Power dynamics and the construction of social categories among matchubes and rimbeh in Nokuta village, The Gambia – A qualitative case study

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Abstract

Like many other West African countries, The Gambia faces challenges regarding discrimination based on descent, which relates to the inherited disadvantage of being born into a specific group (RADDHO & IDSN, 2012).

This sociological case study has the analytical purpose of discussing the case of social stratification and descent-based discrimination in the *Fulani* village of Nokuta in The Gambia. The thesis focuses on the unique perceptions and experiences of the socially inferior *matchube* category (slave born people) and the socially superior *dimo* category (noble people). The study intends to discuss how different forms of power structures influence the creation and maintenance of unequal categories in the village. Based on the interviews of 22 people, the study highlights the unique perceptions of the individuals concerned. In order to make sense of existing power structures and inequality, the thesis uses Steven Lukes' multidimensional power approach (2005) and Charles Tilly's theory of durable inequality (1998).

Empirical findings suggest that there is some uncertainty about how people refer to social stratification, identity, and categorical belonging in Nokuta village. Simultaneously as the *dimo* group identifies with their prescribed positions of being superior *matchubes*, the *matchubes* would not identify themselves as inferior. All this considered, social stratification in Nokuta village may today be better perceived as *discourses of categorical difference*, rather than a fixed social *caste* system. The conclusions drawn suggest that although been subjected to severe changes due to the slavery abolishment and the introduction of more democratic value systems, there is a remaining salience for the dimensions of categorical difference.

Keywords: social stratification/caste, matchube, dimo/rimbeh, social categories, categories of difference, descent-based discrimination

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1. Introduction

Caste-based discrimination, or discrimination based on descent[1] is believed to affect over 260 million people worldwide (RADDHO & IDSN, 2012). It is not restricted to a specific region or religion and can be found in many parts of the world such as in the Fulani, Tukulor Wolof, Serahule and Mandinka tribes in West Africa. Like many West African nations, The Gambia is traditionally structured along hierarchical lines with categorical status determined by birth (Stevens, 2002). The study aims to investigate the power structures within the *Fulani* social stratification system in Nokuta village (fictive name) in The Gambia, based on the subjective views of people belonging to the superior noble group (singular *dimo,* plural *rimbeh*) and the inferior slave group (*matchube*).

According to the United Nations (UN) (2017), discrimination based on descent is believed to fundamentally undermine the dignity of people concerning economic, political, civil, and social rights. Although harshness and manifestation of the discrimination vary depending on the context, numerous standard features tie together communities based on decent. Social systems based on descent are at their root social hierarchies where certain groups are categorically defined as superior or inferior based on their birth into a specific group. This type of social organization is intergenerational and tightly associated with different forms of exploitative and exclusionary power structures (p. 11-13).

Discrimination based on descent has met increasing concern among UN bodies and fell below the purview of international human rights instruments recently. Published in 2013, the Secretary-General of the United Nations endorsed the *Guidance Note on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities* intending to ensure a comprehensive approach on racial, religious descent-based discrimination. In 2017 the *Guidance Tool* was developed to lay the foundation on a more focused and wide-ranging action on the human rights issue of caste and descent-based discrimination (p. 2). Jurisprudence has made it clear that "these treaty norms also cover those forms of discrimination, and that States, therefore, have a legal obligation under international law to address such discrimination" (p. 1). Although not explicitly mentioned in the UN sustainable development goals, the issue of descent-based discrimination can be related to goal 10, "Reduced inequalities," more specifically goal 10.3.1

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[1] Descent based discrimination refers to "any exclusion, restriction, or preference based on inherited status such as caste, including present or ancestral occupation, family, community or social origin, name, birthplace, place of residence, dialect and accent that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, or any other field of public life" (paragraph 1, IDSN, 2019).

that indicates people who have been discriminated against based on the ground on discrimination proscribed under international human rights law (United Nations, 2019).

Studies on social stratification and descent-based discrimination in West Africa have been executed on the *Wolofs* in Senegal, *Osu*:s in Nigeria and *Tukulors* in Mali and Senegal. However, despite growing awareness in many other West African nations, descent-based discrimination lacks extensive studies of how the issue occurs in The Gambia, where it continues to be a silent problem. Despite being a democratic nation, The Gambia has no significant legislative recourse to regional human rights mechanisms to tackle this type of discrimination. Because of widespread ignorance and lack of knowledge, victims of the discrimination, therefore, continue to suffer physically and psychologically in silence in their homes, in educational as well as religious institutions and workplaces (Stevens, 2002).

2. Research aim and significance

The overall purpose of the research is to describe how different forms of power structures operate within the social stratification in Nokuta village, The Gambia. The analysis focuses on the subjective interviews of 22 people belonging to the *matchube* group and the *dimo* group. Particular emphasis is paid to investigate how power dynamics in the village influence the creation and the maintenance of discriminatory categories in the village. The theoretical part of the study will draw on Charles Tilly's theory of durable inequality (1998) and Steven Lukes' multidimensional power approach (2005).

Studying the case of Nokuta is particularly interesting because of its clear segregation between the matchube group and the rimbeh group. Stated in the annual rapport of the Swedish-Gambian NGO Future In Our Hands The Gambia (2011), Nokuta is the only village in which the NGO's cooperative development efforts have been difficult to carry out because people of the *rimbeh* refused to collaborate with the *matchubes* (p. 13). This shows that discrimination based on descent not only is a human rights matter, it is also an obstacle for development.

In contrast to previous research on descent-based discrimination in other West African countries such as Senegal and Nigeria, the topic was chosen as literature indicates a clear information gap about the stratification system in The Gambia. Current literature also suggests that too little attention is placed on exploring the subjective discourses of the social stratification of communities in West Africa in general and that too much emphasis has been put on the discourses of Western scholars (Dilley, 2000). Appropriately, the study aims to

highlight the perceptions and experiences of the local people in Nokuta village. Taking into account the inadequate knowledge within this field of research, the study intends to contribute to moderately filling the information gap about the hierarchical social system in The Gambia, and more significantly in Nokuta village.

3. Specific research questions

What are the local perceptions of social stratification in Nokuta village, and how do rimbeh and matchubes make sense of their prescribed categorical roles?

How do different forms of power structures operate in the village, and how do they impact the lives of people belonging to the rimbeh and matchubes?

4. Background

4. Social stratification in West Africa and The Gambia

The concept *caste* defines as an "endogamous[2] ranked special group" (Tamari, 1991:223) and is frequently understood as a hierarchical social system of people characterized by an inherited transmission of lifestyle (ibid). Social identities are intergenerational; thus mobility within the caste system is not possible. Having its origin in the hierarchical concepts of 'purity' and 'pollution', people from higher castes are not associating with the lower castes, as they are believed to become polluted if they do. Caste belonging can affect people's involvement in all aspects of social life, such as living situation, occupation, and economic opportunities. High caste individuals are furthermore often associated with social, economic, and political power simultaneously as low caste individuals are associated with powerlessness and low wage employment (IDSN, 2015). The origins of the term ascribe towards the Portuguese and Spanish word *casta*, meaning *race* or *breed* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). It did not take long until English applied the remodelled version *caste* to thousands of endogamous Indian social groups during the colonial period (Dilley, 2000).

