

Land, Life and Women's  
lack of Power  
- A field study based on two  
divorced women  
in Bwiam, Gambia.



**Filippa Wickenberg**

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Lund University

Supervisor  
Rangheidur Bogadottir  
Human Ecology, Lund University



**LUND**  
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## ABSTRACT

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This is a fieldwork following the daily life during two months of two divorced women in the village Bwiam, Gambia. It is a study focusing on females in a patriarchal society and how they are bound by the social structures to be married, often into polygamous households, how they farm the land by traditional methods, learnt over generations, to support their families and how they sell their produce at the market.

This study looks especially upon what a woman can and cannot do in the village of Bwiam and how she is dependent on the land and what she can or cannot farm. On a larger perspective looks at gender division of labour and how the ownership of land and laws of inheritance and divorce in Gambia leaves women dependent upon men. This study suggests that women in rural villages have the knowledge but lack the resources to do anything about the inequalities - they are aware of them and they do not like them but they are stuck due to social structures binding them.

### Key words

*Gambia, Bwiam, female-farming, farming division of labour, female-headed household, rural household, traditional farming, land access, women and poverty, traditional societies, polygamous marriages, customary land laws, human ecology*

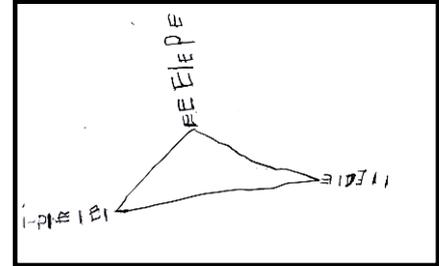
## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Takk!

Didi! First of all I have to thank my lovely son (at the time named Yoda) for just being so wonderful that I was able to do this field study -without you I could never have made it! We were together and the force was with us. You, made everything so much easier for me, and you have continued to be a part of this study all the way.

You were my best friend, giving me reason to smile, even when days were heavy. You are my heart!



My sons' 'human ecological triangle'

Takk!

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Takk, my family, Rutan and Mimi for all your help!

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Thank you!

Thank you my informants and very best friends in the village Bwiam. You are and will always be close to my heart!

## List of acronyms

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GAMCOTRAP	<i>The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices</i>
Sida	<i>Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency</i>
UN	<i>United Nation</i>
UNDP	<i>United Nations Development Program</i>
UN Women	<i>United Nation Women</i>
APRC	<i>Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction</i>
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organization</i>

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All the photos and drawings are made by me, and I do not want them to be used without my permission; filippawickenberg@hotmail.com

## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

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Alkalo	Head of a community or a village
Cadi	A Muslim court
Customary laws	Laws that are associated with tribal practices
Kabilo	Family- or Kin group
Mahr	Bride wealth
Shari'a	Code of Islamic laws
Toubab	"Whites", nickname for white man.
Fishmoney	The sum the husband will give the wife for buying food
Cooking pot	All the people that eat together within a household
Foni Kansala	One of the nine districts of the Western Division of Gambia
Kombo	The capital city area, near the west coast and the Atlantic Sea.
Mandinka	Gambia's biggest tribe and the main langue on the countryside.
Fula	A tribe in Gambia
Wolof	A tribe in Gambia, the main tribe in the Kombo area
Jola	A tribe in Gambia
Serahuli	A tribe in Gambia
Serer	A tribe in Gambia

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<sup>1</sup> Some glossaries are a part of glossaries to be found in Touray et. al. (2003) page 7-8.

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I believe everything we dream  
can come to pass through our union  
we can turn the world around  
we can turn the earth's revolution  
we have the power  
People have the Power

Patti Smith, People have the power

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Leaving the Gambian highroad turning on the gravel road in Bwiam, children running after the car screaming “toubab, toubab”. When my son and I arrived at the only guesthouse in Bwiam late in the afternoon the manager said that we could not have the room that I had booked, because the guesthouse was full. The president had just become re-elected and was having a three-day celebration in the nearby village and his security guards were staying at the guesthouse. Eventually the manager gave us a room, and even dinner. The next day we strolled around in the village and sat down talking to people in Bwiam. My son got friends all over and the children screamed his name wherever we went. It was not difficult to get around making friends in a village so full of hospitality.

When I left Sweden my intention was to write a thesis about polygamy and the women experience around it. I wanted to find what is good with polygamy from the women’s point of view. My main question was; why do women choose to stay in a polygamous marriage? As I came to Gambia and the village Bwiam I quite soon dropped my first intention. I attended a women’s group that had a three-day course in ‘tie and dye’ and batik.



Pictures from the women group tie and dye course.

I just sat around chatting among the different women coming and going from different parts of Bwiam. As I was talking to the women I came to realise that none of them really liked polygamy. So, being married into a polygamous relationship is part of a larger pattern. I wanted to dig deeper into that pattern. I saw, with my western eyes, that polygamy was just one part of the social structures that women were dependent upon. I therefore changed my intention for the study and I decided to study the social structures surrounding women.

To get a better understanding of this I decided to focus my study on divorced women. I felt that the women who lived by themselves, that did not have any superior

in form of a husband, were in a better position to answer questions about life within marriage and could also compare this to how they managed by themselves. I decided to follow three women in their everyday life and let the thesis develop itself (Brockington and Sullivan 2009:57). For this study I have used the material from two of the women. The two informants live by themselves in very simple houses, under very poor conditions. My first informant has four children and her husband left her during her last pregnancy, since then she has been managing by herself. My second informant lives with four of her six children. Under my stay in the village she was going through a divorce in the Cadi Court<sup>2</sup>, which is very rare for a woman in Gambia.

## 1.1 Background

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Of the world's population many are very poor, over a billion people around the world are living in poverty and have to manage on less than a dollar per day<sup>3</sup>. Many of these poor people are woman, especially where mothers are the breadwinners (Daly & Farley 2004: 238, Buckingham-Hatfield 2000: 2). Poor people are mostly dependent on their manual labour for survival and often they do not have access to education or a chance of learning new skills. Poverty also very often continues over generations (Kabeer and Mahmud 2009: 10, Chant 2007: 31).

Women's poverty is connected to what rights they have and often they cannot do much to change their lives (Scheyvens et al. 2009:169, Chant 2007:80, 101). Women all over the world have restricted land rights, small chances to get loans or credit and lack education and political and social power (Chant 2007:164, Kabeer 2001:121, Guyer 1981:102). There are also norms that limit what a woman can work with, for instance what profession she can have (Chant 1997: 30, Chant 2007: 40, 79, 114, Chant 2004:20). To be able to decide over her life, a woman therefore needs to have the opportunity to own land, manage her own income and divorce her husband without the risk of losing all that she has (Guyer 1981:101). Due to all the limitations she does not have equal opportunities and many times she is therefore stuck in poverty (Chant 2004: 20, Gordon 2001: 271, Kabeer 2001:122).

Women seems to use their income to buy food, clothing and things they need for the household and therefore many aid-organizations invest in women projects<sup>4</sup>. The Swedish government wants Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, to work with equality and women's role in the development as one out of three different specializations<sup>5</sup>. Sida, as many other organizations, want aid to go directly to feed the family, to have positive effects on nutritional intake, health care and education.

Organizations also talk about empowerment of women, primarily education, in order to enable them to develop their countries (UD 2010:9, 12, Chant 2007:121). When I came to the village Bwiam I saw a complex picture and as I understood, education only would not change the women's role in society. I therefore wanted to understand the social structures and to see what was behind women's power or lack of power.

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<sup>2</sup> Cadi court is a Muslim court where the judges are Muslim (Touray et al. 2003:7)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.worldbank.org/progress/reducing\\_poverty.html](http://www.worldbank.org/progress/reducing_poverty.html) World Banks homepage, taken 30 December 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon 2001:281, Dugan 1998:105, Clark 1989:91, Kabeer 2001:104, Kabeer 1999:35, UN Women 2011:4, Schroeder 2000: 279, Chant 2007:112, 173, Braidottir et al. 1998:56, Linares 2009:21078, Guyer 1988:249, Carney 1993:334

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.sida.se/Svenska/Bistand--utveckling/Delta-ar-svenskt-bistand/> Sida's homepage taken 11 Oktober 2012.

## 1.2 Purpose and aim of the study

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In my fieldwork I have been studying the correlation between women, her environment and the social structures within the village Bwiam. I have been following two women in their daily life and I have been talking to many women and men in the village to get a picture of how society organizes itself in the village. I have followed these women to study their relationship to the environment, by following the women to the rice field, the garden and being a part of the market. I have through observations and conversations collected and mapped the social norms by which women's lives are based. The initial chapters; Farming, Social structures, and Women and marriage, is the theoretical basis for the information I have been collecting in my fieldwork.

This is a study of rural woman in Bwiam; of family- and social relationships, of ownership and access and of decision-making. This study will also look at the local food production in relation to the societies dependency on there own farming. The production of rice and farming is central for these women that do not have a husband to provide for the household. To look at these women's daily life and work is central to understand their role in society (Jackson & Palmer-Jones1999: 558). To help me structure what I have collected in Bwiam I have used Dieter Steiner's human ecological triangle.

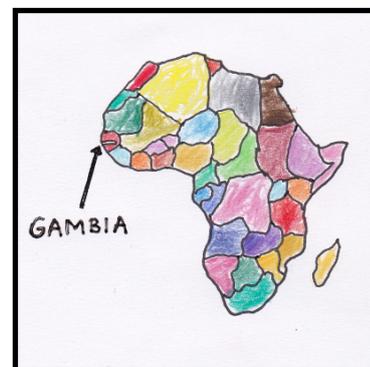
This study shows the correlation between women, land and social structures. The aim is to see in what way the dependency on land and social relationships affects daily life for the women in Bwiam. The questions for this study are:

- *In what way do the dependency on land affect the women in Bwiam?*
- *In what way do the social structures and norms in the village Bwiam affect the women?*

## 1.3 The country Gambia

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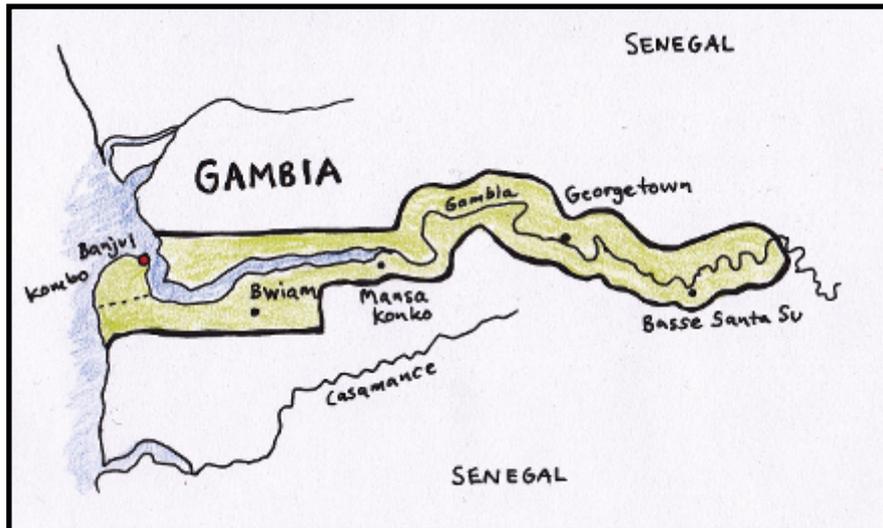
Gambia is one of Africa's smallest countries. It is surrounded on all sides by Senegal. In the west lies the Atlantic Ocean and the Gambian river runs through the middle of the country. Gambia has a sub-tropical climate with a heavy rainy season between July and October. The country was a former British colony for three centuries and gained its independence in 1965. The capital is located on the Atlantic coast and is called Banjul (Chant 2007: 126, Oludele 1994: 41).<sup>6</sup>



Map of Africa, the arrow points at the small country Gambia

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.landguiden.se/Lander/Afrika/Gambia/Geografi>, Landguidens homepage taken the 10 june 2013.



Map of Gambia, with Kombo area and Bwiam

Gambia is a republic and the president is called Yahya Jemmeh. The President and his party APRC (Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction) have been in power since they took power through a military coup in 1994. Gambia is divided into six different political divisions; Banjul, Central River, Lower River, North Bank, Upper River and Western, and each division has a governor that has been selected by the president. There are also 35 subdivisions with chiefs and every village has elected an *Alkalo* that holds the power of the village. All of the country's national government is located in the city area (Chant 2007:126).<sup>7</sup>

Groundnut is Gambia's main export, which the country is highly dependent on. The groundnut production is very dependent on the weather but also on the fluctuations in price on the world market which makes the country vulnerable. Tourism is one of the main incomes for the country but Gambia is also highly dependent on aid (Chant 2007:129)<sup>8</sup>. The majority of the workforce, around seventy per cent, work in the agricultural sector and less than half of the population live in the rural areas and are self-sufficient (Chant 2007:132, Oludele 1994:41)<sup>9</sup>. Non-indigenous Gambians own around sixty per cent of informal sector businesses and they also work in skilled positions in the society such as finance, law and medicine. Unemployment is very high and young people seem to be 'over-educated' because the labour market lacks work for the educated youth (Chant 2007:131-134).

Gambia is a Muslim country with over ninety per cent Muslims and five per cent Christians and the country is known for its tolerance towards other beliefs (Chant 2007:130). Traditional religion is embedded in the society, with beliefs in a supreme being, in spirits, in life after death, in magic, witchcraft and in sacred places (Moyo 2001:301). Gambia had a population of 1.8 million people in 2011 and is expected to have a population of 2.8 million in 2030 (UNDP 2011:164). Gambia has a high fertility rate, a woman has in average five children and almost forty-five per cent of

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.landguiden.se/Lander/Afrika/Gambia/Politiskt-System>, Landguidens homepage taken the 10 june 2013.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.landguiden.se/Lander/Afrika/Gambia/Ekonomi>, Landguidens homepage taken the 10 june 2013.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.landguiden.se/Lander/Afrika/Gambia/Jordbruk-Fiske>, Landguidens homepage taken the 10 june 2013.

the population is under the age of sixteen (Chant 2007:131). Only 17 per cent of the female population in 2011 had a secondary education compared to the male population where 32 per cent had secondary education<sup>10</sup>.

