁹⁷ NRS, CSO 2/3542, Bathurst-Planning of As Residential Area, Minutes of meeting of Bathurst Advisory Town Council held at 2.30Pm on Tuesday, the 27th April, 1943.

on the committee so that they could weigh in on the type of housing that would be appropriate for the government to build in Kombo St. Mary.⁵⁹⁸ The other non-government official was L. de V. Bottomley who was the president of the Chamber of Commerce and a European.⁵⁹⁹ The government officials were the Senior Medical Officer and the Colonial Secretary of State, both of whom were Europeans.

The committee responded to the 1943 Development plan for Bathurst in the following: The committee recommends that before a site on the mainland is selected for rehousing the surplus population of Bathurst, sympathetic consideration should be given to the possibility of reclaiming a sufficient area for this purpose on the Island of St Mary. The Senior Medical Officer, the representative of the chamber of commerce and the chairman dissented from this view.⁶⁰⁰

The Aku and Wolof elites on the committee were opposed to relocation out of Bathurst without the government first considering the possibility of land reclamation. As can be seen from the quote there was a stark division between the European and African elites on the issue of relocation. Many Europeans in Bathurst including wealthy merchants who had their business in city, had already relocated to the Fajara Estate in Kombo St. Mary during the 1920s.⁶⁰¹ From Chapter Four it will be recalled that the Dutton Scheme had proposed the racial segregation of Bathurst. In Chapter Four it was explained that the Board of Health which was the municipal government at the time tried to segregate through reclaiming land and evicting Africans living

⁵⁹⁸ NRS, Pub 10/12, Correspondence with the Secretary of For the Colonies and Notes on the Replanning of Bathurst and The Development of the Kombo, Notes, 6.

⁵⁹⁹ NRS, CSO 2/3542, Report of the Committee appointed to consider a scheme for the replanning of the Town of Bathurst.

⁶⁰⁰ NRS, CSO 2/3542, Report of the Committee appointed to consider a scheme for the replanning of the Town of Bathurst.

⁶⁰¹ NRS, Pub 10/3, Report of The Committee Appointed To Draw Up Plans For The Future of A Portion Of Kombo St. Mary, 1943, 3-4.

close to Europeans onto that land. For Europeans whom the degree of segregation by land reclamation was insufficient, relocated to mainland Kombo as referred alternative.⁶⁰² The Fajara lands were the Bakau community farmlands that had been seized during the Sabijee War 1853-55. Bakau is the Muslim community that was forcefully incorporated into the Gambia Colony after the Sabijee War. Fajara is located on northwestern tip of Kombo St. Mary, a site that receives strong winds. This area was the most elevated part of the Kombo St. Mary region, and close to the site of the former convalesces house. Thus, Europeans relocating from Bathurst settled in a place long associated with healthiness as opposed to Bathurst. However, European government officials and merchants still had to drive to Bathurst every day and many complained of the cost of transportation.⁶⁰³ A large exodus of people from Bathurst as proposed by the 1943 Development Plan would have largely benefit the European elite. Hence, European commercial and government elite's support for the Development Plan was tied to their economic interests.

For people like Francis Small and other Aku elites a move out of Bathurst was politically and socially uncertain, the Colonial Government did not seem to appreciate this, at least explicitly. In a letter to the Secretary of State in England, the Colonial Governor explained the African elite's opposition in the following:

This committee approved the proposals in principle, but the African members, naturally reluctant to leave the town in which they were born, asked that consideration should be

⁶⁰² NRS, ARP Annual Medical and Sanitary Report, 1919.

⁶⁰³ NRS, Pub 10/3, Report of The Committee Appointed to Draw Up Plans for The Future of A Portion Of Kombo St. Mary, 1943, 6-7.

given to the possibility of reclaiming further swamp land in the Island of St Mary as in alternative to the establishment of townships in the Kombo area.⁶⁰⁴

The Colonial Governor, Hilary Blood framed the Aku and Wolof elites' opposition as a type of sentimental attachment. Blood's framing ignores the very real political consequences of relocation for the Aku and Wolof elite. Blood's rule was an important moment in Bathurst's history because unlike generations of governors before him and since the 1850s he abandoned land reclamation and instead supported relocation to Kombo St. Mary. But more importantly, Blood was also responsible for introducing the franchise for legislative elections in 1943.⁶⁰⁵ Under this franchise all adults pass the age of 24, living in Bathurst or Kombo St. Mary could vote. However, only individuals over the age of 24, literate in English, without a criminal record, never have been a public charge or bankrupt could run for elections.⁶⁰⁶ Blood understood what it would mean politically for many educated and politically active African elites to relocated to Kombo St. Mary, as they would have to build a new voter base to run in legislative elections. In fact, Blood pushed the Legislative Council to make Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary a single voting district. On Bloods political maneuvers, Hughes and Perfect write " He also hoped that in a single constituency, the influence of the educated Aku elite (whom he disliked) would be nullified...".⁶⁰⁷ Blood while extending the franchise also hoped to control the political ramifications of increasing Aku and Wolof elite power.

⁶⁰⁴ NRS, CSO 2-3542, Governor to Secretary of State (confidential letter) 25th June 1943.

⁶⁰⁵ Hughes and Perfect, A Political History, 109

⁶⁰⁶ NRS, Pub 10/13, Report of the Committee on the Legislative Council Franchise, 1944; The provision of this committee was accepted by the colonial government. Small's proposal for two separate constituencies was however rejected by Hilary Blood and the Legislative Council.

⁶⁰⁷ Hughes and Perfect, A Political History, 109

Francis Small was opposed to Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary becoming a single voting district. Small was appointed by Blood to the Franchise Committee of 1943, a committee created to form the rules for the franchise prior to its application. F Small in dissenting a to single voting district wrote:

That until the Kombo St. Mary District is sufficiently developed as a live suburb of the Island of St Mary and to have a Rural Council of its own, there is no practical basis for a joint constituency of the Island of St. Mary and Kombo St. Mary District and that for the present a separate and distinct electorate boundary and basis for an electorate of the District should be found.⁶⁰⁸

Small was ignored by the rest of the committee and a single voting district was created, more on the first legislative elections of 1947 that followed. For now, it is appropriate to examine Small's dissent. Small portrays Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary as completely disconnected spaces, disavowing the long history of war, conquest, and Liberated African settlement in Kombo St. Mary. Yet the divisions that Small perceives were perpetuated by an imposed political division by the colonial government in 1902, and because of colonial land reclamation in Bathurst. Land reclamation over decades of British rule forestalled plans for relocation to Kombo St. Mary by enlarging space in colonial Bathurst. Small's advocacy for land reclamation was therefore a request that the colonial government maintain the economic and political division between Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary. For the people of Kombo St. Mary who worked in Bathurst, brought their produced for sale or bought goods in Bathurst, Kombo St. Mary and Bathurst were not disconnected spaces. But for Akus and some Wolof elites, the political rights,

⁶⁰⁸ NRS, Pub 10/13, Report of the Committee on the Legislative Council Franchise, 1944.

wealth, and security that they had attained over the course of the 19th century was literally tided to the land of St. Mary's Island, which relocation would disrupt.