Because of its colonial background and strong associations towards the Indian caste system and all that entails, there is a disagreement among scholars whether the term *caste* is appropriate when referring to social stratification in West Africa. There is furthermore no equivalent word to *caste* in the native languages of either The Gambia or other West African

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[2] Endogamous (Endogamy) - the practice of marrying within a particular social group (Tamari, 1991).

languages (ibid). Because of the definitional problem of what actually corresponds to the word *caste*, this thesis will call Nokuta village a form of *social stratification*, which is closely associated with power and can broadly be defined as a social hierarchical differentiation where people, based on status derived from social background, income or/and wealth gather in specific groups (Ritzer, 2013:280). When referring to discrimination as a consequence of social stratification, I will refer to it as *discrimination based on descent* or *descent-based discrimination*. However, this conceptual issue will be furthered elaborated on in the analysis chapter.

As mentioned, The Gambia is still structured along descent-based lines with social status determined by birth. The country had its first democratic election in 2016 after being under the totalitarian rule by the former president Yahya Jammeh. Still, the country is coloured by old authoritarian structures hampering human rights to be realized (OECD Development Center, 2019). The unequal stratifications can be found within various tribes within the country such as the Mandinka, Wolof, Serahule, and Fula. In contrast to Asian hierarchical systems, people subjected to discrimination based on descent in The Gambia form a small part of the population, and the level and its effects of social stratification are culturally context-dependent and vary significantly between community and tribe. Because The Gambia and other West African people originate from the same tribes and Muslim ethnic groups, researchers have found that there are resemblances between the various hierarchical systems (Stevens, 2002).

Social stratification based on descent is, as explained, closely related to various forms of power structures where the superior group possesses power over the inferior groups. The marginalization and victimization have severe implications for the attainment of rights and equality for the inferior groups within their communities (ibid). As pronounced in the United Nations' Guidance Tool on Descent-Based Discrimination (2017), the reality of groups suffering discrimination on the basis of inherited status may be recognizable on the basis of features including parts or all of the following; limited or no mobility within occupation due to inherited status, forced endogamy within the group, private or public segregation including limited or no access to public areas and recourses such as water, food, schools and religious spaces, and being subjected to stigmatizing and dehumanizing discourses related to their descent (p. 11-13). Discrimination based on the descent can, however, be found in (to name a few) Senegal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali and Ghana. In the social stratification within these societies, there are people usually referred as the superior nobilities or nobles (free people), fishermen, craftsmen, such as leather workers and blacksmiths, entertainers such as praise

singers and musicians (*griot* as a general term in West Africa) and slaves (slave-born people). Social stratification is traditionally linked to specific occupations where some are seen as *better* than others. The nobles are descendants of rulers and warriors, making them socially superior to the rest of the population. Being at the bottom of the hierarchy, people refer the slave-born people to as descending from domestic slaves of the nobles, making them socially inferior. Although varying depending on the community, stratifications such as craftsmen and leather workers are almost always above slaves, but below the nobles. Likewise, nobles may not engage in leatherworking or fishing as it can be seen as being *below* them. They might also be *polluted* if they associate with a fisherman or a blacksmith, as they believe them to be contaminating (Tamari, 1991). Notwithstanding, many of these cultural beliefs of 'purity' and 'pollution' have gradually changed due to slavery abolishment, urbanization, and westernized education systems (Dilley, 2000). For instance, while as an entertainer or a *griot* before could be viewed as being dirty or polluted, a study from Senegal suggest that the negative meanings of *taasu* performers (a form of an entertainer in Senegal) have diminished and been replaced with professional status (McNee, 2000:43-44).

Moreover, research made by the International Dalit Organization (IDSN) (2015) calls for attention concerning descent-based discrimination and emphasizes the political implications people of "wrong" belonging face in West Africa. For instance, the *Osu* system in Nigeria can be described as a form of Apartheid as it enforces strict segregation between people based on their social positions (ibid). The concepts of 'purity' and 'pollution' are used in order to enforce forced endogamy, and people of the *Osus* are denied rights in political elections (Stevens, 2002). It is also a common belief that "touching an Osu automatically turns you into an Osu" (ibid, p. 7). A report from 2012 suggests that discrimination based on caste and decent remains a problem in Senegal mostly among the Wolof and Peul tribes. The legacies are especially apparent in the socio-political sphere where politicians from lower social standings face oppression even within their political parties. Although Senegal is pronounced as a secular and democratic state, victims of descent-based discrimination are at some places denied rights to speak at meetings and face challenges regarding access to places of worship and other social or political gathering spaces (RADDHO & IDSN, 2012).

4.2 Social stratification in Nokuta village, The Gambia
This section's sources are predominantly based on empirical data from Nokuta village. Ranging from 20-40 million people, the *Fulani* tribe is one of the largest and widely spread Muslim ethnic groups within West Africa and Sahel (Tamari, 1991). The tribe is traditionally

nomadic, and a significant portion of the people lives in rural communities. The language of the Fulas is *Fula* or *Pulaar* and belongs to the Senegambian branch within the Niger-Congo languages in Africa (Faal, 2014:24-25). As among other tribal groups such as the Wolofs and Mandinka, the Fulas are traditionally endogamous, and people do not knowingly marry outside their stratification (Tamari, 1991).

The Fulani community of Nokuta is the area of focus for this thesis. Nokuta is a small pastoral village placed in the middle of the country, approximately three hours' drive from the capital of Banjul. The majority of the village population has lived in the village their whole life, and because of being far away from any nearby town, people usually stay within the borders of the village. The population lives under the poverty line and holds custom laws in accordance with traditional Muslim belief systems. The local parliament consists of the village chief (the *Alkalo* who is male) and ten executive members consisting of four women and six men. The society is patriarchal with the male being the head of the household. Up until recently, women were not allowed into village politics. Although improved, the society is not gender equal, and women continue to be expected to obey the rules of their husband. The village has a school up till grade 6 and has with the guidance of national NGO's adopted a westernized education system. The teachers are trained to teach the children with respect, regardless of social background or descent.

The village features descendant-based divisions, where people belonging to the slave clan suffer discrimination concerning opportunities and acceptance. Having around 500 inhabitants, more than two-thirds of the population suffers from the discrimination of being born as *slaves*, and the rest belong to the *noble* group. Although exact dates are impossible to determine, the hierarchical system was established hundreds of years ago when warriors and rulers from other villages settled in the area that would later become Nokuta. The warriors would then be referred to as the rulers of the village. The rulers that in English are translated to *the noble clan* or *the free people* (in *Pulaar* they are called *dimo* or *rimbeh*) would hold non-nobles as domestic slaves. Like in most West African societies, slaves were acquired through war and trade or birth in the households of the nobles. Slaves (the *matchubes)* would live in serfdom and work in the field or the households of the nobles. Thus, the occupation and the living situation were decided by the rimbeh. Being a slave, a person would by the rimbeh be perceived as a *lesser* human being and *impure*. Because of its intergenerational structure, social mobility was impossible, and the children of a slave would too become slaves.

Because of the national-wide abolishment of slavery in 1930 (Bellagamba, 2017:1) (however domestic slavery in Nokuta is believed to have continued up until independence from Britain in 1965), the social stratification discourse in the village has changed.