The population is a mixture of different tribes, *Mandinka* is the largest group with around forty per cent of the population, other large tribes are *Fula*, *Wolof*, *Jola* and *Serahuli*. English is Gambia's official language, which is the language in school. Most of the population speak at least two different local languages, Wolof being the most common in the capital area and Mandinka on the countryside. Only thirty-seven per cent of the population have access to electricity and mainly in the urban area and power cuts are frequent (Chant 2007: 130, 137).

#### 1.4 Why Gambia and the village Bwiam?

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I wanted to make a study about women living close to nature and where the society is dependent on the environment. Therefore I wanted to go to an African country and to the west coast of the African continent. There are not too many countries on the west coast where the population speaks English, and because I wanted to do a field study managing without an interpreter, Gambia was the natural choice. I also wanted to go to a country that is relatively calm, so that I could easily manage to get around. I chose the village Bwiam because it is the first big village away from the city-area that locals call Kombo. Bwiam is far out on the countryside and it takes two to three hours of travelling with local transport to reach the Kombo-area from Bwiam. On one side of Bwiam the main country road passes and the other side of the village is connected to the river. Bwiam is quite representative for a big village in the countryside. Bwiam was a good choice, because I wanted to study a quite close society, in terms of close to the environment, but also in terms of close to each other within the community.

Just as women and men are very separated in Bwiam and sometimes live different lives side by side, the same relation exists between the city-area and the countryside. The cultural practices are very different in the town compared to the village in terms of how people live and what they are able to do. In the city you do not find the same strong dependency on the community and on the land as on the countryside. So, because I wanted to study the correlation of women, land and social structure, the village Bwiam became the choice for this study.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://hdrstats.undp.org/images/explanations/GMB.pdf>, Human Development Report, Gambia, 2011, taken the 8 Januari 2013

## 2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

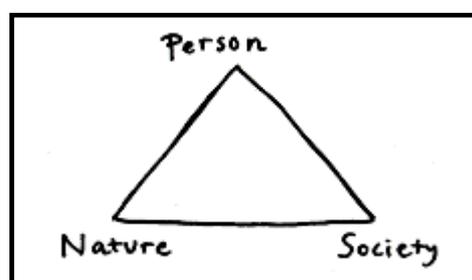
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I have followed two divorced women but I have also been in the village among many other women. I talked to many women and men about their life in the village. From the conversations and from my observations I have started to understand the social structures in the village. In this essay I examine how the environment and social structures within the village Bwiam affect women in their daily life. To be able to do this I have chosen to use the ‘human ecological triangle’ as the analytical framework for this essay. In the study I have used the ‘human ecological triangle’ as an overall theoretical platform.

### 2.1 The human ecological triangle

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The human ecological triangle is a model that describes relationships and visualizes the framework of the human ecological theory (Steiner 1993:56, Hornborg 2001:192). In Human Ecology this triangle is used for the understanding of humans and her interaction with the environment. There are different variables in different corners, in one corner there is *nature* (or *environment* or *ecology*), in one corner is *society* (or *production*) and in the last corner is the *person* (Hornborg 2001:192, Steiner 1993:56). The corners in the triangle are a way to help us to see the connections within society. The variables can be replaced and if they are changed for instance with environmental problems, market economy and individualism, then the triangle can help to identify the structures and relationships that connect these factors. The triangle shows the correlation between these three corners and they are all dependent on each other (Hornborg 2001:193).



In the case of my study I have used the triangle’s different corners to study *women* (*person*), *social structures* (*society*) and *farming* (*nature*). The human ecological triangle is to be looked upon as a whole and it is a way to show a three-way dependency in a wider overall relation (Hornborg 2001:194). It has been a help in my method when collecting the material to have this thought of connection between woman, society and environment, because the women I have been following have had a very close relationship to the other two corners of the triangle. “...human agents engage in social interactions and practices and by so doing reproduce (or transform) the social structures which govern these interactions and practices in a constraining but also enabling way” (Steiner 1993:57). Social structures and interactions are the foundation of this study, and even if my study is a very narrow description of these two women in this small village Bwiam, the triangle is a universal narrative and help in the understanding of the social structures in society, in farming and within the households of similar systems all over the world.

For me, in this study, the ecological triangle is more of a symbolic method to help to explain and concretize the women’s life in the village Bwiam. I do not believe that the correlation to the environment can just be seen through a triangle. It is a flow and a dependency within all that connects, more of a circle, which connects and reconnects again. But, I have chosen to use this triangle because it in a simple and a more concrete way shows the correlation that this essay is built upon.

### 3. METHOD

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The fieldwork took place between the 28 of November 2011 and the 25 of January 2012. During this time we, my son and I, spent more than a month in the village Bwiam. The fieldwork in the village is divided into two periods. First I was in the village for two weeks and then we were away in the more westernised part of Gambia and Senegal to be back in the village for another three-week period. In the village we stayed in a guesthouse except for the last week when we stayed in one of my informant's compound with her and her family. In Gambia I did not have a supervisor, which meant that I did not have any guidance in field.

During the first days of our stay in the village we walked around and chatted with people we met, we often sat by the well. There are always people out and about, doing chores and sitting talking to each other. My son started playing with the children in the village at once, all the young children knows at least some English and I could communicate with them. In Bwiam there have been different NGOs and different missionaries, so the people are used to "toubabs", as we "white man" are called. Many women have a sponsor for their children in school and the women's garden is sponsored by an English NGO. The women are used to foreigners coming to the village and are very friendly and give a friendly reception. Many of the women and men under forty can speak English, and some of them very well. I came in contact with my informants while socializing in the village, mostly in the women's group course. They were two of the few single parent mothers that I found. The reason I choose the two women for this study was because they agreed on having me following them day out and day in, but also because they where very fluent in English.

I have also been interviewing and following a third woman, but the material that I collected from the third woman I have chosen not to use. There were difficulties with the communication and I do not think that she fully understood my questions and sometimes wanted to answer to satisfy me as a researcher (Parfitt 2005:85, Valentine 2005:125). Therefore the study is based on two women.

I have focused the fieldwork on collecting material from the woman's life, the social structure she is living in and the land that she is dependent on. To be able to collect this information I have used different techniques; interviews, observations and participant observation methods.

To get an understanding of my informant and her life the material mainly came from the interviews. I have done different forms of interviewing; I have done interviews with 30 questions and a recorder, and I have asked questions in daily conversation, it is difficult to say if the second form was strictly an interview (Cook 2005:181). I have done three long interviews, lasting about three hours each, with three divorced women. The 30 interview questions are made from what I saw on the field (appendix 1). The questions are open because I wanted to have a conversation where my informants explained their history with their own words (Cloke 2009: 127, 137, Häger 2009:182-185). For the interviews I used a tape recorder and I took notes at the same time. I was very careful transcribing the interview the same evening, which was good because my Dictaphone got stolen (Valentine 2005:123, 126, Cook 2005:181, Ryd 2010:250, 259). The three long interviews were made in the informants' home. One informant was very busy so I had to interview her while she was working with household chores (Scheyvens et al. 2009:169, Valentine: 118). The

other informant took time off from all duties, she sat down and talked for an afternoon and this was also the most rewarding interview (Ryd 2010: 239-240).

To get an understanding of the social structures within the village and the environment that the women's daily living is dependent upon, I have collected material from observations and participation. I followed my informants all day wherever they went; to the market, to the field or doing the chores in the compound, sometimes participating in their works and doings and at other times observing. When I participated it could be in form of making fish pies to sell at the market, watering the garden, learning how to cut rice and helping out in the rice field. Most of what I have found I collected from the interaction of staying with my informants all day. I have also tried to study the relation between the women and her environment. The main reason for this was to get an understanding of household consumption in relation to local supply, but also to see how much of the food that is produced locally. My idea was to map the market and compare this to a form with questions of grocery shopping, that I handed out to ten women. I have mapped the market to see what you can buy in the village and where it comes from (appendix 2). But the forms of grocery shopping I handed out I have not been able to use, because the information was not trustworthy.

My intention when I left Sweden was to use participatory approaches and make the informants map their days themselves, for instance structure a timeline of their days (Kesby et al. 2005:147-149, Brockington and Sullivan 2009: 60-64). This felt as lacking of respect once I was in the village, because my informants were good at speaking English and had gone to school for several years. Another reason for dropping this idea was that I had been thinking a lot about 'for who am I writing this essay and who's voice is it representing?' This essay is written from my perspective. I am following families, and it is not the women themselves that have been participating or are involved in the conclusions of this writing. In this study I have managed to gather the information without help from gatekeepers or interpreter (Valentine: 116-117, Ryen 2004: 83, Chambers 2006:101, Brockington and Sullivan 2009: 61).

I have also done interviews with organisations in Gambia. After my two weeks at field I interviewed GAMCOTRAP and Action Aid. The interview with GAMCOTRAP was very important for me, to compare my observation to a larger perspective. Much of what I saw can very strongly connect with what GAMCOTRAP has described as problems for women in Gambia in general. The other organisation I talked to was Action Aid who agreed with the information that I got from GAMCOTRAP. Both of these organisations see the same kind of challenges behind women's situations in Gambia.

One limitation in my fieldwork was practical matters, it was difficult for my son and me to get food. In Bwiam there are no restaurants or shops and we were completely dependent on people in the village giving us food. Much of my time went to organize how to get food from day to day. This was quite stressful but I think also useful, because this is what the days are like for many of the women in the village. In the guesthouse where we stayed there were no cooking facilities and most of the time no electricity, which made it difficult to use my computer. There was also an ethical aspect to the question of food (Valentine: 114, 125). I decided that my son and I should eat what the locals gave us. So, for instance I could not buy a cup of coffee that cost 8 dalasi when my informants did not have money to buy a cup of sugar for the children's porridge that cost 10 dalasi.

### 3.1 Limitations

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For this study I chose to stay in a specific place in the village Bwiam I have not been in the whole village, I was mostly in one part of the village with different families. I made a choice to stay with the informants for many weeks following them all day instead of visiting many compounds. If I had stayed for a longer period, I would have been able to follow more women. The study is deeper because of this but in another way it is more difficult to generalize and to draw conclusions (Ryen 2004:78).

I have not looked at family structures in general, instead I have focused solely on women's life. Men do also face difficulties and there are social norms that a man has to relate to, for instance a man can be forced into marrying his dead brother's widow (Gayer & Nije 1998: 21). The situation of men, the whole society or social relationships as a whole is not what I have focused on. I have decided to focus on women in her relation to the social structure and the land she is dependent on. This essay is about women and women's rights in society.

To understand this essay and the field material there is also one very important thing to mention, and that is the aspect of timing. We were in Gambia in a "good season", when food and fruit are rather cheap because it is harvest time for rice and different vegetables. The women do not have too much to worry about and they do not have huge money problems. I might have seen a different village and the women might have been giving me other replies if I had been there in the rainy season, also called the "hungry season" (Kea 2010:112).

### 3.2 My role as a researcher

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What do I as a researcher get and what do I give? Can I give anything back to my informants? I see, with development-glasses on me, that structures within the village have a long way to go to be developed. In west we have a vision of helping countries like Gambia to develop, but what I found was that I could give them nothing. They did not look upon me as if I was 'someone', they saw me as a person lacking a lot of skills. I was not a 'good woman' because I did not know anything of use; I did not know how to make fire and I could not support myself. They saw me as a woman that no one would want to marry.

As a European I feel that I do not fully understand the systems that the rural Gambian societies are based upon. Many times I get a feeling that I do not get the 'whole picture'. There are so many practices that are based upon traditions that are difficult to understand or structure, so being an outsider I cannot fully understand the context and history. Sometimes I feel I, like a lot of other western writers, are trying to categorise practices that are very difficult to categorise because they have always just been (Valentine 2005: 114, 125).

I have been living very closely to these women that I have used for this study. I have been explaining what I have been doing. When I started writing I felt it was difficult to draw a line of what I can write in this study and what is personal. They have been very open and they have been giving me a lot of their life, so for me it has been difficult to make distinctions. These women gave me their time and their life and I have learned so much from them. And I feel I had nothing to give them in return (Cloke et al. 2009: 165).

#### 4. FARMING

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In Gambia and in the village Bwiam, most of the people are dependent on the land for their daily survival. Seventy percent of the people in Gambia make their living out of farming (Toulmin and Guèye 2005:23, White et. al 1981:825, Chant 2007:129). Most of the farming in Gambia is still very primitive, using traditional methods, with daily manual labour. This chapter will look at farming, the history of farming in Gambia, female farming in Gambia and women's access to land.

Robert Mc C Netting define smallholders as follows; "The primary distinction between a commercial farming enterprise, even when it is family operated, and a smallholding, is that smallholders consume at least part of what they produce. An important part of what they eat comes from their own fields, orchards, and barnyards" (Mc C Netting 1993:83). Smallholders, or family farms, can vary in terms of size, income, and assets, and how the farm is integrated to the market (Toulmin and Guèye 2005:23, McC Netting 1989:231). Most of the farming in Gambia is done on plots measuring 0,5 to 2,0 hectares and yield is sold on local or domestic markets (Linares 2009:21074). These farmers produce most of their own livelihood, largely with labour from their own household (McC Netting 1989:221). Gracia Clarke means that "in household production, the goal for mutual survival, rather than individual profit, dominates resource allocation" (1989:92).

The social structures determine what crops women grow and what crops men grow in a ritualized and complex system (Stone et al. 1995:167, Guyer 1981:99). "The familiar example of male ploughing and driving draft animals while females transplant, weed, garden, and tend domestic livestock is widely represented cross-culturally" (McC Netting 1993:69). There are also many different cultural practices, for example there is a difference in social and cultural patterns between shifting and plough cultivation. When it changes from shifting to plough cultivation the men's work on the field increases and the women's work decreases (Boserup 1970: 21-22, White et al. 1981:825-6). Men can afford using new methods and techniques when producing cash crops, while women do not have this option and use traditional methods farming food for the family (Boserup 1970: 41-44, White et al. 1981:825-826, Stone et al. 1995: 168, Guyer 1988:249). Women cultivate crops that have a lower market value than men do (Stone et al. 1995:180).