The colonial government adamant on its plans for relocation to Kombo St. Mary disavowed opposition from the Aku and Wolof elites and began drawing up plans for a new urban center in Kombo St. Mary. In this period of large state planning and government committees, the Colonial Government set up two development committee for Kombo St. Mary, one in 1943 and another in 1944.⁶⁰⁹ The 1943 Committee came up with general proposals, while the 1944 committee was more inter-departmental and produced more detailed plans. The two committees were created to answer the Colonial Office's calls for more detail plans before it could disburse the development funding to the Gambia. The Development Committees were made up almost entirely of British government officials, the non-government officials on the committees were different engineering, urban planning and architecture consultants from Britain. In 1944 Maxwell Fry created new urbans plans for Kombo St Mary, Fry was an important planner for African modernist projects in the post war period.⁶¹⁰ The new settlement in Kombo was planned to be a community entirely designed around an airport, the first of its kind according to the 1944 development committee.⁶¹¹ Africans in the plan would be living on land

⁶⁰⁹ NRS, Pub 10/50, Memorandum on Development, 1946, 5.

⁶¹⁰ NRS, PWD 8/5, Development Committee, Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of the Development Committee, held in the Colonial Secretary's Office at 2.30 pm in Thursday 14th December 1944; on Maxwell Fry see Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *Modernism in Late Imperial British West Africa: The Work of Maxwell Fry and JaneDrew, 1946-56*, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Jun., 2006), 188-215.

⁶¹¹ NRS, PWD 8/5, Development Committee, Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of the Development Committee, held in the Colonial Secretary's Office at 2.30 pm in Thursday 14th December 1944.

that had twenty one year leases rather than the freehold they had in Bathurst. Additionally, the proposed settlement would be a segregated community built around a European administration and African work force.⁶¹² Segregation was justified based on ideas of yellow fever being transmitted by Africans who were believed to be immune to it as described in Chapter Four. The Kotu Stream was also proposed to be drained to stop the spread of malaria, water bodies like the Kotu Stream were perceived by British officials as a breeding ground for mosquitoes. The Kotu Stream was the largest water way in Kombo St. Mary, and was a site of rice production for many Jolas.⁶¹³ Thus, tied to the Kotu drainage proposal was the cessation of Jola wetland rice farming around the Kotu stream area. For Aku and Wolof elites aware of the proposals produced by the 1943 and 1944 Development Committees, it must have seemed like a combination of all the worst development projects of the last forty years- from the segregation and expropriation of the Board of Health described in Chapter Four, to Governor Richards' slum clearance and twenty-one-year leases discussed earlier in this chapter.

The 1944 Development committee although proud of its proposal was concerned about its acceptance by the African community in Bathurst. They were particularly frustrated with how slowly Churchill's town was being settled, with:

the development of Churchill town has been disappointingly slow...one of the most powerful hinderances to the settlement's expansions has been the natural reluctance of the dweller to take up and develop land in new surrounding with an absence of immediate

⁶¹² NRS, PWD 8/5, Development Committee, Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of the Development Committee, held in the Colonial Secretary's Office at 2.30 pm in Thursday 14th December 1944.

⁶¹³ NRS, Pub 10/3, Report of The Committee Appointed to Draw Up Plans for The Future of A Portion Of Kombo St. Mary, 1943,3-4.

neighbours... The people should not be given cash compensation for property expropriated but instead should be given suitable alternative accommodation⁶¹⁴

As explained in the previous section on the Kenneth Blackburn 1943 Development Plan, there was a proposal to expand the R.A.F flying boat base by creating an anti amayrl zone around the base. According of a 1938 paper in the *Royal Society of Medicine* on “Preventive Medicine in Relation to Aviation”, an anti-amayrl zone is described as an uninhabited area of at least one mile between the aerodrome and residents in places where “yellow fever exists”.⁶¹⁵ The anti-amayrl zone was part of the segregationist policies that were tied to the discovery of the mosquito as the vector for malaria and yellow, as discussed in Chapter Four. Colonial officials in 1943 and 1944 hoped that the further expansion of the flying boast base would lead to the eviction of more people from Bathurst as their lands were expropriated.⁶¹⁶ The 1943 committee proposed to the Colonial Governor that once people were evicted from their lands to make space for the base, the government should not be give money in compensation. Rather, the committee proposed that evictees should be told that they will receive a “suitable alternative accommodation” in Kombo St. Mary.⁶¹⁷ By so doing the 1943 committee believed that the

⁶¹⁴ PUB 10/3 Report On the Committee Appointed to Draw up Plans for the Future of A portion of Kombo St Mary, 1943, 5.

⁶¹⁵ Air Commodore H. E. WHITTINGHAMI, C.B.E., K.H.P., F.R.C.P.Ed., D.P.H., Preventive Medicine in Relation to Aviation, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Vol. XXXII, December 12, 1938, 4.

⁶¹⁶ NRS, PWD 8/5, Minutes of meeting of the Development Committee held at 2.30 pm on 30th May, in the office of the Colonial Secretary

⁶¹⁷ PUB 10/3 Report On the Committee Appointed to Draw up Plans for the Future of A portion of Kombo St Mary, 5.

process of relocation would be sped up hence solving the problem of the “absence of immediate neighbours”.

Relocation would not turn out as the Colonial Government had wished, as Colonial Gambia would be given a far smaller amount from the Colonial Development Fund than it had wished. According to a Government report titled “Memorandum on Development 1946” a total expenditure of 691,002 was requested in February 1945 for the development of Kombo St. Mary and Drainage of Bathurst.⁶¹⁸In July of 1945 the Secretary of State for the Colonies replied for the proposed estimate was that “ it would not be possible to make available from Colonial Development and Welfare Act funds more than a small proportion of the total required for the proposals outlined in Development and Welfare...”⁶¹⁹ The colonial government in response paired down its relocation scheme to a site closer to Bathurst with only 5,000 residents along with a scheme to improve drainage in Bathurst and drain the Kotu Stream. These plans were further hampered when the Secretary of State told the Colonial Government that they would only be getting 282,740 for Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary and would have to get the rest of the money they needed “ by borrowing and by using surplus balances”.⁶²⁰Relocation by the middle of 1945 was seeming increasingly untenable.

The Colonial Government in a last attempt to rally support for relocation created another African and Commercial interest committee to “consider Remedial Measures to be adopted to

⁶¹⁸ NRS, Pub 10/50, Memorandum on Development, 1946, 5.

⁶¹⁹ NRS, Pub 10/50, Memorandum on Development, 1946, 6.