However, due to long-lasting inequality between the two clans, the discriminatory social system in Nokuta village has persisted. Social and hierarchical identities are still coloured by traditional structures of purity and pollution where matchubes are still subjected to discrimination because of their descent. The village is physically divided between the matchube group and the dimo group with one mosque at each side. The difference is also economical, as many of the rimbeh afford to send their children to high school, which is not done by the households of the matchubes. As has been for centuries, social mobility is limited because of the continued practice of endogamy. Although having a democratically selected village parliament consisting of both rimbeh and matchube, the *Alkalo* (the village chief) are and can (because of the intergenerational structure) only be a dimo (a noble).

5. Previous studies

5.1 Various perceptions of social stratification in West Africa

As mentioned in earlier sections, the literature lacks extensive studies on social stratification in The Gambian context, especially concerning the experiences of people within societies based on stratification. There is, however, research on social stratification of the *Fulani* tribe in other West African countries such as Senegal and Mali. The previous research in this section is carried out by Roy Dilley (2000) and Tal Tamari (1991).

Dilley (2000) analyses the native conceptualization of cultural and discursive distinctions, particularly between Fulani and *Tukulor*[3] groups mainly in Senegal and Mali. Dilley criticizes the term 'caste' in connection to West Africa for its associations to the hierarchical social system in India. Hence, being a Western term developed by colonial administrator-scholars, he rather highlights the importance of native and local understandings of social stratification. Focusing on the conceptualizations of the people interviewed, Dilley discusses that instead of relying on the Indian perception of 'caste' and all that entails, social stratification within the Tukulor and Fulani discourses could be more viewed as a "way of being, a form of moral and physical constitution of a person" (p. 158). These cultural differences are characterized by value systems of power reproduced by the practice of endogamy and separation. Within the Fulani and Tukulor groups, power imbalances seem to

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[3] A West African ethnic tribe, often referred to the Tuta Tooro region in Senegal (Dilley, 2000).

derive from social status based on descent where the nobility clan is perceived as superior other groupings in society. Within these societies, however, Dilley argues that there is a "sense of ambiguity about status of certain social categories" (p. 155). Simultaneously as the noble clans could advocate for the supremacy of their groups and the inferiority of other categories, opinions of categorical identity may differ from group to group (ibid).

Addressing the history and development of (what he refers as) 'caste' systems in West Africa, Tal Tamari (1998) is grounding his research on old Arabic (Muslim) writings together with field work in Mali. Basing his study on the development of the Fulani, Mandinka and Tukulor caste system (to name a few) the author suggests that characteristics of caste have changed over time. This can, for instance, be seen when different caste groupings migrate and either bring with them, adjust or assimilate to the social structure in the new community. Additionally, urbanization and contact with different Western institutions and education systems, the significance of caste belonging seem to weaken. Interestingly enough, the author claims that although subjected to changes in both national and local political discourses, endogamy continues to be strictly observed within many of tribes observed (ibid).

5.2 Durable inequality and power structures within the Indian caste system

Studies conducted on social stratification using Charles Tilly's theory of durable inequality (categorical inequality that lasts from one generation to the next) (1998) and Steven Lukes' multidimensional power approach (2005) has been done on the Indian caste system. In this section, the thesis will draw examples from two articles, namely Mosse (2010) and Hoff and Pandey (2006).

Mosse's (2010) article is specifically focusing on the experiences of the poor and subaltern in India, that is 'Dalits' (the lowest caste) and 'tribals' (Adivasis/Tribals that is indigenous people). Caste belonging has dictated almost every aspect of social life in India for centuries. Although being abolished since decades, unequal discriminatory structures of the system continue to shape the lives of Indians, especially in the labour market. Mosse describes the Indian caste system as a severe form of categorical inequality. Variable economic opportunities are shaped by the barriers of socially constructed categories that operate mechanically to limit mobility and skill gaining. People enter the labour market on different terms depending on social belonging in Indian society. This is done, as he explains, in the context of what Tilly would argue as *intergenerational* inequality. In one of Tilly's examples to explain how transactions between lesser and greater beneficiaries generate boundaries and produce unequal categories, he takes the example of how women universally

obtain a lesser reward for identical effort in comparison to men in the labour market. The same process is taking place on the construction site in the west of India regarding higher caste Indians and lower caste Dalits and Tribals. After generations of urbanizations and development, low caste people remain being skewed towards low-income jobs because unequal structures of 'purity' and 'pollution' have been adapted into society. Describing Lukes' 'two-dimension' of power (agenda-setting power) Mosse refers to how some matters are organized into politics, whereas others are organized out. He claims that low caste people continue to face challenges and exploitation because of their lack of agenda-setting power. The needs of the poorest remain non-politicized partly for they have no power to defend their rights (ibid).

Furthermore, in their study about categorical and hierarchical differences between high-caste and low-caste individuals in the Indian caste system, Hoff and Pandey (2006) suggest that stereotyped-grounded expectations influence a person's performances in the domain of that stereotype. In their work, the authors' start by briefly accounting for the caste system as hierarchical where different casted groups are linked to traditional occupations. In contrast to the 'purer' higher-casted landlords, Dalits (low caste individuals) are traditionally engaged in the practice of leather tanning, which is also associated with ritual pollution. Being of low social rank and subject to discriminatory stereotypes as being 'impure' or 'untouchable', Dalits have historically been denied political participation and economic opportunities (ibid).

In an experiment investigating the performances of how young high-caste and low-caste boys in an Indian village reply to economic opportunities, the authors found that the low-caste boys performed as good as the high-caste boys if no one knew about their identity as Dalits. However, they performed worse than high-caste individuals if their social identity was publically exposed. Taking into account the theoretical concepts of durable inequality, Hoff and Pandey (2006) point to a clear connection between discrimination, social identity, and behaviour. Asking the question, 'Where do social identities come from?' they argue that negative and stereotypical institutions not only put people in oppressive groupings; however, they invest those groupings with collective meaning and construct a narrative to justify that oppression. In other words, publically exposing Dalits' social identity as being low-caste (untouchable and therefore socially inferior high-caste individuals) increases their negative thoughts about themselves, influencing their ability of learning which in the end "keeps them from achieving outcomes comparable to those of the high castes" (p. 211). Taking into account durable inequality, this goes in line with the validation of discriminatory ideologies and replicates the outcomes of structural discrimination over time (ibid).

6. Theoretical concepts

6.1 Lukes' three faces of power

Reflecting upon power dynamics in Nokuta village, different forms of power relations can be revealed. In order to make sense of how different power structures operate in the village, the thesis will include the social theorist Lukes' multidimensional power approach (2005). Lukes distinguishes three forms or three 'faces' of power, what he calls the first, second, and third dimension of power.

One can understand the pluralist view or the first dimension as a 'direct' or 'concrete' form of power, where A is making B to do something that B would not otherwise do. The power to influence and control in a direct way is associated with direct elitist decision-making structures (Lukes, 2005, p. 15).

Lukes (2005) claims that if one has *real* power, one cannot only directly express power; one can set the agenda to decide what can and *cannot* be discussed. The second dimension, 'non-decision making power' can be understood as political power, which embraces influence, compulsion, authority, and manipulation. In contrast to concrete or decision-making structures, this dimension emphasizes the power to set the 'agenda' and refers to how some matters are organized into politics, whereas others are organized out. Thus, power can be expressed by preventing decisions or reducing choices (p. 21-22).