##### 4.1 History of Farming in Gambia

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During the slave trade approximately five to six thousand slaves yearly were shipped from Gambia. The slave trade took skilled craftsmen and farmers away from the local agriculture (Faal 1997: 67-68). In Gambia throughout history the women have worked the rice fields and they have also controlled the rice that they have produced (Carney & Watts 1991:652, 654, McC Netting 1974:29). Men worked with the corn and women worked with the rice (Carney & Watts 1991: 655). In 1770 rice was an important export for the region and the French were buying large amounts of rice, but the rice export decreased when the production and export of groundnut increased (Carney & Watts 1991: 655). Gambia was self-sufficient during the nineteenth century, and rice was the main food crop and their main cash crop was groundnut. Gambia also produced rubber under the colonial period but the rubber industry declined, partly because they fell trees without replacing them (Faal 1997:77).

The influence of the British and the increase of groundnut as a cash crop led to a more gendered division of labour (Carney 1993: 332, Larsson 2001:346). As a

consequence of the colonization, women lost their right to own and inherit land, and also their political power. Before the colonization family members worked the fields together and women had an important role in trade (McGee Crotty 2009:343). Communities that farmed groundnuts relied on other communities' food production. Because of the groundnut production and that the women were unable to supply the whole society with rice the country began importing rice (Carney & Watts 1991: 657-658). In 1850 the situation in Gambia had changed from exporting rice to being dependent on importing rice (Carney & Watts 1991: 656, Oludele 1994:40). Gambian economy is still highly dependent on the export of groundnuts (Carney & Watts 1991:654).

In 1942 the colonial officials wanted to increase the rice production in the region. In one project they took male rice cultivators from Sierra Leone to educate men in the Gambia. The idea was to change its status from being a woman's burden to be a crop that was grown by the family. But the project failed mainly because the men saw rice production as woman's work (Carney & Watts 1991:660-661).

How the exploitation of land was structured in colonial times has shaped the agricultural development in Gambia (Crook 2001:35-36). Women's status was higher in pre-colonial times when they had land rights, animals and the produce of their own labour (Gordon 2001: 273). The colonial rule made opportunities for men but not for women and women did not have influence in the village affairs because they lacked representation in any political organization. Wage work and different forms of business were exclusively for men (Larsson 2001:346). When in colonial times, the best land was given to the men for farming cash crops, women's land rights were undermined (Gordon 2001: 277). Men gradually increased their control over cash flows and individual family heads were able to increase their own wealth (Larsson 2001:346).

#### 4.2 Female Farming in the Gambia

Gambia is an agrarian society and around seventy-five per cent of the women work with farming (Touray 1998:191, Gordon 2001:281). The agriculture in Gambia is based on small independent units that farm traditionally where the yields are low. Women are important in the food production, because they provide most of the cereals and are sole producers of rice and vegetables (Oludele 1994: 40-42). According to Vandana Shiva this form of traditional farming is often seen as unproductive and therefore traditional female farming is often invisible (1998: 63-64). Women do not grow cash crops as groundnuts by themselves, even though they help their husbands in the cash crop production (Linares 1985:88).

Women work long hours at the fields in Gambia (Stone et al. 1995:167, McC Netting 1974:29). June and July are the busiest months for the women at the rice fields, when they plough, sow and weed. This will leave little energy left to do other chores (Barrett & Brown 1994: 210). Weeding is hard work for the women and it is particularly hard during the rainy season. The rainy season is called "the hungry season" because the reserves have been used and it is not yet time to harvest. During the rainy season many women suffer from malnutrition (Kea 2010: 112).

Olga Linares means that the women's vegetable gardens are a sustainable form of production. She means that the gardens "are not only commercially viable but also ecologically sound. By improving soil conditions, preventing erosion and combating

pests, the gardens contribute to enriching the man-made environment” (2009:21078). Before 1970 women’s work was only for household demands, in the rainy period they farmed rice and in dry periods they attended their gardens. Today women have become more integrated in the domestic market and they sell vegetables from their gardens (Linares 2009:21074-6, Schroeder 2000: 275, Buckingham- Hatfield: 109).

Women’s vegetable gardens depend largely on the support from NGO’s. NGO’s will help with matters like the digging of a well or a reservoir where women can fill their watering cans, or the building of a fence around the garden to protect it from animals (Linares 2009: 21074-6, Schroeder 2000: 279, Kea 2010: 170). The underlying reasons for the NGO’s to help women as a group is to give them an opportunity to generate an income and better nutrition to the whole family (Schroeder 2000: 279). Often the women will sell what they produce at the village market and in some cases they will sell to a reseller (Kea 2010: 110, Buckingham- Hatfield 2000: 109). Men do not help their women in the gardens nor do they benefit from the outcome when the vegetables are sold (Linares 2009:21076).

Twenty years ago many Gambian children did not go to school, but today almost all children attend school (Kea 2010: 178, Guyer 1981:114). The result of a higher attendance of both girls and boys in school has led to that the younger girls are not interested in farming and this can lead to what Robert Mc C Netting describes as “deskilling’ and rapid decline in agricultural information” (Mc C. Netting 1993:63, Kea 2010: 182). Younger women will say that they do not want to farm or that they are “too good” for farming (Kea 2010: 183).

#### 4.3 Women’s access to land

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“The Gambia being an agrarian economy, arable land is the most valued form of property, because of its economic as well as its symbolic importance” (Touray 1998:192). Isatou Touray means that owning land is a security and a guarantee of wealth and traditionally it gives political power and social status (Touray 1998:192).

Land rights in Gambia are sometimes based on how much power individuals or groups have, and what authority they can claim (Kea 2010: 134). The distribution of land between women and men is very unequal and ownership affects relationships between them (Guyer 1981:114, 125). In Gambia the system of ownership is different and it does not hold the same meaning as in western countries, ownership of land only comes into question when land becomes scarce and valuable. This may result in women’s loss of farmland. When land becomes scarce privately owned land becomes more common (Boserup 1970: 45-46, Oludele 1994:43)

There are different systems of land holding and ownership in Gambia, for instance the Kabilo landholding system, communal landholding and privately owned land. There is sometimes confusion over whether the land is owned communally or whether it is private due to that there are no absolute principles surrounding landholding (Touray 1998:189). One common family landholding system is called Kabilo, where land is owned by the family-unit, and people have right to use the land and what they produce is theirs to keep (Touray 1998: 189, Carney 1993: 330). Land that is set aside for general benefits, such as prayer grounds, schools, traditional meeting spots, seed stores and hospitals are communally owned. This land is under the control of elders, traditional rulers or local political leaders (Touray 1998:189). If a man clears virgin

land he can own the land individually. He becomes the owner and after he dies the land passes on to his family (Touray 1998:190). Land will remain in the compound that clears it for generations. (Kea 2010: 140).

There is a difference between using land and owning land (Touray 1998: 193). Women make use of the right to farm the land and as Ester Boserup describes it "...the women own only the crops, while the men own the land" (Boserup 1970: 45). Female farmers in Gambia do not seem to own land but they have the right to use land, a wife farms on her husband's land and a sister might farm on her brother's land (Touray 1998: 193, Linares 2009:21076).

The land laws of Gambia are a mixture of statutory law, common law and local customs influenced by Shari'a. In the city areas, in Kombo, it is mainly the English kind of tenure rights that are in use. On the countryside and in other areas customary right dominate (Touray1998: 188). Tradition and customary practice tend to dominate land ownership.

The land laws of Gambia are not pro men, but when it comes to practice the men are in control (Touray 1998:194, Guyer 1981:107). According to the Koran widows are supposed to inherit a quarter of her husbands estate if they do not have any children and a eighth if they have children, and a male child should inherit twice of what a daughter inherits (Kea 2010: 139). Under the customary practice the rural women in Gambia have no right to inherit and therefore they do not own land (Gaye and Njie 1998:13). Due to customary practice women also loose access to their former husband's land in case of a divorce (Koopman 1998:135, Touray 1998:196, Kea 2010: 139). Also the children of unmarried women or widows may loose their rights to inherit since the mother has lost the right to the land (Guyer 1981:110, Koopman 1998:135). There is an exception to women's ownership and that is when women inherit usage land for cultivation of rice from their mothers (Kea 2010: 141).

## 5. SOCIAL STRUCTURES

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This chapter is about social structures in Gambia. At the countryside, in a village like Bwiam, people are dependent upon each other. It will give an overall explanation of different relationships in society, with chapters about social structure within farming and household and family structures.

Susan Buckingham-Hatfield means that gender is a social construction defining male and female roles in the society (2000:4). Some societies allow more interaction between men and women while other societies are organized in a way where women and men are very segregated in what they do, and both social structures share the idea that their way is the natural way or the only way of organizing roles and relationships (Kabeer 1999:5). Within the Gambian family it is the man that makes the decisions. There are also conflicts and family members will bargain for power, as Rolf Larsson describes "... household members' ability to negotiate decisions or control resources in their own favor depends on their bargaining positions" (Larsson 2001: 348). Women's position in society is connected to their power to bargain, and therefore their social and economical position will increase when they get access to more land (Larsson 2001:349). Bargaining within the household is not the same as the bargaining between unrelated individuals, because within the household there is always a threat of social sanctions if one does not co-operate (Kabeer 2001:109).

Anthony Giddens means that in a society people possess mutual knowledge in order to make sense of what they do in their daily life (Giddens 1992:363). Radcliffe-Brown describes that in most of the traditional societies the social relations of individuals are based on kinship and each person behaves according to his role within these relationships (1952: 18). He writes that "... persons in their interactions with each other is controlled by norms, rules or patterns. So that in any relationship within a social structure a person knows that he is expected to behave according to these norms and justified in expecting that other persons should do the same". (Radcliffe-Brown 1952:10).

The Gambian society is traditionally organized in the Kabilo system. The Kabilo system has almost always a male in charge and it is composed of family members from the extended family or nearby households. In the Kabilo system they counsel and decide on issues concerning the family. The wife's role in the Kabilo system is to be a mother and care for the household. A family can consist of relatives, in-laws or people living in the same household (Gaye and Njie 1998:2, Touray 1998: 189). In Gambia it is very important to belong to an ethnic group and it comes with privileges and rights as well as rules and obligations (Carrol and Ofori-Atta 1998:266).

### 5.1 Social structures within farming

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Social structure is also how land, the labour on land and the income from the land are controlled. This involves a complicated mixture of rights, duties, sanctions and bargaining (Guyer 1981:101). Robert Mc C Netting means that in traditional farming societies the relationships within the society depend on the agricultural production and if the production changes the kinship relation will change (1974:32). There can also be differences in the division of labour for different tribes within Gambia, for example in the Jola tribe women work at the rice field and men work with the production of groundnut while in the Serer tribe men work with production of millet

and groundnuts are grown on individual fields by both men and women (Guyer 1981:115).

Within a society there are allocations of different tasks and there are also regulations in tasks allocations in a production. To clear new land is performed by men and also the fencing, ploughing, and the construction and maintenance of irrigation channels (Stone et al. 1995: 168, McC Netting 1974:29). If a woman does a certain task within a society, then she will probably also be doing a set of other tasks in connection to the first task. If a woman does soil preparation, she will probably be doing planting and crop tending and harvesting (White et al. 1981:825).

Men's farming is normally connected to trade, as farm employees or daily wage labour and they often combine farming with other kind of work. Most often the work opportunity in rural Gambia is based on the groundnut production and therefore the groundnut production have changed women's role in society (Carney & Watts 1991: 656, Kea 2010: 102, 103). In the rural areas it is mainly agricultural production that gives the women an opportunity to make an income. And this income depends on the market conditions and women's right to resources (Guyer 1981:113). Because women produce food not only for their household, but also to make an income, their production is important for both the rural and urban food supplies (Koopman 1998: 132). "... the informal sector offers a way of making a living from day to day, especially important for women with no access to man's income" (Guyer 1981:113).

For farming households in Gambia everything depends on daily chores and seasonal efforts that are learned over generations. Children's knowledge of farming is directly linked to the land that feeds them, for instance they learn what trees are good for firewood, which grasses are the best for the animals and how to get clear water. The farmers have an understanding of their own environment and this ecological knowledge is shared and passed on through observation and imitation (Mc. C Netting 1993:62-63,70). "In the rural household long-terms experience with the farm's specific mix of soils, terrain, climate, tools, crops, and livestock, plus passing on this knowledge to other family members, emphasizes the tie between the household's productive and reproductive roles" (McC Netting 1993:62). They farm crops that have a long history of cultivation and that are embedded in tradition and ritual, and it is often old cultural meanings that determine the production and sale of a specific crop by one sex, or by a particular group (McC Netting 1993:62-63, 70, Linares 1985:83, 92).

## 5.2 Household and family structures

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In Gambian society the family is an extended family (Dolphyne 1991: 3). Gambia has a patriarchal family system where the woman is under the rule of the man and sons are more valued than daughters (Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003:26, Buckingham-Hatfield 2000: 64, Gaye and Njie 1998:12-13). Traditional societies can be matriarchal, where the children belong to the woman's family or patriarchal, where the children belong to the father's (Dolphyne 1991: 8). A woman is more vulnerable in a patriarchal society because she and her children belong to the husband's family and it is difficult for her to divorce. Compared to a matriarchal society where the woman still has protection from her native family after marriage (Dolphyne 1991:9, Sen 1998:143). Woman's unequal position in society is rooted in the family (Kabeer 1999:16). The woman is expected to give birth and her position will change when she becomes a mother. It is particularly important to have a boy and the woman herself

does not decide how many children she will have (Chant 2007: 149-150). Boys and girls are already at birth treated differently, boys will be fed better, given better medical treatment and educated better (Kabeer 1999:16).

