The Dagara farmer at home and away: migration, environment and development in Ghana

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Preface and acknowledgements

An olive tree can reach fruit-bearing age after four years, but it may take longer. This depends mostly on the type of olive tree, soil and weather conditions, cultivation practices and the amount of competing weeds. In the Dutch university system, a PhD project is supposed to mature after four years, but it often takes longer, depending mostly on the capacities and ambitions of the PhD candidate, the quality of supervision, institutional support, a bit of luck and the side activities the candidate engages in, or to put it negatively, the amount of competing weeds. My PhD project took more than eight years to mature. How come? I was more than happy with my supervisors, the institutional support was good, and in eight years, it is inevitable to experience bad luck sometimes. My capacities can best be judged by others. My ambition is to become a good researcher rather than to have a fast career. Another ambition is to become a *homo universalis*, in the spirit of Alexander von Humboldt. These ambitions and the freedom that comes with a PhD project made me to invest quite some time in developing qualitative and quantitative research skills and to engage in quite a number of side activities – competing weeds some would say – that caused some of the delay. The analogy between an olive tree and a PhD project could be taken further to discuss the volume of the harvest, the oil content and the number of years a tree remains productive, but let me leave it here.

In this pre-amble, I summarise the story of my PhD trajectory and express my gratitude to the many people I met on the way, people who shared the joy of the good times, people who stood by me during hard times, people who made this PhD project possible and people who contributed to the quality of the output.

In April 2002 I finished my Master’s thesis about climate change and livelihood vulnerability among rural households in Nandom (Northwest Ghana). By choice, the data gathering for this study had taken unusually long, a full year. During that year I had come to love life in Nandom and I had established warm friendships with people in the area. I had been adopted as a son by Mr. Constantio Nurudong – better known as Mr. Kontana – and I had had the privilege to live in Mr. Kontana’s ‘mud castle’ for a year. This gave me the opportunity to experience the beauty, but also the hardships, of daily life in a rural community in Northern Ghana. Mr. Kontana taught me some basics of the Dagaare language; he shared his vast knowledge of Dagara culture with me; and he encouraged me to participate in all realms of village life, for example by giving me a small piece of land to cultivate. I had the time of my life. Back in the Netherlands, while writing my Master’s thesis, I had just one desire: to return as soon as possible.
The chance to return to Nandom came sooner than expected. About half a year before the completion of my Master’s thesis, my supervisor, Professor Ton Dietz, had brought me into contact with Dr. Kees Burger, econometrician at the Free University of Amsterdam, who was working on a research proposal about migration and environment in Burkina Faso and Ghana. I contributed some ideas to the proposal and a few months later the news came that the proposal had been accepted for funding by the Dutch Council for Scientific Research (NWO). Within the research project there was a vacancy for a PhD candidate to study the environmental and economic consequences of migration from Northwest Ghana. This was a great opportunity to continue work among the Dagara of Nandom along the lines of my previous research, which had found that human mobility has a central place in rural household strategies to deal with environmental scarcity and natural hazards. After a discussion with Kees Burger, in which he reassured me that I would be free to choose a research design that best fitted my disciplinary background in human geography, I decided to accept the offer, and started work in October 2002.

I spent the first three months of my PhD project in Brighton (UK) at the Sussex Centre for Migration Research. This centre offered an excellent course in theories and typologies of migration, and an extremely stimulating academic environment. I would like to thank tutor Professor Russell King and course convenor Professor Richard Black for introducing me to the rich field of migration studies and for their valuable feedback on my research plans. The University of Sussex, and especially the Institute of Development Studies, proved to be an excellent place to develop my research plan, to find and study relevant literature and engage with leading academics in the field of migration, environment and development. I have very fond memories of my encounters, however short, with Robert Chambers, Melissa Leach, Ronald Skeldon and Ann Whitehead, scholars whom I hitherto only knew from the world of paper. I further want to thank my fellow PhDs in the research project – Fleur Wouterse and Victor Owusu – who also followed the migration course in Brighton. We had a few good sessions in which we shared and discussed the best pieces of literature we came across and in which we commented on each other’s research plans.