According to Lukes (2005), the very definition of power has historically been too narrowly understood, though the act of control can take place in several different forms (p. 1). In the pluralist view, power only shows in a case of an actual conflict, but this is to ignore, he argues: "the crucial point that the most effective and insidious use of power is to prevent such conflict from arising in the first place" (p. 27). A conflict cannot arise if people in a society are *indoctrinated* to think in a certain way. Although subject A might be exercising *direct* or *indirect* power over subject B, subject A may also exercise power by determination, influence, and *shaping* the wants of subject B. Lukes describes this third dimension of power as 'normative' or 'ideological,' wherein the act of socialization one's identity and desires are modified relative to the social sphere in which one exists (p. 28). Exploitation and oppression can, for instance, be related to this third dimension. If one is taught to be loyal to an oppressive political system that protects the interests of the exploiters, one can end up reproducing one's oppression (Mosse, 2010).

6.2 Durable inequality

Tilly (1998) is concerned with how social categorizations of people result in categorical inequalities. Durable inequalities are enduring as they "last from one social interaction to the next, with special attention to those that persist over whole careers, lifetimes, and organizational histories" (p. 6). As descent-based discrimination bases on persistent categorical inequality, I believe that the concept of durable inequality is suitable for this thesis.

Tilly (1998) explains that durable inequality is particularly interesting because it has limited explanatory power. Gender inequality, class/caste/race discrimination, and inequality because of (dis)ability do thus not exist as direct products of differences in individual characteristics or abilities. Instead, they are the outcome of (formally and informally) institutionalized social relations constructed and reproduced over time for the benefit of the socially advantaged (p. 8).

One of the key points in understanding categorical inequality is the operation of, among other things, exploitation and adaptation. The exploiters (a categorically superior group within an organization for example) are exploiting the subordinate (the inferior group) by controlling "valuable, labour-demanding resource from which they can extract returns by harnessing the efforts of others, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort" (p. 87).

One of the core claims in describing durable inequality is that it contributes to the solving of what Tilly (1998) calls 'organizational problems.' Rather than developing organizations aiming at deploying categorical inequality, the durability could be comprehended as a consequence of social routines and habits. It establishes internalized norms and values that have stability through time, space, and culture. As these categorical inequalities are 'adapting' into the social sphere and become normative, adaption could thus lead to exploiters and victims of exploitation reproduce inequalities. That would, for example, be a woman who defends unequal payment because of her sex (p. 97-98) or a black South African protecting the racist discourse during Apartheid (p. 121). Patriarchy or Apartheid could thus be seen as 'normal' although based on a reproduction of unequal categorical structures. The normalization makes it hard for people to break the patterns. The social structures thus become self-reproducing, resulting in people procreating their subordination (ibid). Central for the understanding of durable inequality is that it operates under the same principles in all organizational contexts (Tilly, 1998, p. 8), whether talking about Apartheid, caste systems or sex segregation, they are reinforced by similar social processes (ibid, p. 6).

7. Methodology

7.1 Summary

For this qualitative case study, a total of 22 interviews were conducted over nine weeks from January to March 2019 in the village of Nokuta. The purpose of the study is to explore the subjective perceptions of the stratification system of people in Nokuta village.

7.2 Sampling

Purposive sampling, including snowball sampling, was used for the selection of interview participants. The purposive sampling technique was done strategically through assigning suitable research participants relevant to answer the research questions (Bryman 2012: 418). Since the goal is to make sense of the local perception of the social stratification in Nokuta, the local citizens are the most suitable target group to answer the research questions. When first arriving in field I was introduced to my village contact person that helped me in the initial stages of the sample selection. I continued using snowball sampling in order to get in contact with supplementary research participants acquainted with recent participants. By the use of snowball sampling, I was allowed to locate additional relevant research participants that I perhaps would not have found otherwise.

As mentioned, the purposes is to highlight the voices of people in Nokuta village. To ensure diversity among research participants and to avoid gender, age, and social stratification bias, the interviews were conducted on an equal number of dimo women, dimo men, matchube women, and matchube men. Following this principle, the collected data will take into account a variety of perspectives and opinions from a diverse group of people. Due to ethical considerations, the sample is limited towards people over the age of eighteen years old. Furthermore, there is no particular reason for the chosen number of people interviewed. Because of the limited time in the field, and as I aimed for creating a valuable and trustworthy relationship with each participant, I chose the sample to be around 20 people.

7.3 Semi-structured interviews

According to Punch (2014), the interview is the most prominent data collection tool in qualitative research, hence an excellent way of accessing "people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality." (p. 144). All interviews were done in accordance with a semi-structured interview technique. The reason for not using a structured interview technique is because of its quantitative design. Accordingly, it does not leave enough room for variation in responses. However, the unstructured interview is widely used

in social science, yet its openness would make me less able to derive the interview towards the topics that I am interested in (Bryman, 2012:470-471). The reason for the chosen method was the appropriateness for answering the research questions. Although having open-ended questions, the interview is still partly directed with the help of an interview guide. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview is furthermore suitable when conducting qualitative research, as it allows the interviewee to be active in the construction of their life story. The technique can enable new ideas and themes to be explored, hence contributing to rich data (Punch, 2014:148-149).

The interview guide was developed in accordance with the research questions. Themes covered in the interviews were social stratification, categorical inequality, and identity (see appendix 11.1). Because of my fascination in societies based on caste and descent, I read up on previous research on similar topics. Since there is lacking knowledge about the social stratification system in The Gambia, interview questions were developed to answer questions not existing in previous literature. Because of the semi-structured style, however, not all questions were covered in every interview and were thus managed to fit each research participant. Moreover, meetings with participants often resulted in spontaneous dialogues, and new themes and questions arose as the interview proceeded.

7.4 Coding and analysis

In order not to miss out of essential findings during the data collection process, the analytical process was done parallel to the data collection. Thus, the process of transcribing recorded interviews together with summarizing and reflecting upon field notes began while still in the field. The method of summarizing and analyzing accessible empirical data allowed for initial thoughts about relationships and connections between the answers of the interview participants.

The research process proceeded by using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a coding technique recurrently used in sociology that allows for the analysis of patterns, categories, and sub-categories within the collected data set (Bryman, 2012:578). Initially, themes and codes were examined by hand with the use of colour coding. Each theme was thus assigned a specific colour. However, as of a large amount of data, I decided to change the coding procedure by instead using the data analysis program NVivo, a computer software specifically developed for the analysis of qualitative data. The significant benefits of the analysis program are its various features that help the researcher to efficiently save, manage and systematize a large mass of collected data, which is difficult while coding by hand. The coding procedure

was done by going through each transcript and effectively coded them into descriptive themes, or, what NVivo calls 'nodes' (Bryman, 2012:593-595). The nodes were saved in the computer program and were thus easily accessible during the whole analysis process. The data analysis was organized in such a way to answer already existing research questions. Frequently emerging themes were thus related to categorical inequality, decision-making power, social interaction, and identity creation. The theoretical concepts furthermore helped me making sense of the collected data.

In this research, coding has helped to underscore how the interview participant has expressed experience relate to categorical inequality and power structures. Furthermore, the several stages of coding helped me with the understanding of the interviews and thus grasping relevant themes.

7.5 Ethical considerations

Considering ethics is of great importance regardless of the research topic. Though, as this study deals with sensitive topics such as discrimination and categorical inequality, it is of particular importance (England, 1994). Ethical considerations have, therefore, been a critical part of the research process and every stage of the study have been guided with consideration of the wellbeing and safety of all research participants. For instance, core principles in conducting qualitative research are to create a trustful atmosphere where the research participant can feel comfortable to express their self freely. Participants were before each session informed by their rights, including confidentiality, that the interview was voluntary and that the person could cancel or interrupt the interview at any time.