Husbands and wives have separate budgets and different responsibilities, usually men house the family and women feed it (Koopman 1998:135, Carney 1993:334). Food prices affect people's lives significantly and sometimes there are not much left over after buying a bag of rice (Chant 2007: 166). In Gambia men are by tradition the families' breadwinners. A husband can keep part of his wage for personal use, he can spend his income on other women or other things for himself like bikes, watches and radios (Chant 1998:157, Gordon 2001: 281, Kabeer 1999:17). Richard Wilks writes "... inequality between the sexes may be manifested when women are expected to donate their earnings to the household pool, while men get to keep their earnings and spend them at their own discretion" (1989:34). It can be very stressful for women when they get fishmoney from their husbands and it is a different amount every week for housekeeping (Chant 1998: 157). It is hard to find wage work in Gambia and if the husband fails to support the family, the wives will take the husband's responsibility and supply the household with food (Kabeer 2001: 118, Boserup 1970: 31, Chant 2007: 166).

Each Gambian compound has a cooking pot. A cooking pot usually consists of a man that is in charge, his wives and children. The females are responsible for buying, preparing and cooking food in the cooking pot. Women within the same cooking unit take turns to cook and in between they will have free days (Kea 2010: 100-101). The wives are supposed to do all the chores, both within and outside the household, they harvest and pound the grain, they collect fuel and water, they clean, they cook and they wash (Kabeer 2001: 106, 123, Dolphin 1991: 5, Buckingham- Hatfield 2000: 75, Gordon 2001:281). Women and girls tend to work more hours than men and boys, often they work a double day, as they take care of the household and work on the field (Buckingham- Hatfield 2000: 69, 71, Guyer 1981:114). The man will not devote any time to childcare even if he is unemployed or work at home (Kabeer 2001: 106)

Households where the women are the sole breadwinners seem to contribute all wages to the family's welfare (Chant 1998: 157, Chant 2007: 112, Kabeer 2001:104). Even if the woman in a female-headed household get less income she can still feel better off because she manages her own income (Chant 2004:22, Daly & Farley 2004: 238). Sylvia Chant means that "Women may well be poorer in income terms on their own than wives or partners in male-headed households, for example, but can feel better off and, importantly, less vulnerable, on account of having more autonomy, more control, and/or greater security" (2007:44). Children in a single parent household participate actively in the tasks of the household and girls are less discriminated in female-headed families, they are given equal opportunities to those of boys (Chant 1998:158). The mother's relatives play a larger part and will help out in a female-headed household (Chant 1998:160, Chant 2007:38). Female heads often do not have contact with their former husbands and his relatives, in respect of their own family or others in the community (Chant 2007:102, Chant 2004:20).

## 6. WOMEN and MARRIAGE

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Marriage and family laws are central to women's life in Gambia, what women are entitled to do and the laws that surrounds her. Because marriage is central in life of the people in the village Bwiam, this is an important chapter for understanding the women. This chapter is about marriage, polygamy and the laws of marriage and divorce in Gambia.

All young women have to be married in Gambia (Gaye & Njie 1998:2, Chant 2007:149, Dolphyne 1991: 2, Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003:25). It is a social expectation and to be married gives respect in the community (Dolphyne 1991: 16, Chant 2007:175). No matter how highly educated the woman is, she still has to get married, the same applies for the man and if he does not marry the community will dismiss him as irresponsible (Dolphyne 1991: 16). In a Muslim marriage girls can be married from the age of fifteen and men can be married from the age of eighteen (Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003:27). Young marriage is more common among some tribes and in the tribe Fula girls can be married already at the age of ten. More than fifty per cent of the women are married by the age of twenty but most men do not marry until their thirties (Chant 2007:149).

There are three different types of marriage in Gambia; customary marriage, Muslim marriage and Christian marriage. In customary marriage a man can have as many women as he can support. Muslim marriage permits no more than four wives and in a Christian marriage there is only one wife permitted (Dolphyne 1991:3). The majority of the population is Muslim, which explains the social morality and values system in common (Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003: 25). Traditional marriages are arranged to connect families more than individuals together, ethnicity is important and many tribes will marry within their group (Dolphyne 1991: 2, Shanklin 2001: 246, Kabeer 1999:16, Guyer 1981:117-8). Women keep their name in respect to their family when they marry (Gordon 2001:275).

When a man wants to marry a woman he will ask his family to ask her family. If the family does not approve, they will ask him to look for someone else. It is important for the women to choose a 'good husband' (Chant 2007:185, Dolphyne 1991:2). The emotions between husband and wife are supposed to grow after the wedding. The educated young today are still very concerned about making sure that the parents approve of the marriage (Dolphyne 1991:2, Shanklin 2001: 246). Many times parents give their daughters away to someone that they consider to be good without their daughters consent, even though Muslim marriage is not valid if the woman does not give her consent (Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003:26). The view on marriage has changed and it is no longer about gaining access to rice fields or skilled female farmers and a good marriage among educated today will free the woman from farm work (Kea 2010: 182).

"Bride wealth, typical in Africa, is a custom that requires a transfer of goods and services from the male's family to that of the bride or to the bride herself. Bride wealth is not to be equated with "selling" daughters. Rather, it indicates the high value attached to women in African society: families must be compensated for the loss of their daughters and the wealth she brings to her husband's family." (Gordon 2001:275).

Bride wealth, called Mahr, is common in Gambia (Touray et. al 2003:8). The size of the bride wealth depends on different factors; if it is a wealthy or influential family, but it also depends on the woman's qualities, if she is hardworking and if she has a higher education. The Mahr that the man gives to the woman in most cases goes to the woman's family (Dolphyne 1991:2, 7, Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003:28). Many women do not want to see an end to bride wealth because of the value connected to the tradition and they believe that without this transaction it would seem like the family saw her as a burden or of no value (Dolphyne 1991: 10). The bride wealth is refundable so if the woman ends the marriage she will have to return the Mahr. This can make it very difficult for the woman to divorce if she will not be able to pay back, therefore an old man can use this when he is taking a young wife he will pay a large sum to make sure she will not be able to divorce him (Boserup 1970: 35, Bowman & Kuenyehia 2003:28, Gayer & Njie 1998:16).

If the woman gets a child before marriage this is regarded as disgrace for her and her family and the family will try to get her married, many times the woman will end up in a polygamous marriage (Dolphyne 1991: 16). A woman can stay unmarried only if she stays with another male relative (Chant 2007: 176). "Lonely mothers may deliberately distance themselves from the kin as a means of deflecting the 'shame' or 'dishonour' attached to out-of-wedlock birth and/or marriage failure." (Chant 2007:102). However, a child that is born outside marriage is seen as legitimate and normally there are no problems for these children in society and they will be brought up in the extended family. The child can be seen as illegitimate if the father refuses to take responsibility over the pregnancy that brought the child to the world (Dolphyne 1991: 6).

### 6.1 Polygamy

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Polygamy is most common in the rural society in Gambia where it is an accepted cultural practice for a man to have many wives (Carney 1993:334, Archampong 2010: 326, Gordon 2001:275). According to the Koran a husband is allowed to have up to four wives as long as he treats them fairly and a husband has to be able to give all his wives equal food, shelter and clothing and this is independent on the wealth of the women (Jawad 1998: 44-45, Archampong 2010: 327, Gayer & Njie 1998:6). If a man wants to take a new wife he has to inform and compensate his existing wives and he is not allowed to marry without their consent. When a woman marries a man with many wives she can often become like a servant to the first wife, because the age-difference can often be fifteen years between them (Boserup 1970: 31,33).

Polygamous relationships were originally a way to secure the community in case of war, disease or high infant mortality (Archampong 2010: 330, 327, Jawad 1998: 44). It also resulted in that men increase their power through polygamy because they will demand more land to support the larger family (Boserup 1970: 25). Polygamous marriages are more common in the rural area and it seems as more educated women prefer monogamous marriages (Archampong 2010: 325).

Different ethnic groups have different ways of organizing their polygamous living. Some live together in one household headed by the man and others live in different compounds where the wives go to the husband's home to perform duties (Archampong 2010: 326). A third way of organizing the housing is where each wife has her own living quarters and the husband lives with each of his wives (Boserup 1970: 31). This is the system in Gambian polygamous households. In the compounds

the cooking units will have a rota system, giving women days off from cooking duties. Many women are pregnant at the same time as they do farm work and take care of the household, and therefore a day off cooking is very valuable for them.

## 6.2 Laws of marriage and divorce

There are different traditions that influence family laws in Gambia. First there is traditional or customary law from the native society. Then there is religious law, which in many countries have precedence over civil rights. Thirdly is the colonial inheritance and finally the present international and western influences (McGee Crotty 2009:342). With the colonial period westernized family laws were introduced. The implementation of these laws meant a total change of the traditional rights on marriage, rights of inheritance, bride wealth transfers and polygamous marriages (Guyer 1981:107). The existing laws should guarantee women's rights, but because the laws are mostly leftovers from colonial times, they are not respected or put into practice.

In family matters in Gambia religious and customary law have precedence over statutory laws. Governments may not want to discuss family matters in public, it is not considered to be politics and this government view will disadvantage women (McGee Crotty 2009:341-342). Gambia's Cadi court is based on Shari'a laws and rule in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance (Touray 1998:190).

In general there is a high frequency of divorce within the Muslim society in Gambia, and there are differences in the possibilities to divorce between the sexes, the man can divorce on his own will but the woman cannot. The man will say 'I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you' in the presence of two witnesses and he has fulfilled the separation (Gayer & Njie 1998:15). If the husband is not happy with their child's behaviour he can blame the wife and even divorce her if she is not able to change the child's behaviour (Chant 2007: 150). The woman has to leave the compound even when it is the husband that initiates the divorce (Chant 2007: 175). If a husband has divorced his wife he cannot remarry her until she has married someone else and her new husband has divorced her. After a divorce the woman has to wait three months until she can remarry (Gayer & Njie 1998:16).

The woman cannot divorce unless she has her husband's consent. The wife can ask her husband to divorce if he has failed his obligations of giving her shelter, food and clothes. In customary divorces the woman has to pay the bride wealth back even if the reason to the divorce is that the husband did not fulfill his obligations (Gayer & Njie 1998:16). The only way for a wife to leave her husband without his consent is to be physically abused and then prove this to a court (Kabeer 1999:30). "A few women have successfully sought divorce or challenged the legality of their divorces through Cadi courts" (Gayer & Njie 1998:16). It is uncommon that women divorce their husbands. When a wife leaves her husband she also leaves the husband's earnings and the compound. It is a big economic and social sacrifice (Chant 2007:113). The wife does not have property of her own and cannot expect protection from her native family (Boserup 1970: 35, Dolphin 1991:8). Therefore the woman will leave the husband when he divorces her, without claiming her rights or access to his land.

"In practice, many women have lost large sums of money invested in their husbands' properties upon divorce. This is because men take advantage of women's ignorance of the law and keep such properties. Even where women are aware of the existence of the laws they desist from court action with hope that the children of the marriage may inherit part

of the property. If there are no children they are often advised to 'leave it in the hands of God'" (Gaye & Njie 1998:20).

In divorces the women might have to leave the children to the father. When boys become seven years old the father has the right to take them (Gordon 2001:275, Gaye & Njie 1998:18). For female children they can stay with their mothers to the age of nine and then the fathers can reclaim them (Gaye & Njie 1998:19, Chant 2007: 152). Many times the new wife of divorced men do not take care of the children from the former wife, so the mother will try to keep her children for as long as she can (Gaye & Njie 1998:19). Many women do not ask for child maintenance because they want a 'quiet life'. Women's independence can therefore leave the women in poverty, which could force them to remarry (Chant 2007: 175, 113).

## 7. IN THE VILLAGE BWIAM

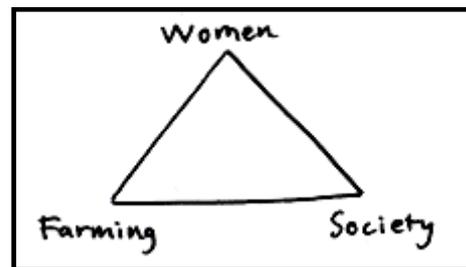
Bwiam lies in the Western Division in the Foni Kansala District and has a population of about 4 000 people. The village Bwiam is a small town or quite a big village, with Gambian standards. There are mainly two tribes in Bwiam; Jola and Mandinka. The village is a Jola-village, but people also speak and greet each other in Mandinka. The Jola is a tribe that continues to hold traditional African beliefs and practices and many Jolas are still animists. The Jola tribe has also been highly resistant to the influence of other ethnic groups (Faal 1997:11).

The village has a big governmental hospital, mostly run with help from foreign countries. There is a big marketplace near the main-road that is full of activity all morning. Bwiam has several mosques, of which two are large. There is a separate part of the village where there are Christian missions with two elementary schools and a big Christian High School. There are not really any other work opportunities apart from work based on agriculture or keeping a small shop. When there are constructions, as when the road was rebuilt, this gives work for the village. The government was building an electricity grid through the whole country, but I did not see anyone working with this construction at my visit. To have electricity on the countryside is a huge step for the country's development, even though the only ones who will have access to the electricity are those who can afford to pay for the usage.

At the time that I came to Gambia for the field work the president had just got re-elected and green flags were still hanging on the roadsides showing the support for the president. In the beginning of the year the main road that goes through the country had reached a bit further than to Bwiam, to the village were the president originally comes from. A new road is something that the president has promised for a decade, but just completed in the election-year.

### 7.1 The human ecological triangle adapted

I have used the human ecological triangle with the correlation between nature-society and person, see section 2.1, and I have developed a triangle that suits this study (Hornborg 2001:192-193). I have narrowed the general human ecological triangle and developed my own triangle, so it is more specific for what I have been doing and working with in the village Bwiam. In the triangle that I have developed for this study there are three different corners; *woman – farming – society*. *Person* I have changed into *woman*, because I have focused my study only on the women and not on all people in the society. In the corner *Society* I have chosen to focus on social structures for women in the society. *Nature* I have narrowed down to look upon the farming that these women do, which is a primitive form of agriculture. Therefore *woman- woman in society - woman's traditional farming* are the three corners and the foundation of this study.