In January 2003 I travelled to Ghana to carry out a two-month pilot study in a principal destination area of Dagara migrants, the Brong Ahafo Region. I settled in Wenchi Town, a district capital with about thirty thousand inhabitants and a large Dagara community. Through the local office of CARE International I met Cyril Yabepone, a Dagara from Nandom who invited me to stay in his house. I gratefully accepted Cyril’s hospitality and through him I met several other Dagara, some of whom would come to play an important role in the research. Cyril introduced me to Constance Saasie, circuit supervisor at Ghana Education Services and Ben Tibo, extension worker at the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. They accompanied me on
several exploration tours on the back of a motorbike and helped me to organize focus group discussions with Dagara migrants in the – often remote – villages we visited. They were wonderful facilitators and skilful interpreters. In Wenchi I also met my friend Emmanuel Wassah. Our frequent beer sessions were a great source of entertainment and his accounts of life as a Northerner in Southern Ghana were a great source of inspiration.

After the pilot study in the Brong Ahafo Region, I returned to the Netherlands for a three month PhD training at CERES, the Dutch inter-university research school for development studies in Utrecht. Initially, I was not all that pleased to abort my stay in Ghana to follow this course. However, I was soon convinced of its usefulness. The very diverse programme, coordinated by Ab van Eldijk, offered a great opportunity to engage with other PhDs and senior academics in the field of development studies. I particularly liked the inspiring lectures by Frans Schuurman, Mirjam de Bruijn, Han van Dijk, Emiel Drooglever Fortuijn, Gerben Nooteboom, Lorraine Nencel and Ben White. The fruitful discussions with fellow PhDs, which extended far beyond the classroom, and in which we gave continuous and critical feedback on each other’s research design and theoretical underpinnings, proved to be an important asset for improvement of our proposals. I particularly appreciated sharing ideas with Bram Buscher, Udan Fernando, Marjan Koster and Theofile Djedjebi. Long after the PhD training, CERES continues to be an important network for young development scholars. The annual conference, in which PhD candidates are encouraged to organize panels and present their findings, is a very accessible and friendly event that helps young researchers to develop their academic skills beyond the daily task of data gathering, analysis and write-up. I had the opportunity to organize two panels for which I wish to thank my co-organizers Annelies Zoomers, Ton van Naerssen and Rico Lie. A special word of thanks is also due to the CERES secretariat, particularly Lolita van Toledo.

Having finished the PhD training and having completed the research plan and test versions of the questionnaires, it was now time to embark on the main fieldwork. Instead of taking a plane, I decided to buy a van and head for Ghana overland. Thank you, Linda van der Zwet and André van der Zijden, for accompanying me on this unforgettable trip.

The main fieldwork would last for sixteen months (September 2003 to December 2004). I spent the first half of the fieldwork period in a destination area of Dagara migrants (Wenchi), and the second half in a migrant source area (Nandom). In both areas, I could count on the splendid services of my principal research assistant Augustine Yelfaanibe (see picture 1). It is difficult to express the importance of his input in my research. During many months we shared almost literally every moment of the day. Augustine gave very valuable feedback on the test questionnaires, using his knowledge of Dagara language and culture and his experience with own research
to explain why certain questions would not work and how to adjust such questions to make them more compatible with the social and cultural reality of the respondents. Augustine also used his wide social network to help recruit and train an intelligent, precise and hard-working team of questionnaire enumerators. When the questionnaire interviews started, Augustine’s task was to go around checking whether the enumerators encountered any problems during the interviews. After a long day in the field we would go through the questionnaires with the enumerators to safeguard the quality. We also did the data entry together. All in all, Augustine was a dream to work with. Augustine, thank you so much for everything you did for me! I wish you all the luck and prosperity in your own academic career. I hope and trust that we will continue to work together in the future.