⁶²⁰ NRS, Pub 10/50, Memorandum on Development, 1946, 7.

deal with overcrowding in Bathurst”⁶²¹. The 1946 committee was larger than the one in 1943, but it also had some of the same faces, L.de V. Bottomley, I.M. Garba Jahumpa, Francis Small and the Chief Medical Officer Dr. T.P. Eddy. There was also Sheikh Omar Fye who like Small was an unofficial member of the Legislative Council. J.A Mahoney, another Aku unofficial member of the Legislative Council. And finally, Mrs. H Brough and Mrs. Lenrie Peters were both nominated by the Bathurst Town Council (BTC).⁶²² The BTC was municipal institution that took over from the B.A.T.C in 1946, with the colonial governments promise that it would have full municipal powers- that is financial and executive.⁶²³ None the less, the 1946 committee of African elites and Europeans recommended the following:

Before anything is done to relieve such overcrowding as exists, Government should, after providing a reliable estimate of the existing population and an estimate of the number of people who require to be rehoused, proceed with a rehousing scheme to provide suitable accommodation on available building areas in Bathurst which are not at present built up. The possibility of obtaining suitable land for rebuilding in the 4 ½ sq. miles area of the Island of St. Mary by reclamation and drainage should be investigated by the Drainage Engineer.⁶²⁴

Elite Africans in 1946 much like 1943 continued to call for land reclamation in opposition to relocation.⁶²⁵ Further, the committee in their recommendation even questioned the

⁶²¹ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946.

⁶²² PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946,1.

⁶²³ ⁶²³ NRS, CSO 2/2169 Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the Bathurst Town Council Held at the Public Hall-Clifton Road- On Wednesday 17th September 1947 at 3:30 PM.

⁶²⁴ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946, 3.

⁶²⁵ See Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, *Times Between the Sea & the Lagoon, An Eco-social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana, c.1850 to Recent*, (Athens, Oh: Ohio University Press, 2001)128-133; The Anlo elite on Keita were equally resistant to relocation from Keita in the 1930s. The British colonial

colonial official's assertion that Bathurst was overcrowded, asking the government to provide a reliable estimate of the "existing population".⁶²⁶ The committee in 1946, however, stated that if for any reason a person was forced to move as part of the development scheme, they "shall not lose their Colonial Status".⁶²⁷ While there were plans to introduce the franchise to Kombo St. Mary in 1943, Kombo St. Mary was not incorporated officially into the Colony till January 1st, 1947.⁶²⁸ Thus, the legal status of British Subject in Kombo St. Mary at the time of the committee's report in 1946 was still uncertain. Francis Small was the only 1946 committee member who dissented from this slight compromise by the African elite to the issue of Colonial Status in the relocation plan.

Francis Small's dissent was targeted at the "colonial status" paragraph of the 1946 committee's report in the following:

My protest with regard to paragraph 13 is, I submit, by no means trivial; in my opinion, the clause in question does make a serious difference to the merits of the Report as a whole. My objection is not, of course, against the idea that Bathurst citizens should retain their status in the Colony, wherever they may go.... The Committee's terms of reference are plain and definite. They are: "to consider remedial measures to be adopted to deal with overcrowding in Bathurst, and to make an early report with recommendations to Government." There is not one word which suggests that the Committee may propose the removal of people away from Bathurst to the Protectorate, where they will eventually lose their Colonial Status... That a public Committee like this should do no more than guess or hint, about any such contemplated "schemes" leaves much to be desired. Would

government refused Anlo demands for land reclamation and instead pushed for relocation off Keita. Land reclamation in Bathurst would again begin in 1947, as demanded by Aku and Wolof elites. Therefore, showing the importance of the Aku and Wolof elite to the colonial system.

⁶²⁶ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946, 3.

⁶²⁷ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946, 3.

⁶²⁸ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, Chapter 1, 1.

not the public be justified to think there is probably no genuine intention to explore the possibilities of extending the present boundary of Bathurst within the Island of St Mary? Could it not even be thought that this Committee is a mere “dress-up” for schemes already contemplated which have not emanated from any public committee?⁶²⁹ For Small the committee had no business considering what would happen if British

Subjects were moved out of Bathurst to Kombo St. Mary. Small wanted to limit the conversation on how to alleviate claims of overcrowding within the boundaries of St. Mary’s Island. Small in his dissent used the history of Liberated African settlements in Kombo St Mary to state that “township experiments in Kombo, has proved an acknowledged failure.”⁶³⁰ Further on the Liberated African villages formed in Kombo, Small states “ All of them have either disappeared, like Melville Town and Goderich Town; or they have lapsed into the Protectorate, with the inevitable result that their English -speaking inhabitants soon found their way to Bathurst to avoid the loss of their status as British subjects.⁶³¹” Small uses these historical examples to argue that it is only in Bathurst that the civic status of him and his ancestors have been secure. Liberated African and Aku British subjecthood was in Small’s eyes tied to the land on St. Mary’s Island. And as Smalls discusses in the quote above, the committee, by suggesting any scenario in which people could move to Bathurst without losing their status, was drawing skepticism from

⁶²⁹ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946, Appendix V, The Grounds of My Dissent From the Last Clause of Paragraph 13 of The Overcrowding Committee Report, 16-17.

⁶³⁰ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946, Appendix V, The Grounds of My Dissent From the Last Clause of Paragraph 13 of The Overcrowding Committee Report, 16.

⁶³¹ PUB 10/54, Report of The Committee Appointed to Consider Remedial Measures to be Adopted to deal with Overcrowding in Bathurst, 1946, Appendix V, The Grounds of My Dissent From the Last Clause of Paragraph 13 of The Overcrowding Committee Report, 18.

the public. Many in the public according to Small saw the 1946 committee as another Colonial Government attempt to make people move out of Bathurst and would be discredited.

Over the three years since the 1943 Development Plan was made public, and various committees created by the Colonial State to gain support among the Africans in Bathurst, there was no conversation about the colonial status of Kombo St. Mary residents. Rather, from 1942 their leaders were removed, and strict limits were imposed on the areas that villages could occupy.⁶³² Although Small uses the historical experiences of Liberated Africans to make argues, he seemed to erase the history of Kombo St. Mary as a colonial space that was stripped of its colonial status in 1902. The Aku and Wolof elites proposals for land reclamation ignored the political needs of Kombo St. Mary's Jolah and Mandinka majority. Rather these Bathurst elites saw their colonial status as their exclusive right tided to the Island of St Mary's, which they also had to protect. The position of Aku and Wolof elites vis-à-vis the people of Kombo St. Mary's demonstrates a restricted imagination in the political possibilities during an era of imperial decline and imperial scale redistribution of rights and resources.

Yet the Aku and Wolof elites' limitation in their political imagination was itself the result of the inequality and the many pretenses of enfranchise under British Colonialism in the Gambia. The Liberated African ancestors of the Aku had to fight to secure the flood prone lands that they were given by the British colonial state, as explored in Chapter One, Two and Three. And

⁶³² PUB 10/3 Report On the Committee Appointed to Draw up Plans for the Future of A portion of Kombo St Mary.

moments that looked like full enfranchisement like the Ratepayer's Council in 1850 were fleeting.