## 7.2 Two life stories from female-headed households

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This chapter is about my two informants that I have been following and partly been living with. I have been with them day in and day out. The writing in this chapter is mainly based on the interviews, but it is also information I have been collecting through daily conversations. This represents the corner *women* in my own human ecological triangle. This is the two life stories from the informants that I have been following. The first story I have named; struggling businesswoman and breadwinner, and the second story is called; the mother of six children who managed to divorce.

### Struggling businesswoman and breadwinner

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My first informant is divorced and is living with her father's last wife, her stepmother. Her stepmother did not get any children so she was raised and brought up by her stepmother. She sees her stepmother as her mother. She has four children that are from the age of three to the age of eight years. She is also providing for a relative's son that is living with them, a boy that is around nine years. So all her children are quite young and cannot help her out too much in the household. Her youngest daughter is too small to go to nursery school, instead she is home with her grandmother all day. They live in a compound, quite far away from the centre of the village, with a big yard around the house. In their compound they have pets, a dog and a cat, which is very unusual.

She came in contact with her husband when she was visiting her relatives in Kombo. He started calling her and asking her to marry. At that time she was in love with another man, but he had moved to Europe to earn money and she could not wait for him. The man she married was older than her, around 45 years old, and already had a wife his own age. At the time she got married she was around 25 years old and somehow had to be "married off". The man belonged to the tribe Wolof and so did his first wife. Her mother did not like the man and did not really agree on the marriage, but she married him anyway because she felt expectations from the society that she had to marry.

She moved away from her mother's house to stay with her husband, his first wife and the mother of the husband. Her mother in law did not like her or her tribe, she told me "the big problem was his mother" and that she was not accepted by her mother-in-law was a huge problem for her in the marriage. There were also a lot of other complications. She came to be ruled by the first wife and the husband and they very much controlled what she did and where she was. Another problem was that it was not equal between the wives, as she says: "It was not equal between the first wife and I, she could get a soap and I did not get any". He was not fair in the distribution of fishmoney between the wives and when she tried to support her children by her own her husband interfered with her. She tried to sell charcoal, from firewood she collected in the bush. She made charcoal herself, but this her husband did not agree on letting her do, so she had to stop this business. Her husband divorced her when she was around six months pregnant with their fourth child.

When she talks about the future and when I ask her if she will remarry she says "I want to marry a good husband. That will take care of the whole family and the children". She is very concerned about her children, and because their father has neglected them, it is very important to marry a man that she knows will take the full responsibility over the children, this seems to be very hard to find.



The first picture shows her compound and in the second picture she is cooking lunch in the kitchen.

A day in their compound starts with her mother that goes up early in the morning, before the sun rises, to prepare the rice porridge over open fire. The porridge is made from rice, sugar and groundnut paste. They always eat porridge in the morning, except for in the ‘hungry season’ then she says that “I cannot afford sugar and I have to give the children food from the day before, or just rice”.

In the morning she works at the market. She has a shop in the market. This shop she has managed to get by saving money from selling food at the market. She was also lucky to get a loan from some European missionary friends. With this money she went to the city where she purchased pots, buckets, plastic baskets, different things for the head and hair, materials and threads that she sell in her shop. For two dalasi per customer she can also grind their groundnut in her shop and sometimes she also sells other things besides, like roasted groundnut, that her stepmother has prepared, or oranges. She takes a small commission on every item she sells. Even though she is good at counting and keeps track of everything she sells in different books, it seems as if the business is not really going so well. She is taking out too much money to buy food for her family, and does not have money enough to cover the rent for the store. There are also many women that are just passing by her shop on another business. She is taking care of a record of many women together that is collecting money, a contribution. The women are all giving a certain sum and the money will go to different women at different times, depending on their needs. Sometimes the collections can be quite big sums, and if you are part of the group you have to join your share of the money, even if you do not really have the amount.

When the market closes at around one o’clock she will be heading home and the walk takes about half an hour, in the hottest time of the day. At home she will be in a hurry to cook lunch for her children coming home from school. When all chores in the compound are finished as cooking, cleaning, washing and so on, she will be heading towards women’s group and the joint garden. Her compound is quite far from the village and every day she will have to walk more than twenty minutes to get to the garden. The women’s group is a gathering of the women in the area. They have a house and here they are learning different kinds of textile crafts, like tie and dye, weave or braiding bags. She really enjoys these meetings at the women’s group and they are important for her. After the gathering she will continue to the garden, where she will make beds or water her plants. During the time she is away at the village the children fetch water to the household in the well that is a small distance away from

the compound. Most of the day she is not at home and it is the stepmother that takes care of the children and her children have a very close relationship to the stepmother.

When her former husband divorced her, he left her pregnant with nothing but some furniture. He did not have any land, because he lived in the town area. She moved back home to the village and her stepmother that has quite a lot of land. Her father is dead since long ago and the stepmother got land that was the father's, but most of the stepmother's land is from the family village that she originally comes from, the next village, Dabong. This land the stepmother has inherited. The stepmother does not have any children and she will get all the land that was her father's if the stepmother passes away. The other land from the next village might go back to the stepmother's family since before marriage. Anyway, she is secured at her stepmother's place as long as the stepmother is alive, she can live there by herself without a husband and she has access to land to support her family.

Her stepmother is growing rice on three rice fields and it is very hard work for the stepmother to harvest these fields at her age. She does not help her stepmother to harvest because she says she cannot harvest, she does not know how too. It might have something to do with that she is the youngest sister of her family and did not have to help out in the field as a child, but it can also have to do with age and that she went to school to quite a high level. She does not want to go to the field to try and help out because she feels embarrassed over not having the skills in harvesting. The rice from her stepmother's three rice fields will last for three months for their family. When the rice is finished she will have to buy rice in the market. About her life today she is quite happy and says; "It is hard, but I don't think of men. I will manage, because business is my friend".

#### The mother of six children who managed to divorce

My other informant is divorced and lives with her children in her mother's home. Her mother died a few years ago, but they still talk about the compound and the land as belonging to their mother. The compound is quite big and there are different rooms in two buildings. It lies in the centre of the village, close to the well. The fields belonging to the compound are out in the bush. There are many families living in the compound; her two brothers with their families, her uncle with his family and her sister who also lives alone in one house because her husband is working in Kombo. Even if she lives with her brothers she say "my brother helps me sometimes, but I take care of my self". "All the decisions I will take myself", she says. Four of her six children are living with her. She had two children before she was married and her son before marriage has always been staying with her mother, when she lived. Her other child that she had before marriage is staying with the child's father's sister in the next village. Out of the four children she had with her former husband, the son is staying with the former husband and the three girls are staying with her. She sleeps with her three girls and the elder son has a room that he shares with his cousins. She supports all her children that are staying with her by herself. Her biggest son that goes to high school has a sponsor and she also gets help from an organisation with her younger children to pay the school fees.

How she divorced is a long story, but she managed to divorce through Cadi Court from her former husband. For a women to manage to divorce her husband through court by herself, it is very rare for a Gambian woman. It was quite a long process with three sessions at the court. She was able to get the divorce because her former

husband had abused her in public. She had to pay the bride gift back to be able to divorce, which in her case was a sum of 1 500 dalasi. This money she managed to collect from selling food at a Muslim celebration. In the court it was decided that their son would stay with the father and their three daughters would stay with the mother. The father is supposed to pay child support to her, but she has not got any support from the father. About being married again she says “If the heart is clean, and he is good, it is no problem even if he already has four wives since before”. And she wants to get remarried within a year from the divorce because “It’s not good to be by yourself if you die”.



The first picture shows the whole compound and the other picture shows her making pies for selling at the market

She wakes up early in the morning, normally after five, but before six o’clock. Her day starts with preparing dough, and sometimes also smoking fish, for making fish pie. Among the first things she will do in the morning is to pray and after seven she will wake her children up. For breakfast they will normally eat cold rice from the day before, even if she would have liked to give them porridge in the morning, she means she cannot afford to buy the sugar she would need for making porridge. She will start making the first fish pies as the children are preparing for school. Two of the girls go to nursery and one is in lower elementary school. She will continue making the pies until around half past nine. One woman that is going to the market will come by to pick up her fish pies and sell at the market, every day she will say that she is late.

It is very important that she does not send the fish pies too late, so that the pies are there in time. Often she goes to the market so she is there sometime around ten and eleven, but she does not sit there and sell the pies herself. She usually stays at the market for some hours, mostly going around chatting with different women and also the shopkeepers. Some weeks she also has the responsibility to collect money from all that are selling, she collects the market fee. She will stay until noon and after that she will walk home, it is quite hot in the daytime and it takes almost half an hour. When coming home she will cook and do other household work. Washing is something that takes half a day and if she washes she will not go to the market that day, instead she will be home washing. If she has time, if all chores she has to do are ready, then she will join the women’s group. When the sun is not too hot in the afternoon she will go to the joint garden or the rice field, depending on what season it is.

In the beginning of December she had already harvested her rice fields. As I came to follow the harvest it was on her friend’s fields. It took them, two women, four days of work in the afternoon to harvest one field. It was hard work to do. The friend had not

helped her on her land to harvest, but when she was finished she helped her friend. She did not get anything in return and she did this only out of friendship. I think they enjoyed working together, all the time chatting. In the rice field no one can hear and it is one of very few places where a woman will be alone. The women do not bring the children to the fields for work. The rice that she will get from her own fields will last approximately four to five months for her family.

In the compound all the women, her brothers' wives and sister, take turns cooking, but she does not. They cook two days each and the other days they are "free", this system is a common system in polygamous households. This eases the women's burden and they will have time for other chores. "It's very good with many wives, you only cook every fifth day if you are three wives", she told me. But she is not taking turns in cooking in her compound, the reason for this is because the other families eat more rice compared to her children and her, so she cannot afford to cook together with them.

She is living with her brother and uncle in her mother's compound, and her mother has passed away some years ago. She has three fields she is talking about as her fields. It took me very long time to understand that the actual owner of the compound and the fields is her brother that lives abroad. She does not see there is an actual owner of the land because she has the right to use the fields and people in the village will call the field hers or her dead mother's fields. Why it does not matter who the actual owner of the fields is, can be because in her family they will never sell any land "it is not good selling land" she told me many times. And they still talk about the compound and the many fields belonging to the compound as their mother's. The final decision if they would sell land belongs to her sister living in Kombo because she is the oldest sibling, even if the brother that is in Europe is the actual owner in the government's register. So, this makes it very complicated and it is as if the government's system is not hand in hand with practice in the village. In this family the actual owner is not the same person that would make decisions over the land and this person is not the same as the one farming the land. In this family the women are very strong and her mother was a woman that was highly respected when she lived. I do not know if this can represent families in general, but it seems that there are very complicated relationships between owning land and farming land. Normally I think it is the brothers that make the decisions over the land.

### 7.3 Following women's daily life; on the rice field, in the garden and the market

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Here will follow three sections from my observations, the rice field, the garden and the market. Much of the fieldwork is based on my observations of what the women do all day. I have been following them in their life, from early morning to late evening. The women's life during the time I was in Bwiam was day in and day out. In the morning they were going to the market and in the afternoon until evening they will do all the chores in the household as well as going to the rice field or to the garden. These three places, the rice field, the garden and the market are very central to the woman. The market is the meeting point and where she will buy all the food she does not supply herself, it is also here she will have a chance to make a living. The rice field and the garden are central for supporting her family. These three show how the woman's life is in connection with her environment. In all aspects of the woman's life

she is in a very deep relation with the environment. This represents the corner *farming* in my own human ecological triangle.

### Vital and the life cycle - the women's rice field

There is not really a shortage of land in Bwiam, as one male informant said "I will just clear land when I marry". There were also fields not being used and women borrowed other families' fields or plots for farming. Some rice fields were not used because of lack of time. The reason for a family to have more land than they could use was their view on land "you don't sell land, it is no good". So even if there was no shortage of land in the village, land was still very important and essential for their living and therefore something that they held on to. One woman also described to me "In Bwiam it is easy to grow rice because the compounds and the fields are close to the river. But in some parts of Gambia it is not plenty of water and there you cannot grow your own rice".

This rice that the women farm has a high value for them, it is a part of their tradition. This rice is seen as the good rice, and it is this rice they will use to eat at celebrations. The rice the women farm she will not sell, it is only for household consumption. The rice from the women's rice fields is not enough to supply the family for the whole year, but it is a good complement. Most of the women I have spoken to say the rice from their own fields will last between three to six month.

In June to August they will plant the rice and they will have an ongoing work with removing the weeds. In October to December the women will harvest the rice. This will take approximately one week of hard work in the afternoons. The rice fields are solely the women's work and as one women explained to me, "I take decision of how many rice fields I will manage".

In the beginning of this study and my stay in the village they were harvesting the rice on the fields and every afternoon the women went to the rice fields to harvest. I followed the women to the rice fields, I stood beside and watched and I also practiced and learned how to cut the rice myself. The women themselves think that the work on the rice fields is the hardest work. It is a heavy burden for the women. All the work on the fields they will do with their own hands and muscle power.

On the rice field the women are bending over the rice and cutting the straws by hand with a small knife (see picture one and two below). When they have cut the rice, they tie it in piles, put into rice-bags, and carry it on their heads back to the compound. At the compound they will dry the rice, for an afternoon the rice will be spread in the sun to dry (see picture 3 below). Before they are able to use the rice for cooking they have to hand-pound it (see picture 4 below). They pound the rice in a mortar so that the shell breaks, this the women can do herself or together with another woman. When they work in pairs, it creates a tremendous dynamism of rhythm. The women can pound the rice before they store it, but they can also store it without being pound, and they will have to pound it first when using it. To pound the rice is very heavy. As my informant described to me; her mother could harvest the rice field by herself but "she cannot pound the rice, it is to heavy, I will have to pound the rice the day before she will make the porridge"



The first two pictures show two women harvesting the rice fields, work performed by their own hands. The third picture shows how they can dry the rice, they have put the rice in front of the well. The last picture shows rice that has just being pounded, with a mortar beside.