Stewart-Withers et al (2014) reflects on potential problems when conducting qualitative research. She mentions that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is often situated within broader structures of power imbalances. The fact of me being white and educated can reproduce old colonial power structures putting the research participant in an inferior position. Nevertheless, the researcher has the interpretation power; thus, the power of 'setting the agenda' of the interview. In order to overcome potential hierarchical conflicts, the emphasis has been put on reflexivity and actively positioning myself throughout the research process (p. 62). Furthermore, according to England (1994), by taking the role as the 'supplicant,' the researcher makes known that the research participant possesses more knowledge in the subject than the researcher and thus the researcher is dependent on the believes and opinions of the research participant. It is a popular method in qualitative research as it somehow reduces some power from the researcher and gives it to the participant (ibid).

There is a risk of being viewed as awkward and disrespectful in the social interaction with people when being a stranger in the village lacking contextual knowledge regarding language and cultural rites. To avoid simple cultural mistakes, it is of considerable significance to be culturally sensitive, hence being mindful of biases and cultural baggage (England, 1994). Being always aware of my positionality, I also had dialogues with my translator and other local people to acquire necessary information about Nokuta before and during the data collection period.

Lastly, as a qualitative researcher studying phenomena in its natural setting, one of the challenges is to avoid both misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Trying to overcome these biases, I used response validation; thus, I 'gave back' research results to the participant in order to get their input. In that way, I was able to resolve any potential disagreements regarding my interpretations of the data collection (Hesse-Biber, 2006). Another solution to minimize misrepresentation is the inclusion of quotes of the interviewees, so their voices are (literally) represented in the text. Also, as being an issue of sensitiveness, all research participants, including the village, have been given fictional names.

7.6 Limitations

The study's limitations are mainly methodological. As the study treats research topics that could be viewed as both sensitive and taboo, there is a risk that it can affect the responses of the research participants. In order to overcome this problem, the comfort and wellbeing of the participants have henceforth always been of high priority throughout the whole study.

Because of the inevitable language barrier with a majority of the research participants, a Pulaar speaking translator was hired. The disadvantage of not understanding the local language not only gives power to the translator to 'filter' what is discussed; the loss of personal dynamics makes it tougher as research misinterpretation can arise. This bias was partially overcome by carefully discussing the issue with the translator.

Moreover, because of many weeks in the field, I had the opportunity to learn simple greetings and expressions in Pulaar. As explained by McLennan et al (2014) even simple language acquiring has professional and personal benefits when conducting qualitative research (p. 156-157). Not only did the small language skill enable more precious data in interview sessions as I came to understand specific phrases, but it also generated opportunities to interact with the people in Nokuta to a wider degree.

Conducting research using a case study approach, it is a risk of delivering a great deal of data. Although data reduction is an essential element in the research process, the narrowness

might exclude essential parts of the findings. However, due to a thoroughgoing analysis strategy, I believe myself to have included the data necessary to answer the research questions.

Lastly, this bachelor thesis covers the perceptions of categorical differences and power structures within the Fulani stratification system in Nokuta village, The Gambia. As with case studies in general, one limitation in this research is its external validity. Namely, given it is conducted in a specific socio-political and geographical context; the generalizability of the findings is limited (Bryman, 2012:69-70). The study intends to raise knowledge on the complexity of social stratification on the specific case, hence not generalize the findings to people outside Nokuta village.

8. Analysis and discussion

The following chapter will account for the analysis of the main findings. The analysis will begin by outlining key perceptions about social stratification and categories of difference among the matchube group and the dimo group. The two sections after will continue to analyze the data with the help of theoretical concepts.

8.1 Perceptions of social stratification

A 'caste system' is often referred to as a hierarchical static society characterized by an inherited transmission of lifestyle. Social membership is believed to be fixed and unchangeable. As also stated by Dilley (2000) when referring to local conceptualizations of stratification, something that became clear already in the first parts of the field period in Nokuta was the absence of the word *caste* in the Pulaar language. Even when holding interviews in English, the word was met with misinterpretation and confusion. Although used in conversation with Gambian academics and development workers when speaking of social stratification in The Gambia, there seems to be no direct equivalent word in the Pulaar language in Nokuta to in fact denote what is frequently referred to as *caste*. The purpose of the thesis is not to linguistically find out the perfect definition of social stratification in Nokuta or in The Gambia. Likewise, it does not attempt to either confirm or unbutton any general academic concept. However, by using the word *caste* without not fully understanding its definition could be misleading, as it does not rest on local conceptions. Similarly, because of its preconceived conception as being static and cemented into a social structure, it does neither take into account the changes in Nokuta that have led to a transformation within the discourses of stratification (this will be furthered elaborated later in the analysis).

During the fieldwork period, it became evident that social stratification in Nokuta village is a subject of severe complexity. Although testimonies from the matchubes and rimbeh indicate a gradual change in the social stratification due to slavery abolishment and the introduction of more democratic value systems, there is still a salience for *categorical belonging*. What became increasingly apparent as interviews proceeded was a distinction in perceptions regarding opinions of categorization among matchubes and rimbeh, and to what extent categories matter for identity creation.

The physical division between village compounds owned by matchubes on the one side and rimbeh on the other offers evidence of a separation between people of different descent. The graveyard is divided into two sections, meaning that segregation also continues after death. Endogamy practices because of the continued belief in 'purity' and 'pollution' where the rimbeh is traditionally higher up on the social ladder. This has led to the construction of a second mosque, a *matchube mosque*, as matchubes, because of their descent, are not allowed to lead prayers in the village mosque. Although denied by the rimbeh, many matchubes say that they are not even allowed inside the mosque to join the prayer. Thus, how social interaction appears between the two categories further indicates clear segregation between what the village people refer to as 'us' and the 'others'. As expressed by many interview participants, due to outside influences such as slavery abolishment and a more westernized school system, people seem to socialize more across the categorical boundaries. Weddings and naming ceremonies often take place inside someone's compound, and people are usually welcome to celebrate regardless of descent. Still, though friendship between groups occurs, social interaction predominantly happens with people of the same descent.

Not to mention, concerning discrimination as an effect of the persistent categorical society, the difference in opinions among the matchubes and rimbeh is apparent. All matchube interviewees would argue that discrimination exists, either they have been exposed to it or knows someone who has. Discrimination is told to take form in different ways, such as the exclusion of participation in mosques and name-calling. According to the rimbeh, discrimination is something that used to happen when slavery was legal, however not happening any longer.

8.1.1 Diverse perceptions of categorical difference

"If I happen to wear a shirt, and if a slave happens to wear it, I would leave it with him. I want to give it away. Because we cannot share clothes."

The above testimony is stated by the grandson of the village *Alkalo* (the village chief). It may be suggested that many rimbeh perceive themselves as very different from matchubes in Nokuta. Resting on the unequal perception of 'purity' and 'pollution,' the rimbeh cannot risk being contaminated by the matchubes by using their clothes. This view corresponds to another male dimo interviewee suggesting that if he let a matchube sit on his bed, he would "throw the bed to the dogs" (Interviewee 17).

What became noticeable when interviewing the majority of the rimbeh was that they have a sometimes hidden, yet a profound perception of being superior the matchubes. By the perceptions of the rimbeh, a member of this category is often characterized as someone that holds inherited intelligence and purity. Predominately, it was seen in many interviews with rimbeh that hold important political positions in the village and thus have high status.