Even in 1946, when the Bathurst Advisory Town Council-a body with no executive powers- was transformed into the Bathurst Town Council the powers of the BTC were limited. During a session of the BTC a councilor asked the chairman who was the colonial secretary, "Does Bathurst enjoy a Local Self Government of the widest nature as compared with the limited scope of the Bathurst Town Council?. To which the Chairman replied " This question is not understood". The councilor followed up with " What is the incentive, that prompted Government to establish a Local authority, if it is goodwill, is it not the moral duty of Government to enhance its rapid growth to a full municipal Government. Why was not the Bathurst Town Council inaugurated after the model of English Local Government?". The Chairman finally replied "These questions refer to the policy of the Government of the Gambia and not to the work of the Bathurst Town Council. This is not, therefore, the appropriate place for them to be raised."⁶³³Aku and Wolof elites understood the limitations in which they operated under British Rule, and the possibility of each political gain being taken away. Yet one can only imagine what a more radical position to the 1943 Development Plan would look like, particularly one that embraced the political incorporation and economic development of Kombo. While also rejecting the segregation and confinement of Africans as labor rather than administration in the development of Kombo St. Mary.

⁶³³ NRS, CSO 2/2169 Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the Bathurst Town Council Held at the Public Hall- Clifton Road- On Wednesday 17th September 1947 at 3:30 PM.

This section has attempted to show and explain the Aku and Wolof elites' position on the proposed 1943 Development Plan and its subsequent mutations. The African elites of Bathurst asked that the colonial government first expand Bathurst through land reclamation before moving any communities out of it. By focusing on the figure of Edward Francis Small the section also explains the political ramifications of relocation to Kombo St. Mary. As proposals for relocation coincided with the introduction of the franchise for legislative elections in 1943. Governor Hilary Blood intended to weaken Smalls political position, by making Kombo St Mary and Bathurst a single voting district in 1944/45. This section by framing the colonial policy of relocation to Kombo St. Mary as bound up with the political incorporation and enfranchisement of the people in Kombo St Mary demonstrates the political significance of land reclamation in this era. As such, land reclamation for Aku elites was a tool used to maintain the political enclosure created by the division of British Gambia into colony and protectorate.

5.8 The Campama Estate: The last land reclamation project under British rule

With Hilary Blood gone in October 1946. The new Governor Andrew Barkworth Wright (1947-1949) fully embraced land reclamation in colonial Bathurst, he was unsurprisingly very popular with the African residents of Bathurst.⁶³⁴ The Bathurst Drainage Scheme which Wright initiated was the largest of its kind in Bathurst's history. The project, which began in 1948 built a two-mile causeway through the mangrove wetlands. The causeway acted as a sea wall to prevent

⁶³⁴ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Report on Development and Welfare, 1947, 6.

flooding and enclosed an area of about 400 acres.⁶³⁵ By 1963 about 76 acres of the 400 acres was filled in and firm enough for settlement.

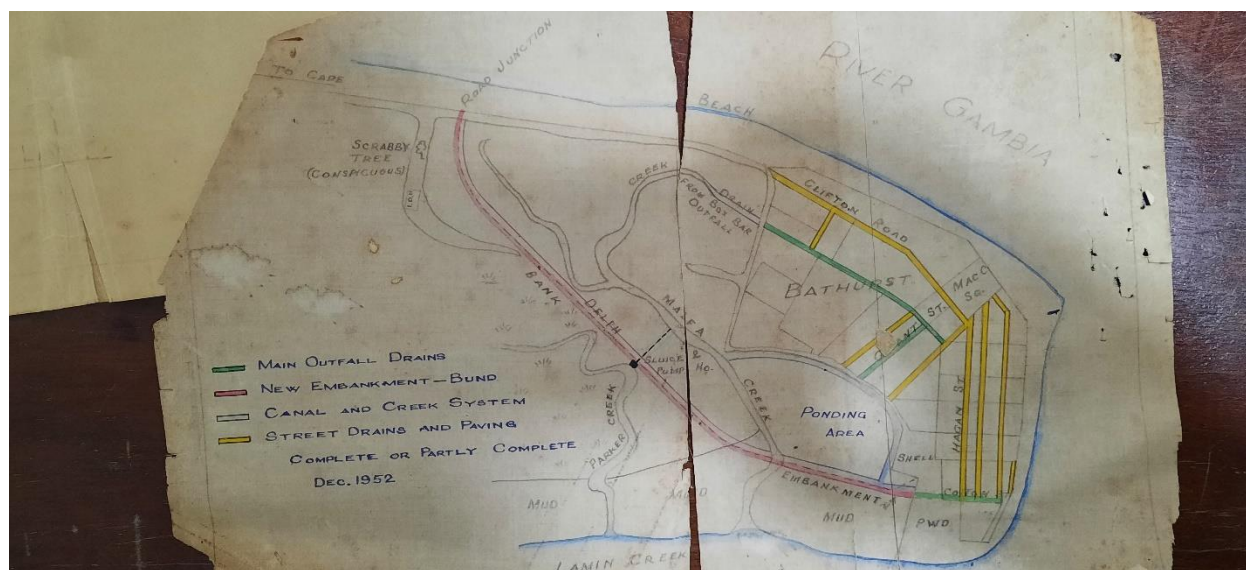


Figure 17 1952 map showing the causeway that was built in red, as well as the drainage system of Bathurst in green and yellow. The area with the many creeks that was enclosed by the causeway would become the Campama Estate (Source: National Record Service of the Gambia).

This allowed for the establishment of the Campamah Housing Estate, which was the last housing estate under colonial rule. The drainage and reclamation project that built the estate took up a significant amount of the post war development funds provided by the British Imperial parliament.⁶³⁶ Thus, the Campamah Estate and the drainage/reclamation project that created it

⁶³⁵ Gambia National Records Service (NRS), APR 20/2, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Report on Town Planning for Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary, Gambia, West Africa, January 1963, 40.

⁶³⁶ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Report on Development and Welfare, 1947.

represented the continued concentration of economic resources and political power in Bathurst under the colonial state.