I experienced two different ways of harvesting the rice fields. The most common way is when the woman harvest her fields alone or in company of a friend or relative. The other way is a gathering of women of the area, around twenty women come together to harvest one or two rice fields. The women will walk in line and harvest all together forward. Ax by ax. Step by step. To the end of the field they all sang songs together. The host supplies them with mintis (sort of candy), cold water and a nice meal. This collective system is a way of helping older women or those that are not capable of harvesting themselves. This was also a gathering that the women enjoyed and they sang special songs and talked. The women were cheerful and the work went quite fast, even if it might not have been as properly harvested as when a woman harvests the whole field by herself.

I did not see any children or young women on the fields to help or to work. There was only one young girl that took care of one newborn baby while the mother was working on the field. The women did not take their children to the rice fields and one older lady explained to me “it is too heavy”. I did not see any children working on the rice field and I also did not see them learning the practice of how to.

“It is like men owns the land, because the women can not sell land”, as a woman explained. The women do not call the land by any name in the village, and no women that I talked to could say who the actual owner of a piece of land was. They could say which women were working on what field and what compound it belonged to. The women talk about land as belonging to the person that has usage-access to farm, they do not talk of people owning land. They talk about land as the compound’s land, or

the oldest woman's living in a compound. Ownership does not seem to be important as long as there is still land available. In the village it was not up to the women to clear new land, it was the male that cleared new land if needed.

### Each day watering - the Garden

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Near the village there is a big joint garden. The garden lies by the road on the way to the river, a little bit outside the village. When the women were finished harvesting their rice fields, they would start to 'make gardens'. For some women it took a few weeks before they got started, but some started at once. Most of the women start making a garden in the middle or late January, and they continue to work in the garden until April or May.

The first step is to clear the land and hoe the soil. This the women will do with her hands and her own muscle. She will work the soil with a small hoe (see picture one below). After that she will put different seeds, depending on how to put and grow them. Then she will water plenty in the beginning and every day she will have to continue watering at least once a day. To get a good harvest, they will water twice a day, in the morning and in the evening (see picture three). She will also remove weeds continuously (see picture four). They do not use inputs as chemical fertilizer or pesticides in their farming, so the beds are ecologically sound.

At the time of my visit I did not manage to map all the vegetables they farm in the garden, because most of the women were just in the beginning of making the beds. At the time of my study some women were planting tomatoes, lettuces, garden eggs, green leaves, sorrel and peppers. To one of my informants the garden was very important and she was very organized, she used seeds that she had collected under the years and seeds that she had saved from the year before.



The first picture shows how they work the field with the hoe. The second picture shows what a bed looks like. In the third picture the woman waters the bed and in the fourth picture she removes weeds.

The women's community is funded by a British private organisation and has been there for over ten years. The organisation pays for a proper fence and they have dug three wells within the garden. At least once a year a man and a lady from The United Kingdom come to the village to see that everything is all right with the garden and to see if the women need anything more, like fixing the fence. The women care for the garden and organize it by themselves, without involvement from the organisation. The women share the beds among them and if they have one bed very close to a well, they might have to take the next one further away. Depending on how many beds that were taken, a woman could take as many as she could cultivate. All the beds in the garden were not taken at my visit. There was somewhere around fifteen women having beds in the garden. "What I will put in my bed at the garden, it is up to me to decide", a woman putting seeds in the ground described to me. The women cared for the garden themselves and I never saw a man in the garden. All the women I have spoken to also decide what to do with the outcome from the garden, even if most of them only grow for household consumption.

Children were sometimes sent to water the gardens but mostly it was the women themselves that went there working. Children helped out watering if they were in the garden playing, but it was not as if the women left the work for the children to care for themselves.

A huge problem for the women making a garden is the destruction of crops by cattle, because the animals walk freely in the village. Many of the women would like to have their own garden near their compound, not needing to walk to the garden every day. But, many of these female farmers cannot afford to pay for a fence and therefore do not have the possibility to have a garden near the home. Other problems the women can have around the gardens are lack of seeds, storage or water.

A bit further from the village, beyond the women's garden towards the river was another garden. In this garden there were only men working. It was a man who owned the land and had put up a fence around the garden and also dug a well. This garden was new and it was a group of young men working there and they did not get any salary, but instead they would get a share of what they produced. The owner of the land had organized and invested money into the garden. In the garden the vegetables grew very nicely, differently to the women's garden. The greenery was due to the men's access to pump water, inputs to their crops and that they rented different kind of machines. To work in the garden was the men's fulltime job, from morning until afternoon. To work in a garden was before seen as a chore that only women could perform and not a chore for men. It has dramatically changed in the last year. I spoke to both men and women about this and the explanation they gave was that "the president calls all people to work. He doesn't want people to sit at home, he wants them to go out on the field". This is connected to the rice prices on the world market and the president urges the country to go out on the field and farm rice (Jallow 2011:53)<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://allafrica.com/stories/201109290198.html>, taken the 26 November 2012.  
<http://observer.gm/afrika/gambia/article/governor-touray-hails-crr-for-establishing-communal-farms-for-president-jammeh>, from the news paper Daily Observer, taken the 26 November 2012.  
<http://allafrica.com/stories/201205311130.html>, taken the 26 November 2012.  
<http://dailynews.gm/afrika/gambia/article/jammeh-reiterates-back-to-the-land-as-wb-pumps-in-us24-million> taken the 26 November 2012

## Were everything is happening - at the market

The market is central for the women in the village. This is the women's meeting point and it is here they buy their food and have opportunity to make money for their living. Here is also where a lot of interaction takes place, where rumours will spread and where women somehow will show off. The vegetables position is central in the market. Here you can find all the different vegetables that the women need to make local food (see appendix 2). At the market there are also women sitting selling things that they have produced in their homes, it can be anything from homemade ice from syrup, to fish pies or roasted groundnuts.



Pictures from the vegetable market, a women selling fish and to the right a vegetable market stand.

The vegetables that the women sell at the market come from different places, but most of the vegetables are local. Most of the vegetables come from Bwiam and nearby villages. In January the 12<sup>th</sup> I mapped all the vegetables at the market, and in appendix 2 there is a description of all vegetables. This mapping is to see and understand how much of the food available to buy that is produced in the local area. This has been an important complement due to that I did not spend enough time to get the full picture of what was produced in the gardens during most of the year they buy all the vegetables from the market. A summary of the market reads as follows:

These vegetables come from Bwiam or neighbourhood villages: *lokos beans, small pepper, big pepper, pumpkin, groundnuts, bitter tomatoes, groundnut paste, garden eggs, lime, tomatoes, beans, sorrel, oranges, bananas, okra powder, dried sorrel, chives, sorrel flower, peanut flour, okra, grapefruit, local soap, green leaves, ice, groundnut, talo, lettuce leaves, fish pies, kassava, baobab flour, potatoes, 'medicine'*

This comes from other parts of Gambia or neighbouring countries: *pile of fish, smoked fish, dried catfish, ball of seeds, lettuce, 'snail', sweet potatoes*

This is imported: *black pepper, saffell, adja (broth), jumbo (broth), onion, tomato puree, takk (broth) garlic, motar, pasta, flour*

In the vegetable marketplace there were only females selling vegetables. To sell costs three dalasi per day and the money is collected daily. The market is open from morning until around one or two o'clock. When the market closes the women have to go home and take care of their families and duties in the household. The main participants at the market are females, so there would be no use having the market

open all day. The other part of the market is the small stores that are all around the vegetable marketplace. In these stores they will sell retail products like bags of rice or onions. There are also shops that will sell pants, buckets, shoes or dresses. There are two tailors, one butcher and a young man who has a breakfast cafe. Men run many of these shops, but there are also a few stores that are run by women. To have a shop costs 300 dalasi a month and the money is collected monthly. Some shopkeepers were late with payment and some were many months behind with their rent. The collection of rent goes to the Foni Kansala District.

When the women come home from the market they will start cooking. The women buy most of the ingredients for cooking at the market. In November and December it is harvest time for rice, so all the households were eating rice from their own rice fields. Dinner is rice with different sauces, with the vegetables found in the market (see appendix 2). The ingredients used for sauce are raw vegetables and the food is not refined. The protein ingredient is mostly dried, smoked or fresh fish. The fish is sold raw, dried or smoked with bones, head and everything. Lunch and dinner is the same and breakfast consists of rice porridge with grounded peanuts and sugar, or leftover rice from the night before. All the food is prepared from scratch and is cooked over fire on the ground, and it takes time to cook the food, approximately around one and a half to two hours for a meal. Many times the food is not ready until the children have come back from school. The children will help out with the cooking or other things that needs to be done, like fetching water.

#### 7.4 Women's place in the social structure of the society Bwiam

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In my interaction in the village among the women but also among many men I have seen and understood different structures in how the relation is between the men and women in the village. This material has been collected over time, in different conversations and in different situations and I have put my findings in relation to the interviews I have made with the organisations, especially GAMCOTRAP. This chapter represents the corner *women in society*, in my own human ecological triangle.

The women and men have very separate lives in Bwiam. The women are working and meeting in different places in the daytime and they are supporting each other, and the same goes for men. Men and women do not socialize in the village, but even if the woman lives a quite separate life from the husband, especially if he has many wives, he still makes a lot of decisions in her daily life.

A Gambian woman has to marry. This is central in the woman's life, especially in a village like Bwiam. In Bwiam a woman should be married by the age of twenty-five. The woman cannot stay by herself in the village due to cultural practice. If she is not married after graduating from school she will be staying at her mother's or a relative's house until she gets married. If a woman will go on to further studies in Kombo the parents will organize for her to stay with a relative. When she marries and moves out, she changes family and will now belong to the husband's family. To get married is very important in the village and it is not likely that the woman will find herself a husband, it is a man that will ask her to marry. One older lady said to me "It is more difficult for the women to get married. For a man it is easy to find a new wife, but for a woman it takes time". Therefore getting married is very stressful for the women.

This circumstance that women 'has to marry' is also a factor leading to agreeing on marrying into a polygamous marriage, even if she does not like polygamy. Of all women in the village that I have spoken to no one thought polygamy was good for women, even though many women were living in polygamous marriages. How many wives a man have does not have such a great impact on the decision on *who* to marry. All women in the village have consistently said that they want "a good husband". It is very important that the husband is "good". But what it is to be a "good husband", this seems to be very different depending on the woman.

In a polygamous marriage there are normally different status among the different wives, the first wife has the highest status, which can be seen as natural because of the age difference between the wives. When a man marries his first wife, she will be around his own age, and maybe first after ten years, he will take a new wife. The big decisions that the first wife makes can for instance be over the fish-money or holding the key to the pantry.

When a man in Bwiam asks for a woman's hand and marries her he will give a bride wealth to her, but this will go to the woman's native family. If a woman wants to divorce she has to repay this amount to the man. Some women prefer to still belong to their native family even when they are married. A woman could have her husband working in Kombo, he stays there with his other wife and will travel to meet her in the weekend. When the wife chooses to stay in the village, her husband provides her with a house and she will be given access to land, her husband's land or in some case the land of her native family. In these cases the women seem to be very satisfied with their situations, they did not want to move to the city and they felt secure because they had their family near and access to land.

"For a woman to get divorce, it does not happen here. God forbid it happened here!", a woman in Bwiam says when I ask her about women's possibilities to be able to divorce. The Gambian laws that are associated with tribal practice are based on Shari'a law (Touray et al. 2003:7). This is why a woman that wants to divorce, where the husband does not give his consent, has to go through Cadi Court. Laws that are associated with rights to inherit and ownership of land are also based on Shari'a. According to Shari'a law women do have certain rights but of what I have seen the women do not claim these rights.

In the village Bwiam it is as if the possibility for a woman to claim a divorce does not exist. The woman will first of all talk to the husband and if he has not fulfilled his obligations he should agree on a divorce. Second of all her native family has to agree on the divorce, which they many times do not do, as a woman said; "If the woman wants to leave her husband her parents will force her to stay in the marriage". From the discussions I came to understand, that it is not cultural practice for a woman to divorce her husband in Bwiam and it is also as if the whole society will not support her if she does it.

When the husband divorces, the woman will not claim her right because she does not want to be seen as a person that is 'making trouble', this could also be a problem for her when it is time to remarry. The woman's reputation is very strongly rooted and important for her. It is very important for a woman that she does not 'make a scene' as many women have described it. In a divorce it is the man that decides where the children will stay. What is most common is that the boys stay with the father and the girls will move with the mother. If the father does not want to take care of the boys, it

is looked upon by society as if the father has neglected his children and will not take any responsibility over them. When the husband divorces his wife she might have a problem to find somewhere to stay, since she cannot stay alone in the village. Normally she will move back to her native family's compound and stay under the supervision of her brothers,

The husband is the head of the family and he is supposed to be the breadwinner. As a young woman said to me "The father is the head of the family". Each compound has a cooking pot. A cooking pot usually consists of a man that is in charge, his wives, children and the man's relatives, for instance his mother. The females are responsible for buying, preparing and cooking food in the cooking pot. Women within the same cooking pot take turns to cook and in between they will have free days. The husband decides over the income and where it goes to and normally he will give the wives fishmoney, a certain sum that she can buy food for at the market. The amount the household gets is up to the husband to decide and what to buy, the woman will care for.

The money that the woman can earn herself, for instance by selling on the market, is hers to keep. Normally she will use this money for the children, for buying food, clothes and school uniforms, especially if she will not get enough support from her husband. The husband decides over his wife, and if she is selling homemade food products or vegetables at the market, he can say that he does not want her to do this. Normally the husband in Bwiam will let the woman do what she wants to do. He can also decide over what he wants her to do or sell, for example if he is investing in a business he can put her to work in it. As in the case of the third woman that I have been following, she is a shopkeeper, which her husband has decided. Her husband lives in town with his first wife and she lives in Bwiam and works in his shop.