"Yea… There is a difference. The difference is what I say you, the blood. It's my investigation, and my thinking capacity, that a noble is always a noble. And a slave is always a slave".

"Most of the time when the nobles and slaves are mixed, most of the time, nobles are in front of them. The higher class. In term of knowledge, in terms of education, in term of experience, in term of mind."

Within the dimo discourse, categorical membership has a higher significance as it, contrary to the beliefs of the matchubes, reflect upon their identity (their *maarsal*). When asking whether people are equal, none of the rimbeh interview participants would directly express themselves as being superior to matchubes. However, as can be seen in the quotes above, some formulations state otherwise. Furthermore, when asking the village's highest-ranked dimo (the Alkalo) if matchubes and rimbeh could be friends, he said yes. When asked if there is a chance for rimbeh and matchubes to marry, the Alkalo laughed and stated that he does "not pray for that to happen in his presence." Correspondingly, the importance of categorical difference not only enforces categorical specific rules and physical segregation. According to some rimbeh, the category is a sign of identity and determines what one can do with one's life.

"I am a noble but that does not make me superior. We are all born in this village. God created us, we all have the same creator. […] The elders are differencing us but not the young ones. It brings conflict among us. We should all term ourselves as one."

The above citation states the opinion about categorical inequality by young dimo woman. Though, the quotation is a representable statement of what young dimo women believe in the village. Contrary to the majority of the young women in Nokuta, Interviewee 5's family could afford sending her to high school. She claims that the reason for the differentiation is because of culture and tradition. As it seems, children and young adults who have gone to high school have less of an interest in keeping the separation between matchubes and rimbeh. The younger generation tends to refer to the stratification as an 'invention of the elders', and that separation is not happening among the young people.

After having interviewed people from the dimo group, it became increasingly noticeable that opinions regarding categorical differences differ depending on age, social status, sex, and educational status. Simultaneously as women (and educated) are more open to having friendships outside their category, interviewed men tend to be more exclusive in their social interaction. Ancestry plays a vital role as it in the male dimo discourse determines whom one is. Some would justify this categorical injustice by arguing that it is the will of Alla'h[4]

Moreover, the matchubes also tend to make known that they are not part of the dimo group. Similar to the rimbeh, there is also here a notion of 'them' and 'us.' However, the matchube discourse tends to differ significantly in their perceptions about the interviewed rimbeh. Instead of identifying themselves under a prescribed category, the matchubes argue that the community rests upon unequal categorical structures and that the rimbeh are calling them matchubes/slaves. However, they do not agree themselves to *be* matchubes/slaves. Based on these findings, there seems to be some *ambiguity* about how people in Nokuta village refer to themselves. Hence, in contrast to rimbeh who would identify themselves per their prescribed category, many matchubes would instead refer to family (*koreje*), neighborhood or household (*galle*) when speaking of belonging and identity. One can link this to Dilley's (2000) article of the local conceptions of stratifications among Fulani groups in West Africa. Although a person has been 'given' a position within the social stratification, this does not necessarily mean that the person identifies with the specific position (ibid).

"The ones calling themselves nobles /…/ They think that they are everything. Mhm. You see? And I believe that somebody you don't give a person food, shelter, clothes, no nothing if you are saying that person is a slave!"

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[4] Alla'h – the Arabic and Muslim way of saying god (ne.se, 2019).

According to interviewee 7, the rimbeh are enforcing the physical and psychological distance between the groups because of their common conviction of being *better* than the matchubes. Though, he does not see the point in calling someone a slave when slavery is in fact is eradicated. This opinion is shared by most of the interviewed matchube individuals in Nokuta. Simultaneously as the majority of the matchubes claim that the dimo discourse rests upon old and unequal structures of supremacy and inferiority, the matchubes believe that everyone should have equal rights. One can, for instance, describe this by using the example of the *Nokuta youth association*, which is an association created as a protest against the unequal categorization between matchubes and rimbeh. Starting as a small group of young matchubes and rimbeh in 2018, the association grows every month to raise awareness of the opinions of the young people in Nokuta, opinions they believe have not been heard in the past. The association organizes activities, hold monthly meetings, and even have representatives in the local parliament. Stated by one of the founders of the association: "The association was created to be one family, to forget about the past and look forward the coming generation." (Interviewee 10, man, matchube).

Furthermore, as among the rimbeh, differences in perceptions of categorization are apparent even in the discourses of the matchubes. One can roughly distinguish two groups within the matchubes; the first group could be classified as more or less *accepting* the unequal treatment and live their lives without questioning it. This group mainly consists of the older generation's matchubes. The others can be seen as the ones *not* willing to accept it. This is mostly the younger generation who believes in and promotes equal treatment regardless of stratification. Relevant to add, this generalization may not be supported by all people in Nokuta village. Hence the study is based on the subjective perception of 22 people.

"When you are treated badly because of being a matchube, you accept it out of faith."

An older woman that has lived her whole life in the village gives this quotation. When discussing the issue of categorical inequality and discrimination, the woman states that she sometimes is being discriminated because of being a matchube, yet it used to be different. She describes that she does not feel welcome in the village mosque and sometimes when she walks past a dimo, (s)he can unprovoked call her a slave. When she was younger, the rimbeh

would treat her even worse and force her to do chores such as cooking and fetch water for them. This is, she describes, not happening anymore. As stated among many older matchube individuals, she does agree that people should not be treated differently because of descent; however, she has learned to accept the discrimination it to avoid trouble.

8.2. Notions of power

"The nobles don't like the chairperson to be a slave, but the chairperson is a slave. Because by saying that when a slave being the chairperson, they will follow the word of that person".

<div align="right">Interviewee 9, man (matchube)</div>

The issue of *power* is a subject frequently touched upon within interviews; therefore, this topic has a central part in the analysis. In this section, I will connect perceptions of power with Steven Lukes' second dimension of power, which is the *agenda-setting powe*r. It will be argued that this concept can, to a certain degree, be applied to the case of Nokuta.

Interviewing an older matchube man he revealed his perception of power as being 'the power of speech.' He believes that if one can come forward with one's wishes and desires that is a sign of power and control. Matchube interview participant 13, claiming that power is also when someone listens and respects you irrespective of what background you might have, supports this statement. Regardless of categorical belonging, the majority of the interviewees would, nevertheless, speak of power as something that is connected to decision-making and *to have power over someone else*. According to the Alkalo's grandson, the Alkalo family is entitled to the power of ruling the village as it was given to them when their ancestors took over the village centuries ago. According to him, the matchubes are 'guests' in this village. This statement is not shared by the matchubes interviewed. They believe that everyone should, regardless of their descent, have the power to make decisions regarding the village. For all that, what could be understood in interviews is a contradiction in opinions between matchubes and rimbeh regarding to *whom* the power in Nokuta, in fact, *belongs*.

Nokuta village has been described as a community of traditional hierarchical values regarding superiority and inferiority. In ancient times, warriors took over the village and held people as domestic slaves. The abolishment of slavery, together with the introduction of a more westernized education system, the hierarchical discourse of rimbeh and matchubes, has begun losing its grip among people in Nokuta. Hence the concepts of 'purity' and 'pollution' have become increasingly *fluid*.