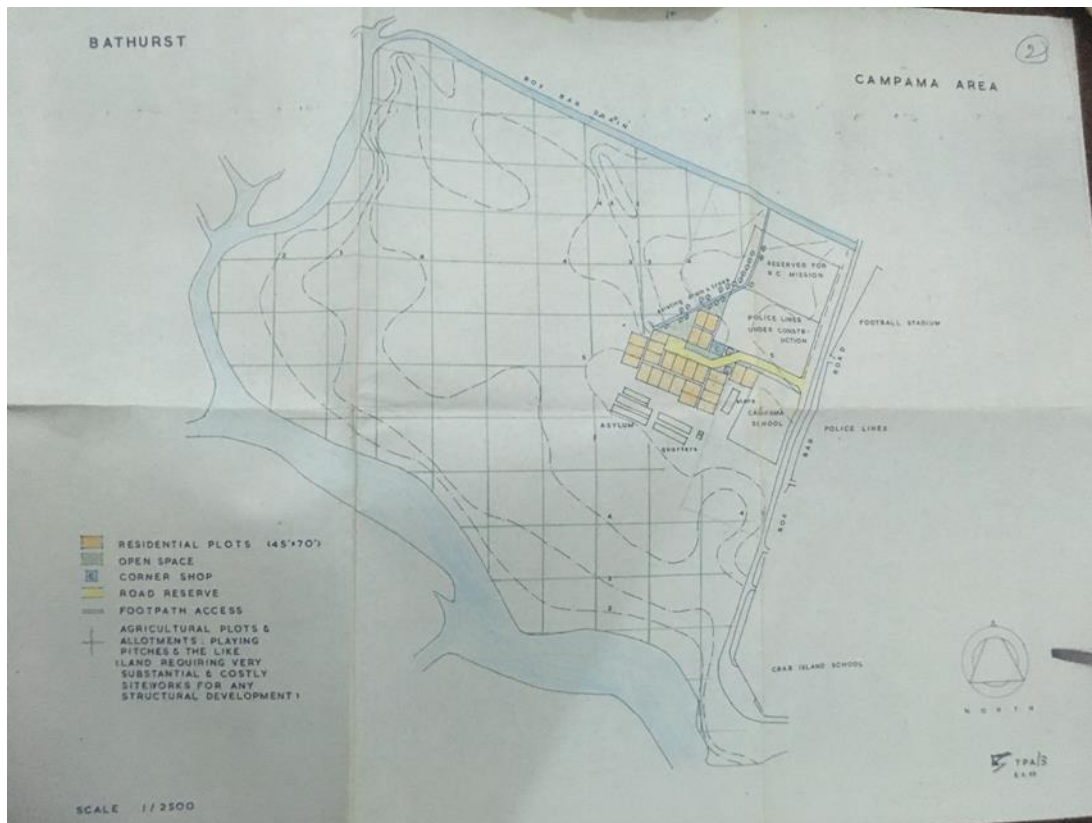


Figure 18 Plan for the Campama Estate showing the first residential areas, police lines and asylum, 1964 (Source: The NRS,PWD 4/44, Town Planning, Campama area, 1965)

Despite pushing the land reclamation scheme forward Wright was mindful of the division between colony and protectorate. In 1948 Wright claimed that the reclamation project would:

Drain the whole Island of St Mary and the swamps to the south of the Bathurst—Lamin Road extending some thirty square miles, by building a bund from Half Die to Lamin

Creek and by closing the inlet from the sea at Denton Bridge. The Island would then be united with the mainland.⁶³⁷

Wright was hopeful that creating a road would lead to a slow and progressive integration between Bathurst and the rest of British Gambia. What united the mainland, and the Island of St Mary's politically was the declaration of Bathurst as a city within the new republic of the Gambia in 1965 ending its status as the Colony. This unity meant a total end of Aku political dominance, as Gambians from the protectorate educated in Bathurst began organizing politically. This educated class of protectorate people would come to for the first independence government of the Gambia in 1965. Aku political minoritization however, began long before 1965 and instead has its roots in 1947 when all Adult British subjects in the colony were enfranchised for legislative elections.

5.9 The Beginning of Aku Political Minoritization 1947-1951

After a three year delay the Legislative Council elections for the first elected African member was held in 1947. Prior to this date Africans on the Legislative Council were appointed by the Governor of the Gambia. The main contenders for the seat were Francis Edward Small and Shiek Omar Faye. Fye while on the 1944 committee had voted for Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary to be a single constituency, with the hopes that the Muslim majority of Kombo St. Mary would vote for him. Small despite the potential and feared disadvantages that would come with a single constituency won the 1947 elections, becoming the first elected African member of the

⁶³⁷ BOA, Development and Welfare in the Gambia, June 1943, Gambia Under Colonial Rule, Government Reports, 1881-1966, British Online Archives, Report on Development and Welfare, 1947, 6.

Legislative Council. However, Small's win was likely due to the low turnout for the elections, as only 3,195 people voted out of an electorate of about 10,000. Small won 1,491 votes. No individual born or based in Kombo St Mary stood for the elections. The requirement that candidates be able to read and write in English made it very difficult for anyone coming from the rural communities of Kombo St. Mary to stand for elections. This meant that even though universal suffrage was granted to the people of St Mary's, they were represented by politicians from Bathurst. This dynamic would stay true to the end of colonial rule.

Despite Small's win in 1947, he would lose in 1951 elections in which Bathurst and Kombo St Mary voted as separated constituency. Hughes and Perfect mark Small's loss in 1951 as "the demise of the Aku minority as an independent force in Gambian Politics."⁶³⁸ And though, Kombo St Mary voted as a separate constituency all the politicians that stood there were originally from Bathurst. Kombo St Mary would continue to be a rural space on the political periphery of Bathurst even with its colonial status. Although Small feared the political consequences of having a single constituency, the rural nature of Kombo St. Mary, the restrictions on who could stand for elections, and the lack of electoral experience meant that it would take a long time for people in Kombo St. Mary to become an electorate of consequence. Only 1,075 people voted in Kombo St. Mary during the 1951 legislative election.⁶³⁹ Universal suffrage in 1947 was a bigger factor in Aku political minoritization than the incorporation of Kombo St. Mary or the formation of a single voting district.

⁶³⁸ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 122.

⁶³⁹ Hughes and Perfect, *A Political History*, 124.

While Aku's could easily dominate municipal elections, legislative council elections under universal suffrage would be a hard task. Aku's as the majority of landowner in Bathurst were more likely to win municipal elections which took as its electorate ratepayers or property owners. Legislative elections from 1947 onwards were conducted under universal suffrage. And universal suffrage in the Bathurst context meant that the demographically dominant Wolof of Bathurst would form the largest part of the electorate for legislative elections. Between Francis Small's win in 1947 and the legislative elections in 1951, new independent Wolof politicians and Wolof headed political parties appeared on the political stage. Pierre Sarr Njie a young lawyer in 1951 stood as an independent, J.F. Senegal who was a member of the BTC also stood as an independent, while Garba-Jahumpa stood for the Bathurst Young Muslims Society (BYMS). Another important candidate Rev.J.C. Faye stood for the Gambia Democratic Party (GDP). Faye own the 1952 elections with 905 votes and Garba-Jahumpa came in second with 828, out of a total of 2,262 votes casted. From 1951 to the late 1950s Wolof candidates would dominate legislative elections in Bathurst.