The more wives a man has, the more difficult it will be for him to support the whole family. The principal at the primary school also confirms this picture that children that do not have enough money to pay for school fees often come from polygamous marriages. According to the Koran a man can take a new wife as long as he can support the wives and treat them equal, but in polygamous marriages in Bwiam it is mainly the woman that work hard to support her own children.

It seems to be very difficult to resist the cultural norms of how the women are supposed to live in Bwiam, what the society expects from her and how she should behave. The only way for women to be a part of the community is to accept the cultural norms and therefore it is difficult for them to break these norms. If a woman makes problems the society will reject her. It is also important to clarify that this society does not only consist of men; it is both men and women within the society that will reject the woman. To be safe in the community the women have to stay within the frames of what is expected of a woman. There are also a lot of cultural practises that will tie the woman to what she is supposed to do and what she cannot do.

The village's many chores are divided in what men do and what a woman can do, for instance women cannot grow commercial cash crops. In Bwiam a woman can grow crops in a garden for selling at the market but she is not allowed to grow cash crops, this is for the men to work with. As long as it is within the crops a woman may farm, what the woman will grow in the garden is up to her. When she has access to land, she can grow what she wants on the ground and what she will do with the harvest is up to her, if she gets profit it is hers to keep. However, there are exceptions

for instance if the women will plant a tree in the garden that she has usage-access to, then this tree is not hers to decide over because it belongs to the owner of the land.

## 8. DISCUSSION

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The women in the rural village Bwiam still have a long way to go before being able to live on the same terms as men. Men and women do not have equal rights or opportunities in Gambia.

“But women in Africa continue to face enormous obstacles. The growing recognition of their contributions has not translated into significantly improved access to resources or increased decision-making powers. Neither has the dynamism that women display in the economic, cultural and social lives of their communities through their associations and informal networks been channelled into creating new models of participation and leadership”,<sup>12</sup> as Gambian newspaper, the Daily Observer, explains the women’s situation.

In Gambia there is a difference between city and countryside. The urban area is more influenced by the West, while the countryside is still strongly tradition-bound, this may be because there are more opportunities to make a living in the city. Sylvia Chant describes in her book that in the city area of Gambia marriage is not as important to the woman and she can manage to live by herself (2007:175). In rural areas, people are dependent on their roles in society that decide what they can and cannot do.

The people’s lives are dependent on the social structures and norms that prevail in the village. If someone wants to be a part of the village and take part in joint networking, they have to follow the common rules. A woman must first of all do what is expected of her and perform the chores that a woman ‘may’ do. All the women I have interviewed or spoken to in the village believe that a woman is totally dependent on her reputation in the village. If she goes against the common expectations, society will say the woman ‘makes a drama’ that will lead to a conflict with her husband, her family and society as a whole.

Individuals in Bwiam are directly dependent on the local community and social structures and they are all dependent on each other. Society is a relatively closed ecological system and the individuals living in the system are directly dependent of the environment, this is clearly illustrated when mapping the market where most of the vegetables come from Bwiam or the nearby villages. There are not many other job opportunities or ways to get salaries that would make them independent of society, the main income comes from selling to each other in the village.

### Women and farming in Bwiam

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On the countryside in Gambia the society is wholly or partly dependent on the land and what it provides for their survival, as it is dependent on the relationships within it. As we can see in the chapter *Where everything is happening - at the market* and in appendix 2, that majority of the vegetables that are available to buy in Bwiam are grown in the village or the nearby villages. The villages are therefore very dependent on the environment that surrounds them, and they are directly dependent on the land for their survival.

Rules relating to cultivation and land are based on traditions and social structures within society. The women that this study is based on is to a large extent dependent

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<sup>12</sup> <http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/women-and-farmland-for-food-security> women and farmland for food security an article in the newspaper Daily Observer, 16 October 2012, hämtat den 31 december 2012.

on the land and are therefore dependent on social structures and traditions that give them the right to work the land. The women do not own land but have access to usage and this makes the women dependent on the whole community. In societies where land is scarce it can be a problem for the women to get access to land. In Bwiam, as I understand it, the land is not scarce and therefore there are no problems for the women to get land to cultivate or just clear new land. As a young man in the village told me, 'I will just claim new land for my wife when I marry', and he will not claim his family's land.

Women cannot grow whatever crop she wants, for example she cannot cultivate crops for commercial sale. The woman produces food to support the household, and the overproduction from the garden she can sell at the market. It is the woman who grows rice and crops in the garden and she is making her own decisions about how to organize her cultivation and the benefits that it will bring. What the woman can grow is based on the traditional view within the society of what a woman can or cannot do. This traditional view on what the woman cannot do leaves her in a situation where it is very difficult to earn larger amounts of income. Except for the small surplus she sells from the garden, she never gets a chance to get a sum that she can reinvest. Because of her dependency on the community the woman will not make higher earnings, she can just farm for household consumption and does not have the option to take other forms of work. This makes her trapped in her situation.

The rice that the women farm is not only a complementary food supply for the family, this rice is traditionally important. It gives the woman and her family certain status and it is this rice they will serve at celebrations. This rice is in connection to the woman's position in the society, to bring rice to the household she shows that she is a 'good woman' and does what the society expects of her. I also felt, when spending time with these women at the field, that going to the field gave them power. The women felt strong and confident when coming back from the field.

"Woman's work that is in harmony with local systems is often invisible and decentred" (Shiva 1998:64). The farming methods I saw in Bwiam used by the women are organic without inputs of pesticides or machinery that needs fuel. The woman works with her body in opposite to the man that seems to be working with machinery and inputs. I believe that the way that the women in Bwiam live and interact is very good for the environment. There is a very close relationship between the women and the land and how they benefit from the land. The women have a deep knowledge of their environment and with specific traditional methods they farm different crops, which is a knowledge they have learned through generations. This connection these women have to nature is nothing they will talk about, it is just a way of living. They are living on the environment and for the environment, and most of what they use in daily life will come from the ground; the food, the work, fire and water.

Palmer Kea describes the connection between farming and education and that younger women in the Gambia do not want to work in the fields. The girls want to have other work when they are educated and so they make a choice of not working at the field (Kea 2010: 181-183). On the countryside there are almost no other work than work connected to fieldwork or cooking, and this is a problem for the women. What I saw in the village is that the younger women do not have the skills from the field; they do not know how to do. They felt embarrassed that they did not have the skills and

therefore did not want to go to the field and work. This can be connected to schooling and that the children are in school all day and therefore they do not follow the parents and help them with chores, I did not see any girls or young women at the fields. The young women do not learn the practice of agriculture and cannot manage later when they are on their own to harvest their own fields. The young woman might then have access to fields but not have the skills to farm, this woman will be trapped because she will have a problem to support her children even though she has access to land.

Gardens were men produce vegetables for commercial selling, as I understood, have not existed previously in Bwiam. Men have grown on plantations, for instance fields of cassava, but not in gardens with different vegetables. A common sight before has been as Sylvia Chant describes it “Men are sitting chatting and drinking ataya (green tea) while women are working and taking care of the children” (Chant 2007: 172). At the time of my study I did not really see men drinking tea in the bushes instead I saw a progress of social change where men are more active and doing chores, chores that before only were connected to women. That the men now perform tasks that before only women were doing might lead to a change in the view of the women’s work in the future.

#### Women in the social structure

On the countryside in Gambia a woman has to marry. To marry is central in the young women’s life in Bwiam. If a woman is divorced she cannot live as a single parent without the ‘protection of’ an elderly relative or a male relative. She sooner or later has to remarry, even if she would like to continue living by herself she knows that it is not accepted of the society.

In the village I came to understand that a woman would never claim her right. She knows her rights but on the other hand she will not claim them. She does not claim her rights due to local practise of what a woman can or cannot do, and what is to be a ‘good woman’ according to the society. A ‘good woman’ is not a woman that will claim her right and would never ‘make a scene’. Everything that the woman does is part of a social pattern and to understand the whole picture of these structures is difficult. How the woman act and why it is difficult to understand and why she does in a certain way or if she has a choice to do things in another way is difficult to get to know. It is also as if the women are prevented to make their own decisions, as a woman said: “My mother decides sometimes, not always, and my brother decides. When I was divorced my mother decided that I had to do business. Now my husband decides.”

When it comes to work the woman is not entitled to work in all professions, there are certain occupations that women can work with, this can be a teacher, nurse, to sell or to have a shop in the market. This prevents her from doing any kind of business that she wants. “Thus men and women are prevented from doing certain things or receiving certain benefits, not on grounds of proven ability or inability, but because they are men or women” (Kabeer 1999:6).

Most of the women make a small earning through selling things on the market that they have grown or cooked and this income does not belong to the households but is the woman’s own earning. The woman should be able to do what she wants with this income, but this seems not to be the case. In households where men do not earn enough or do not make anything at all, it is a woman who buys the supplies. The same

applies if the husband does not contribute with what is needed to keep the entire household, then the woman will help out to buy a sack of rice, pay school fees or buy new clothes for the kids. So in theory, a woman is entitled to her own earned money but in the end she is the one who makes sure that the family has food to eat every day.

If the husband does not manage to give fishmoney to his wife or wives, then the women will make sure to support the family in some way. About this problem one lady said “We will sell at the market, even if we are eight months pregnant, we still have to work to support our children”. So, even if the husband has given up, not finding an income, the women will make sure to find food for the children in some way or another.

A single parent woman in Bwiam has to reinvest her surplus to make a new income the next day. The female-headed household is strongly dependent on the surplus income for reinvestment to be able to support the family. As many writers have mentioned<sup>13</sup> women seem to use her income on the family and the household. I do agree on this, that women above all will feed her children, and this might not be as obvious for the husband as for the wife. But, I think it is important to mention that the women are also spending a huge amount of money on things that does not favour the household directly, especially on new nice dresses for celebrations. Even if the woman has very little money and does not really manage, she and her children will come with new dresses when there is a celebration. It is the same when it comes to contributions, the woman will always contribute a certain amount even if she can not afford it.

Sylvia Chant mentions that women may be better off alone, because they do not have to worry about money and what will be left for the household (2004: 22, 1998: 157, 2007:44, 112). This is not in all cases applicable; women in Bwiam are in polygamous marriages already feeding her children and herself. So it does not make a difference if she is in a marriage or not, she is self sufficient in both cases. Between my two informants their realities differed. The woman whose husband divorced her would say that she manages better by herself, because the husband interfered with her business in the marriage and she was dependent on his earnings to support her children. She says that “it is more decisions to take by myself now, but I like it”. In the case of the woman that managed to divorce her husband there was no difference in the marriage or after the marriage. She supported and took care of herself within the marriage and also after the marriage. Though, she thought it was better to be within a marriage, even if she has to support herself, because she as a woman felt more secure within the bad marriage. “It is better with a man even if he is not good. Husband is the best. People will talk even if I will sit with a relative”. This leads to the conclusion that the most important for the woman is whether she is in control of her assets or not.

In the rural Gambia the social structures are still very deeply rooted in traditional practices and when new laws are implemented they can be difficult to put into practice. According to the Shari’a laws, women should get a part of the land, for instance in the case of inheritance, a daughter inherits half what a son is suppose to get (Kea 2010:139, Touray et al. 2003:7). But in practice, in the villages, this is not reality and the women ends up with nothing. It is difficult to implement laws in societies when the laws mean a different way of living and that the society has to change for the implementation. According to the organisation GAMCOTRAP the

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<sup>13</sup> Schroeder: 279, Chant 2007:112, Bradottir et al. 1998:56, Gordon 2001:281, Dugan 1998:105, Clark 1989:91, Kabeer 2001:104

woman does not get her piece of land because she will be married and the native family does not want to lose their land to her new family. If her husband at a later stage divorces her, one might think that she will get the land that she was originally supposed to inherit. But at this time the piece of land has already gone to someone else, so she cannot claim the land. This is how it becomes when practice of 'how the village always have done' takes precedence before the law, which actually gives the women some rights. This issue is connected to one of the biggest issues that GAMCOTRAP sees, that when a woman is trapped in a bad marriage she is not able to divorce because she does not have any land to support herself on.

Even if a woman knows her rights in different situations, she will not claim this right. For example she will not claim a part of the husband's land in divorce because she knows that it would lead to a 'scene'. This will trap the woman when she does not have land to be independent and has to move back to her native family's compound. She needs to have land to be able to support herself and her children. That she has no right to make own decisions over the land is a big complication for the women in the village. All the women that I have talked to have access to land and right to farm on this land, but they are not the owner of the land. And of most importance is that the women will not claim their right even if they know they have it. So, it is *not* that the women do not have knowledge of these laws that give them rights, as many western organizations often claim and that 'the women need education'.

### Women and marriage

"No, a woman will not leave the husband. All women in Gambia want to be married." one woman explained when I asked about the woman's right to divorce her husband. In Bwiam it is central for the woman to marry and in case of divorce, she knows that she has to remarry. It is therefore very important for her not to 'make a scene' or be seen as a woman making trouble. It is not good for a wife in the village to be in a conflict with the husband, because the husband has the final say in terms of right to the children and access of resources, as a woman claimed; "It is difficult for women to divorce, because the husband will take the children". It is easy for a husband to divorce his wife and the divorce will have a deep impact on the wife's life and therefore the women will do what she can to avoid a divorce.

"It is easy for the men but not for the women. It is difficult when you have children to divorce; it is not good. No one will want to marry you, and she has to remarry", a woman said. A woman will not divorce her husband because, first of all she needs his consent and second of all she will need the consent from her family. The last way out of the marriage for the woman is, as my informant managed, to go through Cadi Court. This is very rare in Gambia. It is normally very difficult for women to successfully get divorced through Cadi Court. To not manage to get divorced by talking to the husband or her native family, and having to go to Cadi Court, will give the women a reputation as a troublemaker and this will put her in a very difficult position later when finding a husband to remarry. In the case of my informant that managed to get through Cadi Court, it is a very special example, not at all representative. She was married to a man that was not Gambian, first of all, and he did not have respect within the community as a Gambian husband would have. My informant is respected within the community and she is a woman that comes from a respected family, she speaks very freely to both men and women. I think this might

have to do with the respect her mother had within the community, she was a woman many seemed to look up to, she took care of people and the owner of many rice fields.