Having researched the development of caste and social stratification in West Africa, Tamari (1991) suggests that contact with Western institutions tend to weaken the importance of traditional beliefs of social stratification (ibid). Likewise, in contrast to before slavery abolishment and the introduction of a Western school system in Nokuta, the village has become more democratic with a local parliament now consisting of democratically selected women and men of both the rimbeh and the matchubes. The change in discourse has thus led to a *transformation* from a totalitarian hierarchical discourse to a discourse that has adopted more egalitarian principles.

Furthermore, because of the long-lasting effects of the former discourse, the rimbeh continues to possess ruling positions in the village. The village has a democratically elected parliament where everyone has one vote. When it comes to legislative proposals not supported by the Alkalo however, he always has the absolute power to say yes or no, regardless of what the others have voted. In contrast to other local parliamentarians, the Alkalo position inherits by one of the dimo families and can thus not be possessed by a matchube.

"They cannot lead people here… The equality is gonna be somehow missing is some places."

Interviewee 2, man (dimo)

The citation above summarizes a common belief among the rimbeh. Although no longer having any explicit ruling power, many rimbeh want to keep their superior power by *reducing* the influence of the matchubes. For instance, concerning political decisions in the local parliament, some rimbeh tend to ignore the requests of the matchubes. This makes it harder for the matchubes to carry through decisions in the local parliament.

"Yea because, /…/ when you are in a community, whereby the believe has not been the same, it always give us tough time, how to convince people. You have to talk to them always, you try to look for a way whereby you convince them so the believe they had before, you'll find a way to remove those beliefs so that you can be in term."

Interviewee 7, man (matchube)

This testimony links to what Lukes (2005) would call *agenda-setting* power (the second dimension). All forms of political organization "have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others" (p. 20). It may be assumed that the rimbeh makes use of their agenda-setting power to effectively ignore the demands of the

matchubes so that the rimbeh group can continue being powerful. Mosse (2010) uses Lukes' second dimension of power when discussing the discrimination of low caste individuals in India. He claims that "power relations in society are always shaped by wider political systems and /.../ depends on the capacity of others to impose social classifications upon them and then speak on their behalf" (p. 1166). Because of their descent, the socially and politically inferior *Dalits* and *Adivasis* continue to be exploited in politics as well as in the labour market since they do not have the power to defend their rights. Likewise, because of the rimbeh's superior position in village politics, they still have the power to a *certain extent*, exclude the interests of the matchube from the political agenda. Accordingly, the power to decide what should be discussed but most essentially, what should *not* be discussed. The most perceptible and easily understood example related to the second dimension of power was how the rimbeh, before slavery abolishment, used to exclude the matchubes for entering the village politics. As of rimbeh's superior power, the matchubes have for centuries had no right to claim their opinions or views regarding village politics. Another example related to agenda-setting power could be the absence of, until recently, the term 'discrimination' in everyday conversations. By more or less guiding the political conversation in a specific direction, hence steering the *agenda*, there has been no political arena to express feelings or suspicions of discrimination.

"Whenever we meet, now I can say thank God. The Alkalo is changing. Because, when we meet if he is the one to call he will tell the agenda of the meeting. When he tell us the purpose of the meeting, so now we are left with the population of the community to discuss. So whatever the majority say, we are going according to that. Ya. Now things have been changed. How it was before and today is quite different."

Interviewee 7, man (matchube)

This is a quote derived from a conversation with a young male parliamentarian when discussing the political situation in Nokuta village, which he describes as *gradually* changing. When asking him if there have been any *concrete* changes in the village due to the changing discourse, he brings up the development of the *village youth association* that has, because of its popularity in village politics, begun influencing political decisions. Simultaneously as the association has created a social meeting place for young matchubes and rimbeh to gather, it has carried through several legislative proposals such as a changed tax system.

Accordingly, as a cause of the initiation of more egalitarian principles in the community, people have come to question persisting power structures, which has resulted in a

transformation of the political system. Although rimbeh have more power due to the position of the Alkalo, for instance, the agenda-setting power has now *transformed* to be in favour of both the rimbeh and the matchubes. Ergo, now both rimbeh and matchubes have the power to influence what should and should not be discussed in village politics.

8.3 Intergenerational inequality

In this section, the empirical material conducted in Nokuta will be connected with Tilly's (1998) theory of durable inequality. The section discusses that the situation in Nokuta can, to some degree, be explained by using his concepts of adaptation and intergenerational inequality.

As explained in section 6.2, Tilly (1998) argues for how social categorization often leads to categorical inequality. Categorical inequality is in itself enduring, meaning that it lasts from one generation to another simultaneously as it establishes internalized norms and values that have stability through time, space, and culture (p. 8).

Generally, when societies are developed in accordance with hierarchical power structures (such as slavery or racial segregation) where one group possesses power over another, discrimination is justified. However, what seems to be the case with many categorical societies is that although unequal structures are formally eradicated, legacies of former discriminatory structures persist (Mosse, 2010). To illustrate, although the racial doctrine in the United States where the regime separated black people from white people was officially removed decades ago, Afro-Americans continue to face economic, political and social challenges due to their color (Hoff and Pandey, 2006). Likewise, although slavery is abandoned and categorization has no proper function in Nokuta, discriminatory structures of categorical differences continue to colour people's identities in the village. An interview with a very old matchube woman that is called interviewee 8 supports this claim. When talking about descent-based discrimination, she indicated that she sometimes have feelings of vulnerability and inferiority in the social interaction with rimbeh. Because of their traditional superiority as slaveholders in Nokuta, she claims that she sometimes "feel like a slave" in their presence. The persistent effects of inequality can moreover be seen in an interview with one of the highest ranked rimbeh in the village of Nokuta:

> "If you have some work to do, he can do it for you. Pay, you can give him what you want. Because this system cannot be totally eradicated. That's going to be very difficult /…/ Today, when I have money I won't call my neighbor nobles to do to work for me. I call a slave to do work for me."

The fact that rimbeh would not ask another dimo to do chores for them further demonstrates how they feel about categorical difference. It also evidences how the connection between the superiority of the rimbeh and the inferiority of matchube is somehow naturalized in the rimbeh's discourse.

"Think since you were born you see it is mixed since you grandparents you don't see mixture with them. When you come and start mixing it, then it is bad. For sure."

This is an answer I received after asking if this young dimo man believed that matchubes and rimbeh should be able to marry in the future. The justification of the categorical difference rests on the argument that it has always been like that; therefore it shall not change. Many rimbeh share this belief in Nokuta. The physically separated community, the continued practice of endogamy, and the unwillingness to share clothes are only a few examples of how unequal structures of purity and contamination continue to influence everyday life in Nokuta village.

As discussed in 8.2, close contact with Western institutions such as Western schools or other social meeting places tends to *weaken* the importance of traditional beliefs of social stratification. However, although a more human rights-based discourse has begun to establish in the village, old values persist. This could suggest the *enduring* mechanism of durable inequality, meaning that the belief in unequal discourses of differences has adapted into the common belief of the village's population (Tilly, 1998:10-11). To draw on the work of Tilly, the categorization of people in Nokuta not only institute categorical specific rules such as the inappropriateness for matchubes to join prayers in the village mosque; one can claim that the categories have been invested into social meaning.