Bathurst's continued role as the main urban center and seat of the colonial government had a major impact on the development of Gambian politics into the late colonial and early independence period. As a result, of urban development and politics being centered in Bathurst, Kombo St Mary was deprived of the important political institutions and culture that was established in Bathurst. Chief among them were the friendly societies which provided a basis for mass politics in Bathurst since the 1840s. Thus, there was never a political party that came out of Kombo St Mary itself in the colonial period. In the context of the colony and protectorate divide

in British Gambia, a political party formed in Kombo St. Mary would have had to be one that was attuned to both urban and rural needs simultaneously. The long-term effects of this were that Gambian politics developed along two lines; one that was primarily urban and Bathurst based and another that was rural and protectorate base. The People's Protectorate Party (PPP) which was formed in 1958 by young protectorate youth who had been educated in Bathurst, would come to demand more political rights for protectorate peoples and eventually independence from British rule. When universal suffrage was extent to all British Gambia in 1960 the PPP won. The PPP under Sir Dawda Jawara would eventually become a unified Gambia's first government after independence.

5.10 Conclusion

British official's abandonment of land reclamation as a solution for Bathurst's sanitary, housing and flood problems was an important break with eighty-three years of colonial state policy. Colonial Governors had for eighty years argued that land reclamation was the only way to improve Bathurst physically, socially, and morally. British officials in 1943 were proposing instead to move a significant amount of the colonial population and government infrastructure out of Bathurst. The development proposal also came with an increased concern for the division of the British territory into colony and protectorate. As such the 1943 break with land reclamation policy reveals that land reclamation was not only important for increasing the state's social control and ability to recreate Bathurst. Rather, land reclamation also enabled a continued

division of the Gambia into a colony encompassed by an island and a protectorate that was everything else.

The African elite of Bathurst mainly comprised of Akus and Wolofs were against the 1943 Development which proposed relocation out of Bathurst and instead became major proponents of land reclamation. The 1943 Development Plan was a threat to the power and institutions that Aku and Wolof leaders had built in Bathurst. African leaders such as Francis Small, who would become the first elected member to the legislative council, feared that relocation out of Bathurst in the context of universal suffrage would diminish Aku political power.

For elites such as Francis Small the removal of the government and Bathurst population to Kombo St Mary was a treat to the political position of Bathurst. The 1943 Development Plan if it was carried out as proposed would have completely shifted the center of power out of Bathurst to Kombo St. Mary which had an entirely different demographic makeup with a Mandinka and Jola majority. For Aku elites land reclamation and the continued concentration of development in Bathurst was a way of forestalling their political minoritization within an increasingly enfranchised and decolonizing political structure.

Ultimately the 1943 Development Plan was not carried out as proposed and land reclamation won in the end. The final reclamation project under British rule became known as the Bathurst Drainage Scheme. The Bathurst Drainage Scheme was the largest of its kind in Bathurst's history and led to the creation of the Camapa Estate over the last decades of British colonialism. The project which began in 1948 built a two-mile causeway through the mangrove

wetlands that acted as a sea wall to prevent flooding and enclosed an area of about 400 acres.⁶⁴⁰ By 1963 about 76 acres of the 400 acres was filled in and firm enough for settlement. Despite land reclamation taking place, Kombo St Mary was eventually incorporated into the colony in 1947 but remained a rural place that was on the political periphery of Bathurst. Non-the less the Blackburn proposal represents an important and brief break with eighty-three years of colonial government policy to destroy and reclaim the mangrove wetlands of Bathurst. Furthermore, the failure of the Blackburn proposal also indicates that land reclamation as a technopolitical project was always consequential to the division of British Gambia into colony and protectorate.

British colonial official's 1943 abandonment of land reclamation as a solution for Bathurst's sanitary, housing, and flooding problems signaled a break with over one hundred years of colonial state policy. Since the mid-19th century, and except for ten years in the 1850s (described in Chapter Two), colonial Governors had repeatedly argued that land reclamation was the only way to improve Bathurst physically, socially, and morally. The 1943 proposal to move a significant portion of the colonial population and government infrastructure out of Bathurst, by contrast, represented a transformation in colonial policy.

British officials in 1943 were proposing instead to move a significant amount of the colonial population and government infrastructure out of Bathurst. The development proposal also came with an increased concern for the division of the British territory into colony and protectorate. As such the 1943 break with land reclamation policy reveals that land reclamation

⁶⁴⁰ Gambia National Records Service (NRS), APR 20/2, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Report on Town Planning for Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary, Gambia, West Africa, January 1963, 40.

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colonialism. The project which began in 1948 built a two-mile causeway through the mangrove wetlands that acted as a sea wall to prevent flooding and enclosed an area of about 400 acres.⁶⁴¹ By 1963 about 76 acres of the 400 acres was filled in and firm enough for settlement. Despite land reclamation taking place, Kombo St Mary was eventually incorporated into the colony in 1947 but remained a rural place that was on the political periphery of Bathurst. Nonetheless the Blackburn proposal represents an important and brief break with eighty-three years of colonial government policy to destroy and reclaim the mangrove wetlands of Bathurst. Furthermore, the failure of the Blackburn proposal also indicates that land reclamation as a technopolitical project was always consequential to the division of British Gambia into colony and protectorate.

⁶⁴¹ Gambia National Records Service (NRS), APR 20/2, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Report on Town Planning for Bathurst and Kombo St. Mary, Gambia, West Africa, January 1963, 40.

Conclusion

In 1816 Governor McCarthy of British Sierra Leone commanded Alexander Grant of Royal African Corps to establish a new British settlement on the Gambia River. The settlement was meant to serve two functions in line with the British Empire's recent prohibition against the slave trade from 1807. The first was for the settlement to enforce British antislavery policies, namely stopping slave ships from entering and leaving the Gambia River. The second was to promote British commercial endeavors that could act as profitable alternatives to the British trade in slaves in Senegambia. Since the 15th century, the Gambia River was an important site for the capturing and selling of Africans into the Atlantic Slave Trade. Until 1807, the British had been a major driver of the slave trade along the riverbanks of the Gambia River. However, after the Napoleonic Wars from 1803 to 1815, the British lost their positions in the Gambia River to the French. Following the signing of the Vienna Peace Treaty in 1815, the British and French agreed to re-order their spheres of influence in the Senegambia Region. As part of this treaty the French took back Goree and St. Louis which the British had seized during the war, and the French agreed to respect British sovereignty over the Gambia River. A year later, in 1816 Alexander Grant took control of Banjoul Island and renamed it St. Mary's Island. This narrative is generally how historians of The Gambia begin their accounts of the history of Bathurst, the colonial capital of The Gambia from 1816 until 1865.