My informant also managed very well living by herself, but in her brother's compound. Otherwise the community will ensure that it is not safe for a woman to stay alone and "people in the village will talk" and therefore the woman needs to be living with her brothers or some other relative. A woman that stays by herself will be seen in the village as a 'bad woman' and this will be a problem when she in the future wants to remarry. The society in Bwiam do not want women to stay alone, because they do not want a woman to show other women that she can manage by herself. "People in the village do not want to see that a woman can manage alone", as one woman explained to me, and she meant that people in the village do not want a woman to show other women that they can manage to live by themselves. This might have to do with traditional views of not being married, as a woman explained; "If you die, it is not good for you". So, the society wants to make sure the woman will marry again, and stay married.

Bride wealth is a part of a tradition that puts men, especially older men, in control over women. In the village Bwiam the bride wealth goes solely to the native family of the women. April Gordon describes bride wealth as an indication of the high value attached to woman, I would say that the bride wealth is not a high value attached to the loss of the women but rather a social construction to hold the woman in her position (Gordon 2001:275). To have a system that compensates for the loss of the work performed by a household member, would be as selling him or her off. The bride wealth can also show that the woman does not have a value, it is embarrassing for the woman when the bride wealth is very low, which it can be in the cases when a woman has to be 'married off' or marry quite old. The most important is that the woman has to repay the bride wealth if she wants to divorce. It is then a way of preventing the woman from being able to free herself from a bad marriage. Therefore I believe bride wealth is a social construction that keeps women in oppression.

In polygamous relationships, a man can only take a new wife as long as he can support the wives and treat them equal. But as the first wife bears expenditures that the man should have born, this leaves space for the man to have the opportunity to take another wife. In polygamous marriages in Bwiam the woman will many times work hard to support her own children. When the woman supports herself, then the husband can save money enough to be able to take one more wife. So, in reality the women will support their own children so the husband can afford to take a new wife without, mostly without his former wife's consent.

The husbands are not supposed to take a new wife without the consent from his former wives according to the Koran, but this does not seem to be the case in Bwiam. It is solely the husband's choice himself. One women explained polygamy "It is not good for the women but for the men, it is what they want. It is their feelings and therefore it is no good". The women think polygamy is good for the man, because it will make it easier for him to decide over them. The circumstance that the woman 'has to marry' leaves the woman with no choice than to marry a man with many wives. As I see it the women in Bwiam are a part of a social structure that they might not think is optimal, even though they would never resist it.

When I talked to the principle of the primary school the children that could not afford the school fees mostly came from polygamous families. The structure of polygamous

families itself might not be a problem. But in Bwiam, because the husband is not capable to support his family before taking a new wife, it will lead to big economical problems for the whole family in the future. If the husband waited and only took a new wife after knowing he could supply for the new wife and the former wives, polygamous relationships might not be a problem. “The main problem of polygamy is if the man is poor and cannot support all his children and family”, one woman said to me. Young men that I have talked to that did not want a second wife, were talking about the responsibility of supporting the children and giving them an education. So, this scenario might be changing in the future.

When I talked to women about polygamy and equality, this is nothing that the women in the village normally think of, it is as if it does not exist. But in the news papers ‘issue of the day’ an anonymous respond to the question of equal rights: “Men and women cannot be equal because men can marry four wives and women cannot”<sup>14</sup>. The women in Bwiam mainly seem to think about practical matters. In the end it is the husband who will decide what the women can and cannot do, for instance if she can sell in the market or not. So even if it is her self-acquired earning, but the husband believes that she spends the income in a way that he thinks is wrong, he may decide that she no longer has the right to earn the income.

This work is based upon the human ecological triangle, which I have developed to fit into this writing. The three corners, *woman – woman’s social structures – woman’s traditional farming* has been the basis for this writing. What I have shown is that the woman’s life and her choices depend on her environment. The woman is dependent on the social relationship within the village and she is above all dependent on the cultural practice and what she is expected to do and not to do. The whole community Bwiam, as many societies on the countryside in Gambia, are highly dependent on the land and what it brings. Bwiam is an agrarian village where people make there living out of farming and the women supply their household from their farming. There is a strong relationship between these three corners when it comes to the woman’s life. She supports her children through the dependency of the land and the dependency on land is in direct connection with the dependency of the common rules within the community. She is also dependent on the community in all her daily life, when there is no other way to live than to follow the common rules, if she is to be a part of the community. The dependency on the land and further dependency on the community will make the woman follow the common rules within the society. Which leaves her in situations where she does not assert her rights, as when it comes to inheritance, assets, divorce, to refrain marriage or polygamous relationships and the right to her children.

Many worldwide but also national organisations, as the organisation GAMCOTRAP, are talking in terms of ‘empowerment of women’ and ‘women’s awareness’ and that women need to get more knowledge about their rights in the society. I do not really agree upon that the main problem is lack of knowledge. These women that I have met in the village care primarily about what is most necessary for their daily living, they care above all about getting food enough to feed their children. They think about

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<sup>14</sup> <http://observer.gm/africa/gambia/article/issue-of-the-day-should-men-and-women-have-equal-rights-opportunities-and-laws-why-or-why-not>

today and not about the distant future. What I experienced is not that these women do not know their rights it is just that they do not really care about their rights, because, as one women said “Food is our largest problem”. Also within the village the women do not want to be branded as a troublemaker or as a girl explained to me “you do not want to make a scene, because if you are seen as someone making trouble then it will be difficult for you to get married or remarried”. Which leads us back to the claim that all women have to marry.

## 9. CONCLUSION

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This study has looked upon the woman's life through the ecological triangle, by studying the woman, her environment and the social structures she depends on. Through my observations, interviews and discussions in the village Bwiam I have come to the conclusion that the woman is trapped in her situation due to several reasons. Above all a woman in Gambia has to marry, this is essential and this pressures the woman and will keep her in her situation.

In this study we have seen that the women are very dependent on the land that feed them. The women in the village did not own land, they had access to land but they were not the actual owners. Even if she has the right to inherit land, legally, a woman loses this right when she marries and moves to another family's home.

Within the society there is a mutual dependency on each other, a woman cannot make her own decisions and she is highly dependent on what the society permits her to do. She cannot engage in any business that she would like, she can only engage in the activities considered appropriate for women. A woman who is divorced cannot stay by herself, and will be dependent on a male relative. The woman will not go against the society because she will not want to be seen as someone who is 'making a scene'; the woman's reputation within the village is very important for her.

A woman does not divorce, even though she is legally entitled to it, as a divorce is the husband's decision. It is the man who decides over the common possessions and where the children will live, so a woman can lose her access to land and children in case of divorce. The woman also has to remarry after divorce and she cannot live by herself for too long. This in combination with polygamous marriage, where the second woman often is much younger than her husband, will put the women in an inferior bargaining position.

The whole society in Bwiam is highly dependent on nature and the environment. The land is central for the women to be able to feed the family, and much of what is consumed is grown in the village. The women have a close relation to the land, and farm with traditional practices, as a part of the environment. There is a very tight link between the social structures and farming in Bwiam. The woman's dependency on the local environment for growing food is linked to the social structures of what she 'may do' within the society. This study shows that the different corners in the human ecological triangle are in strong correlation with each other in the village Bwiam. This relationship traps the woman in her situation, because of her dependency on the social structures within the village and on the land that feeds her.

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## Interview Questions

### Question around the divorce

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#### Background

1. How old were you when you married?
2. For how many years were you married?
3. How many children do you have? How old are they?
4. How long time ago did you divorce?

### Relationship

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#### Background to the marriage

5. Can you describe how you came to marry your husband?  
*(Did you decide this marriage yourself? Were you in love? Was it another family member's decision? Was it because of money? Was it because of the community?)*
6. Did you move when you married your husband?

#### About polygamy and the relationship within the compound

7. Was it equal between the wives?
  - In terms of owning?
  - In terms of how much time he spent with the different wives?
  - Did your husband give an equal amount of money to each wife? (Did the sum vary depending on amount of children?)
  - In terms of favouring?
8. How did you experience being in a polygamous relationship?  
What was good?  
What was not good?
9. What did you decide over when you were in the relationship? Did you make any big decisions?
10. Did you have the right to have your say?
11. Did you earn your own money when you were married?
  - If, was it yours to keep?
  - And did the other wife also make an income?

#### The marriage compared to being divorced

12. Can you describe your divorce?  
If you were in court, can you describe how it was?
13. How do you experience staying by yourself?
14. What is good in the marriage?  
What is not good in the marriage?
15. What do you decide over now? How does it feel to take all responsibilities yourself?
16. Do you make any big decisions today?

17. Do you feel that you decide more now and that you can decide over your own life more without a husband?
18. Can you describe what happened with your children after the divorce?

#### The practical around the split up

19. Can you describe how you live now? (Who you are living together with).  
- How does your family organise cooking? (Who decides what to cook?)  
- How does your family organise cleaning?
20. What is yours? Did you take anything with you when you separated?
21. What do you own?
22. How do you manage when you are alone?
23. Who is responsible for your children?  
Is the father giving you any money for child-support?
24. Where are the children staying?
25. Do you feel like you can stay alone or that you have to remarry again?  
How soon?
25. What do you feel about being in a polygamous family now?

#### **Wives work**

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26. Can you describe your day?  
From morning to evening, tell me what you do?
27. Did you decide over how to do the chores that you are obligated to do when you were married?  
How is it now compared to when you were married?
28. Did you decide yourself what you want to grow in your own garden before?  
Do you decide what to grow now?
29. How much food do you get from the field?  
Is it yours to keep?  
- How much do you have to buy to complement?  
- What do you buy? (Local-growing food, that you don't grow yourself or imported food).
30. Do you earn anything today?

## Appendix 2

### Commodities in the vegetable market 12 January 2012

I mapped the market. I spent many days at the market, but I spent one day mapping what was for sale. I also handed out a form to women from different households to see what they bought. So I could compare different households' grocery shopping. The other reason is to get an overview of what is produced and consumed in Bwiam. I have not been able to use the form that I handed out to the women, but the information from mapping the market still has a value to the essay.

Picture	What it is	Where to find	How it is sold	How much
	Pile of fish, that is called Challos	This comes from Kombo, but you can also find it in Bwiam.	Three to four fishes in a pile	10 dalasi for a pile
	Smoked fish	Kombo	Fish in pieces	3,5 dalasi each
	Lokos beans	Has made themselves. It is seeds that they found in the bush, boiled and pound.	A small cup	2 dalasi per cup
	Dried catfish	Kombo	A pile	40 dalasi per pile

	Small pepper	Grows in the village	A small pile	1 dalasi per pile
	Big pepper	Grows in Bwiam	A pile	5 dalasi per pile
	Pumpkin	Grows in Bwiam	In pieces	10 dalasi per piece
	Groundnut paste	Local, from Bwiam or the nearby villages.	A small bag	10 dalasi for one bag
	Black pepper corn (Black bag) Saffel (white bag) Adja, broth Jumbo, broth	All is imported	In small bags and packed	2 dalasi 1 dalasi 2 dalasi 1,5 dalasi

	Bitter tomato	Grows in Bwiam	Different sizes	In between 1 to 2 dalasi depending on the size
	Union	Imported		3 unions for 10 dalasi
	Oil Tomato puree	Imported Imported	Sold per cup Sold in different bags	10 dalasi 2 or 5 dalasi
	Takk, broth	Imported	Packed	1.5 dalasi
	Garden eggs	Grows in Bwiam	Per piece	5 dalasi for one garden egg

	Tomatoes	Grows in Bwiam	1 pile with about 4 pieces depending on the size	5 dalasi for one pile
	Lime	Grows in Bwiam	Pile of 4 pieces	2 dalasi for one pile
	Orange	Grows in Bwiam	Per piece or in a pile	0.5 dalasi for one orange
	Okra powder	Grows in Bwiam	In a bag	1 dalasi
	Garlic	Imported	Per piece	5 dalasi

	Motar	Imported	In a bag	3 dalasi
	Macaroni or pasta	Imported	Repackaged	2 dalasi
	Beans	Grows in Bwiam	In a bag	5 dalasi
	Ball of seeds	Imported from Senegal	As a blob	2 dalasi per bit
	Flour	Imported	In small bags	2 dalasi

	Dried Sorrel	Grows in Bwiam	In piles	1 dalasi
	Chives	Grows in Bwiam	In bundle	1 dalasi
	Lettuce	From Kombo, But can grow in Bwiam	Quite small	25 dalasi
	Sorrel flower	Grows in Bwiam	In pile	1 dalasi
	Peanut Flour	Grows in Bwiam and in the area	One cup	3.5 dalasi

	Okra	Grows in Bwiam	In piles of several	5 dalasi
	"Snail" (as she called it)	Kombo, it comes from the sea	In pieces	2 dalasi
	Grapefruit	Grows in Bwiam	In pieces	1 dalasi
	Local soap	Made in Bwiam	In small bags	5 dalasi
	Green leaves	Grows in Bwiam	In a bundle as they bind together	1 dalasi

	Ice	Make it themselves from syrup or baobao	In one small bag, frozen	1 dalasi
	Groundnuts in a bag	Grows in Bwiam	Different sizes, some small bags and some bigger bags	1, 5 or 20 dalasi
	Talo, a green fruit.	Found in the bush	In pieces	1 dalasi
	Lettuce leaves	Grows in Bwiam	In a bundle	5 dalasi
	Fish pie	Make them themselves from fish, flour and oil	Small pies	1 dalasi

	Kassava	Grows in Bwiam	In piece	1 dalasi
	Sweet potato	From Kombo	Big or small	10 or 5 dalasi
	Baobab flour, it comes from the fruits of the baobab tree	Grows in the bush	One small bag	From 2 to 5 dalasi
	"Medicine"	Grows in the bush	Packed leaves in a small pile	5 dalasi
	Potatoes	Grows in Bwiam	One small Prize depends on size	1 dalasi