When explaining *adaptation*, Tilly (1998) argues that both the superior and inferior categories build routines and practices around the categorical boundary, and begin acquiring an interest in the maintenance of the categorization. This suggests that even the inferior group (the matchube) have accepted the categorical difference and are active in its reproduction (p. 97-98). This may be true to a certain extent, as there are matchubes that more or less 'accept' the unequal treatment, as mentioned above in section 8.1.1. This corresponds to an interview with a middle-aged matchube woman stating that she can sometimes feel discriminated by the

rimbeh, but she does not react to it very often. Moreover, another matchube participant would say that at first, it felt strange going to the matchube mosque and not the village mosque, but, after a while, it became normal for her to go to the matchube mosque and she stopped thinking it was strange. Accordingly, the unequal structures of difference between matchubes and rimbeh have, to some degree, become part of their daily life routine. As explained by the author, core in understanding durable inequality is that "the organization of categories takes precedence over the attributes of the individuals" (Mosse, 2010:1163) so the unequal structures become *self-reproducing* (ibid). In other words, the categorical difference, hence, discrimination of matchubes become *normal*. Customary laws in the village, together with traditional belief systems have shown to play a significant role in the creation and maintenances of the categorical difference between matchubes and rimbeh. Category-specific practices (endogamy), mythologies (the belief that matchubes are polluted) and jokes reinforce the structures of inequality; hence help them grow stronger (Tilly, 1998:97-98).

"Slaves… Now they have seen themselves. Because what we realized is that all creation come from the same creator. It is the colour that is different, and the language. But we all come from one person. That is the belief we have."

Interviewee 7, man (matchube)

On the other hand, what has been discussed earlier in the analysis, traditional beliefs of superiority and inferiority have begun losing its grip among people in Nokuta village, and people of both groups have begun questioning unequal power structures. The growth of the youth association, the new school systems, together with the initiation of a more egalitarian local parliament may suggest that the unequal structures of inequality against matchubes are on its way out of the village.

9. Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study has been to achieve an understanding of how social stratification in Nokuta village operates concerning power structures and the reproduction of descent-based social categories. Because of the inadequate knowledge in the field, the study intends to give an account for how these power structures are understood and discussed by the people affected by them, that is the matchube group (*slaves*) and the dimo group (*nobles*). In the analysis, I have included Charles Tilly's theory of durable inequality (1998) and Steven

Lukes' multidimensional power approach (2005) to discuss the subject from a theoretical point of view.

As been mentioned earlier, this case study is based on the interviews of 22 research participants in the village of Nokuta, The Gambia. Because of these limitations, the research does not intend to generalize the findings to social stratification in The Gambia as a whole. Social stratification or what some call *caste* is a phenomenon of severe complexity and varies greatly depending on community and tribe. In order to make sense of social stratification in other places in the country, more research is required.

Concerning categories of difference in Nokuta village, what has become particularly apparent after conducting interviews is the distinction in opinions between the matchube and dimo groups. Male rimbeh with high social and political status seem to have a much stronger belief that they are different compared to the matchubes. This belief rests on unequal and *intergenerational* mechanisms of *superiority* and *inferiority* from the time when rimbeh held matchubes as domestic slaves. Fear of losing social and political power due to the changing discourse, some rimbeh try to exclude matchubes from decision-making arenas. This can be seen in interviews conducted with the village Alkalo, Alkalo's grandson and with other high ranked male rimbeh people.

Nevertheless, social stratification does not rest upon one common concept as people in Nokuta village define themselves differently depending on their descent, age, social status, and educational level. In general, matchubes differ significantly in their perceptions about the categorical difference. Instead of defining themselves in accordance with prescribed positions of being *slaves*, they would argue that everyone should be equal, regardless of social background. This general statement, as explained by numerous interviewees, has developed in accordance with the changing discourse in Nokuta village that has given matchubes more freedom to express their opinions. The change in discourse has led to a gradual political as well as social *transformation* from a totalitarian hierarchical discourse to a discourse that has adopted more democratic structures. Given the abolition of the former slave system, the function of the socially constructed categories of being a *noble* and a *slave* has begun to lessen in significance. Thus, the social stratification in Nokuta village seems to be much more *fluid* than before. While the rimbeh no longer have the formal decision-making power to make a matchube do what (s)he wishes, they furthermore do no longer have the totalitarian power to set the *agenda*. This gradual transition has, in turn, led to that people start "breaking the barriers" of their prescribed positions of being inferior and superior. Concurrently as

matchube men and women now can make demands in village politics, one can also see friendships across stratification boundaries.

However, as discussed in the analysis, although not all people agree with their prescribed categories, the enduring intergenerational mechanism of durable inequality seems to persist within the social structure of the village. Simultaneously as one's prescribed identity matters when it comes to where one lives and where one goes to pray, it is also significant when it comes to marriage. The matchubes do not consider themselves to be inferior to the rimbeh, yet the intergenerational effects of difference have adapted into the daily life routines of both categories, hence have become *normal*.

Finally, being a matter of severe complexity, it has become noticeable that there seems to be some ambivalence to how to refer to social stratification in Nokuta village. In the absence of an actual term to refer to as *caste,* interviewed people in the village would instead refer to ancestry, descent (*matchube* and *dimo*/*rimbeh*), or family (*koreje*) to define their belonging (*mingiino*). Based on these findings, it might be inappropriate to refer to social stratification in Nokuta village as a *fixed* system of prearranged social identities. Although the enduring effects of social inequality continue to color the identities of people in Nokuta village, the identities are not, as has been discussed, 'set in stone'. Therefore, one could argue that social stratification in Nokuta village may not be argued as a 'caste system', but rather *discourses of categorical difference*.

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11. Appendices

11.1 Interview guide

1. Background:
Name, Birth, Occupation, Marital status
How does a normal day look like for you?
How does the history of your family look like?
For how long have you/your family lived in this village?

2. Identity:

How would you describe yourself?

Is it important for you that people know who you are?

Would you identify yourself with as being a dimo/matchube?

Are you satisfied with the situation you are in right now?

<u>3. Social stratification:</u>

Can you tell me about Nokuta village?

Have you ever experienced any kind of inequality/conflict in the village?

Do you believe that there is a hierarchical system based descent in this village?

- Can you describe how this system plays out in the village?

- How does the system affect you in your daily life?

- How do you believe other people in the village perceive you?

- Have you ever experienced any kind of discrimination because of your social position? Can you describe it in your own words?

- Can people of different social standing marry/be together/be friends?

- Do you believe that there should be this kind of system in the village?

- Do you believe that people should be equal?

- Do you believe that being a dimo or a matchube determine what you can do with your life

11.2 List of interview participants

Interview number	Sex	Stratification	Date
1	man	dimo	2019-02-20
2	man	dimo	2019-03-18
3	woman	matchube	2019-02-05
4	man	dimo	2019-02-21
5	woman	dimo	2019-02-21
6	woman	matchube	2019-03-18
7	man	matchube	2019-01-19
8	woman	matchube	2019-02-06
9	man	matchube	2019-02-27
10	man	matchube	2019-02-04
11	man	dimo	2019-03-18
12	woman	matchube	2019-02-05
13	man	matchube	2019-03-19
14	woman	dimo	2019-02-19
15	woman	matchube	2019-02-20

16	man	matchube	2019-02-04
17	man	dimo	2019-02-04
18	woman	dimo	2019-02-20
19	woman	matchube	2019-02-19
20	woman	dimo	2019-03-19
21	woman	dimo	2019-02-26
22	man	matchube	2019-02-04