By contrast, this dissertation begins with flooding, which challenged every British administrator and most of the inhabitants of colonial Bathurst for the duration of its existence as

a colonial settlement (and up to the present day). While British sovereignty existed on paper and applied to the Gambia River, it meant very little when it came to the question of land. The African states of Kombo and Niumu controlled the South and North banks of the Gambia River respectively, and jealously guarded their lands. Alexander Grant knew this and understood that the British would have to go to war if they wanted any substantial piece of territory at the mouth of the Gambia River. Having just come out of the Napoleonic Wars, this was not an option. Under pressure to fulfill Governor McCarthy's orders, Grant settled for a tiny mangrove-covered island at the mouth of the Gambia River, known indigenously as *Banjoul*. For the indigenous communities who lived in the area, this island like other islands in the river was understood to be a dangerous, liminal space where spirits lived. Refugees and others would use the island in times of crisis and for food—including rice cultivation and fishing—but not as a place of permanent settlement.

British sovereignty did not extend beyond St. Mary's Island for a good deal of the colonial period, yet it also struggled to impose itself on the tidal landscape of Banjoul. Banjoul is a barrier island, formed over centuries of silt and sediment accumulation. At sea level, its ever-shifting sands meant that prior to systematic land reclamation and drainage it was frequently partially submerged, and fully submerged in some places. What stability Banjoul had was thanks to the many mangroves that surrounded and grew on the island. The waters of the Gambia River and the Atlantic Ocean, combined with seasonally heavy rains, posed a seemingly incessant challenge to British officials throughout the colonial period. Although Banjoul had enough higher and drier land for the construction of a small colonial town from 1816, after 1819 the

British began settling Liberated Africans on the island as well. From this point onwards both the British and Liberated Africans would continually struggle—in different ways, with different arguments and ends—to create and maintain enough dry land for this community to live on.

In this way, this dissertation also centers Liberated Africans, African captives freed by British anti-slave trade naval squadrons off the coast of West Africa and resettled in Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Liberated Africans embodied the key struggles of this era and had the unique experience of being both enslaved and freed in the early 19th century. As a group, however, they were also the means through which British imperial officials hoped and believed abolition could be profitable and moral. Liberated Africans provided the labor, the military strength, and the ideas through which the British empire was remade in West Africa after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. British colonial officials in The Gambia hoped to re-settle Liberated Africans on St. Mary's Island to be a productive community and labor pool for the colony. For their part, and as a free community, Liberated Africans carved out a place for themselves in the new settlement of Bathurst after the failure of an agricultural experiment there. Already in the early years of The Gambia's colonial history, Liberated Africans were the group of people who lived in the lowest-lying flood-prone areas of St. Mary's. British officials quickly realized that to incorporate this community into the colony they would have remake St. Mary's Island through drainage and land "reclamation," or the destruction of mangrove forests and the building of new, dry land in its place. One consequence that this dissertation has traced is Liberated African's historical relationship to the project of land reclamation in Bathurst. They built much of Bathurst's drainage infrastructure and subsequently organized their politics around the proper functioning

of aquatic management systems that kept their lands dry and their lives and property safe from flooding.

In the 1850s the colonial governors of The Gambia attempted to conquer parts of the Kombo mainland as a means of escaping the floods and challenging landscape of St. Mary's Island. The governors planned to build new Liberated African agricultural villages on the Kombo mainland in the hopes that they would expand the territorial reach of The Gambia colony and, in becoming self-sufficient, save the colony money. Colonial governors promised the King of Kombo that they would crush Kombo's rebellious Muslim clerics if he gave their lands to the British. While the British were able to conquer the land in Northern Kombo with Liberated African and Wolof troops, their expansionist wars did not turn out as they imagined. By this time in the 1850s the metropolitan Colonial Office had adopted a line of non-intervention and a ban on colonial expansion. Ordering a military retreat, the new Liberated African settlements found themselves amid a civil war that they, having been foot soldiers, had aggravated but without access to any military protection. Unable to defend newly conquered lands, the colonial government retreated to wetland St. Mary's and initiated large-scale land reclamation projects that Liberated Africans had demanded for protection.

Following this misadventure in the Kombo, the British colonial government found itself confronting a cycle of flooding and drainage. Herein Liberated African politics became organized around land reclamation, better drainage, and access to secure, dry land on St. Mary's. At one point during the 1850s Liberated African elites won substantial control over the management of drainage infrastructure in Bathurst in the form of the Ratepayer's Council. This

was the very first municipal governance institution in colonial Bathurst, and it was primarily charged with allocating taxes for aquatic management. Though short-lived due to the threat the institution posed to Bathurst's white merchants, it represented an early experiment in participatory democracy in Bathurst. Nonetheless cycles of drainage and flooding, followed by outbreaks of yellow fever and malaria, continued to challenge the colonial government. One result was that the emergence of municipal government evolved around flooding, sanitation, and the control of disease.

In its attempts to create new laws, institutions, and categories of work to fight disease outbreaks, the colonial government simultaneously created new opportunities for Liberated Africans and Wolof elites to organize for more opportunities to govern their growing town. Liberated Africans became sanitary commissioners, sanitary inspectors, and eventually voting members of the Board of Health in 1887. The Board of Health was the product of many years of colonial administrative re-organizing in the government's long crusade against deadly disease in Bathurst. From 1887 to 1930 the Board of Health was the municipal government of Bathurst, which was unique in British West Africa. Whereas other British colonial cities had Town Councils and similar municipal institutions, the Board of Health was responsible for all municipal affairs in Bathurst. The Chief Medical Officer of The Gambia was, in effect, the mayor. Scholars have long discussed the sanitary politics of colonial governance in cities, but the

degree to which municipal governance was medicalized in Bathurst was unique and tied to the challenges Banjoul presented.⁶⁴²

Under the Board of Health drainage and land reclamation continued, but these projects were carried out with different goals and were justified using different language and political visions than satisfying the land needs of Liberated Africans and their descendants. By the early 20th century, the descendants of Liberated Africans were known as Akus (sing. Aku). Earlier, Aku had referred to a sub-ethnic group of Liberated Africans, yet by the late 19th century they had grown more prosperous and politically powerful than other African groups in colonial Bathurst. It is not entirely clear what happened to other sub-ethnic groups of Liberated Africans, but Aku has come to be the dominant name for the Liberated African-descended community. For example, despite Aku people holding positions on the Board of Health, from the 1910s to the 1920s the white-dominated Board created new land to racially segregate Bathurst. The Board evicted Africans to newly reclaimed areas to make the “European” neighborhoods exclusively white. These moves signaled the declining African influence over municipal affairs in this period.

⁶⁴²Philip D. Curtin, *Medical Knowledge and Urban Planning in Tropical Africa*, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (Jun., 1985); Odile Georg “From Hill Station (Freetown) to Downtown Conakry (First Ward): Comparing French and British Approaches to Segregation in Colonial Cities at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32:1 (1998):1-31; Janet Abu-Lughod, *Tale of Two Cities: The Origins of Modern Cairo*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 7, no. 4, 429–57; Robert K. Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities*, (New York: Routledge, 2013); Garth Andrew Myers, *Verandahs of Power: Colonialism and Space in Urban Africa*, (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2003); Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

Unable to gain control over institutions such as the Board of Health, Aku and Wolof elites organized along more traditional lines in the 20th century. Formed in the 1840s as burial and mutual aid societies, Friendly Societies transformed into a kind of labor union. Friendly Societies organized strikes that were disruptive enough that the colonial government attempted to regulate them in 1865. The government demanded that they share their financial information with the state because they had been so successful in sustaining strikes. Frustrated by the Board of Health and the general deteriorating labor conditions after World War One, in 1929 Friendly Societies headed by Aku and Wolof leaders organized the longest strike in Gambia's colonial history. This strike resulted in the abolition of the Board of Health and the creation of the Bathurst Urban District Council (BUDC) in 1930. African seats were expanded under the BUDC and property owners were enfranchised to vote in municipal elections.

The 1930s ushered in a new age of municipal politics and democratic participation for Aku and Wolof elites. It is important to note that while a few Wolof elites participated, Akus dominated as they formed the most educated and wealthiest class of Africans in colonial society. Since participation in municipal politics was based on property ownership and taxes, Akus tended to hold the positions that were open to Africans. At the same time, notable Aku elites such as Francis Edward Small formed the Ratepayers Association as a broad-based political organization for both property owners and renters. Through their elected members in the BUDC (and later Bathurst Advisory Council), the Ratepayers Association attempted to expand the electorate to include rent-payers, many of whom came from the Gambia Protectorate and French West Africa.

From 1902 to 1965 The Gambia Colony was administered along the lines of a colony, limited to St. Mary's Island, and a protectorate, which encompassed the rest of British Gambia outside of the island. The Protectorate was formed in 1889 through violent British conquest of the entire Gambia River Basin. Protectorate peoples, however, did not share the same rights as people in the colony, who were British subjects. Protectorate-born people in Bathurst were categorized as foreigners and, for example, were under the authority of protectorate chiefs and Native Tribunals if legal issues arose. Yet, protectorate peoples and French subjects formed the bulk of the working class in Bathurst. The Ratepayers Association's attempts to enfranchise renters from the protectorate and French West Africa points to the inter-colonial and cross-class solidarities that so alarmed the colonial government. In contrast, colonial officials framed migrants coming to Bathurst as carriers of disease who needed to be isolated from the colonial core.

Following a devastating yellow fever outbreak, the colonial government initiated a land reclamation project that they hoped would keep migrants out of the city center by isolating them in its margins. The colonial government called the 1930s reclamation project a "slum clearance" project. As part of this project the government planned to move one neighborhood at a time onto reclaimed land where each household would be given a single-family concrete home. The plans reveal the extent to which the colonial government sought to destroy what they called "temporary and semi-permanent" houses, which were often found within family compounds. After building a model village, these plans did not move forward. They are significant, however, because they point to the origins of a growing, colonial idea and discourse of Bathurst as an

overcrowded slum that needed to be cleared, limited, policed, and patrolled in new ways. While Aku and Wolof people resisted these new land reclamation projects, it was ultimately the outbreak of World War Two that stopped the colonial state from completing this project.

By the middle of the Second World War the colonial government gave up on land reclamation and once again attempted to move the colony onto the Kombo mainland as they had done a century prior in the 1850s. A key impetus for the colonial government's desire to relocate was the promise of new development funds from the imperial government. The militarization of Bathurst helped to initiate the process of relocation to Kombo St. Mary. As part of the war effort, the Royal Air Force built a flying boat base on the southeastern end of Bathurst evicting residents from the area. To house the displaced people the colonial government began building townships in Kombo St. Mary, the first being Churchill's Town in 1942. The colonial administration removed the territory of Churchill's Town from native authority and thereafter settled Bathurst evictees there. The creation of Churchill's Town was one of the first steps the colonial government made towards relocating the population of Bathurst and the government itself. The relocation plan was made public in the Development Plan of 1943, which itself was composed in response to the imperial government's request for such plans and the promise of development funds.

As a political tool, land reclamation took on a new form during the post-war development era. Aku and Wolof elites opposed relocation and urbanization in Kombo St. Mary. They asked that the colonial government reclaim more land before moving people out of Bathurst. Yet, the 1943 Development Plan argued for relocation as an urgent matter, claiming that Bathurst was

overcrowded. Its authors argued that Bathurst's population needed to be limited so that the city could be modernized. "Modernization," at this time referred to the construction of new amenities including playing fields, swimming pools, tennis courts, large avenues, and an expanded flying boat base. Aku and Wolof elites opposed this plan on social, material, and political grounds. At the same time as the colonial government was discussing evicting residents from Bathurst, the introduction of universal suffrage for all adults in the colony, including Kombo St. Mary, was also being considered. Aku elites understood that if this were to come to pass, they would become political minorities in a much-expanded electorate where Jola and Mandinka people formed the ethnic majorities. Granted, Aku were already on their way to becoming a minority as most residents of Bathurst by this time were Wolof people. Yet, from an Aku perspective, the enfranchisement of another demographically and linguistically distinct population would render them an even smaller minority. Aku opposition to relocation to Kombo and their demands for land reclamation reveal the extent to which, by the 1940s, land reclamation had come to be a tool for maintaining Aku privilege and power in a context that saw their shrinking significance relative to Wolof, Mandinka, and Jola communities.

The colonial government abandoned their relocation plans and, once again, turned to land reclamation in Bathurst in 1948. The promise of development funds fell short, and the urbanization of Kombo St. Mary a colonial pipedream. While Aku elites were successful in their demands for land reclamation in Bathurst, their gradual political minoritization continued. The colonial government introduced universal suffrage in 1947, after which no Aku politician would again hold a Legislative Council seat under British colonial rule. Instead, new Wolof politicians

and political parties played a larger role in the Legislative Council. The land reclamation project started in 1948 led to the creation of Campana Estate, today known as Tobacco Road neighborhood.

This dissertation ends where it began, with the historic flooding of Tobacco Road in July of 2022. How might we better understand this flood in socio-historical context? In the 19th century, Liberated Africans continually viewed floods as colonial state failures. Many Gambians today might agree with this statement, applied to the national government. A key difference is that Liberated Africans saw dry land as their right, promised to them for their military service in the British Empire, or to sustain themselves after their emancipation from slavery. The colonial government used land reclamation and drainage, at least in part, to fulfill this promise to the formerly enslaved. For Liberated Africans in Bathurst, freedom required maintaining dry land. The promise of dry land in a wetland ecosystem under colonial rule, however, led to a constant battle with the landscape and a need to continually alter the land to maintain what had been reclaimed. In this context, every major flood and disease event in Bathurst reshaped the social contract between Liberated Africans and the colonial state. Floods submerged land and property as they also led to the emergence of new questions and ideas about how Bathurst should be governed, and by whom. Contemporary flooding opens up similar questions and promises to dramatically re-shape both Banjul's and Kombo's governance institutions.

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