*Picture 1*  The author (right) with his principal assistant Augustine Yelfaanibe (left) and a respondent (the late Bernard Derbie) in Nandom-Dondometeng.

In Wenchi the team of enumerators consisted of Martin Ngmenkpeng, Sylvester Bafere, Augustine Kogme and Edward Maakpe. The enumerators in Nandom were Cosmas Terkemuure, Dominic Maabesog and Alexis Dogle. Both teams were wonderful to work with. Dedicated, eager to learn, joyful, respectful to respondents and thirsty for a beer after a long and dusty day of hard work are some of the key phrases to describe my experience with both teams of enumerators.
A big and loud barka yaga (thank you very much) is also due to all respondents of the questionnaires, totalling almost six hundred. The questionnaire interviews took about two hours of their valuable time, but the respondents almost invariably expressed gratitude for getting a chance to share their experiences with us. Although I sometimes have my doubts, I sincerely hope that the kind of research development scholars engage in can in one way or the other contribute to an improvement of the situation of the people we work with.

During my second stay in Nandom, in which again I resided in Mr. Kontana’s ‘mud castle’, I had the chance to deepen and strengthen my relation with the family (see picture 2) that adopted me as a son and the people from surrounding compounds. Even more than during my first stay, I was encouraged to participate in family life. We decided to add two new rooms to the old house. The building process (see picture 12 on page 114), with a diverse set of labour arrangements and a mix of local architecture and modern materials, was an invaluable experience, not in the least from a social science perspective. It contributed greatly to my understanding of labour relations, Dagara worldview and the local ways of doing things. Thank you, Mr Kontana, Mrs Lucilla Makairi, Primus, Peter-Clever, Mr Rogation Dery, Mrs Afradina, Kwaku and Edina for giving me a second home. I miss you every day.

Picture 2 The author’s host family in Nandom. On the right Mr Kontana and his wife Makairi and on the left his son Peter-Clever, a visitor and his grandson Primus.
The fieldwork in Ghana involved more than administering questionnaires alone. Besides other primary data collection methods, such as life histories and focus group discussions, my analysis of migration, environment and development linkages also relied on secondary data that I collected from several governmental and non-governmental organizations in Ghana. I wish to thank the staff of the Nandom Agricultural Project (rainfall data), the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Wa, Wenchi and Accra (crop production data), the Meteorological Services Department in Wa and Accra (rainfall data), Ghana Statistical Services in Accra (population census data), Town and Country Planning in Wa (survey maps) and the Geography Department of the University of Ghana in Legon (digital maps and GIS data) for their kind services. Many thanks also to the library of the African Studies Centre (ASC) in Leiden for conserving hidden treasures, like historic census reports of the Gold Coast, going back to the early 20th century. Thank you, Ella Verkaik, librarian at the ASC, for your enthusiasm and interest in my work, and for always taking ample time to show me the way to the treasures.

The secondary data gathering and other activities, such as literature searches and a one-week intensive guest lectureship at the University for Development Studies, compelled me to travel to other parts of Ghana on a regular basis. Fortunately, I had friends – Ghanaian, Dutch and American – who offered me their kind hospitality in most of these places: Abraham Navele, Cindy Noordermeer and Apollo Panou in Wa, Prof David Millar in Bolgatanga, Father Kofi Ron Lange and Father Jon Kirby in Tamale, and Albertine de Lange, Marloes Kraan, Jan van der Horst and Tenzu Navele in Accra. However, I most frequently lodged with my paternal uncle, Reverend Brother Dick van der Geest, in Wa. Ome Dick, it was really nice to have a close relative nearby. Thank you for all you did for me and for many Ghanaian friends over the years. I very much enjoyed the time we spent together and I admire your resilience. You had to deal with many adversities in the past ten years, but you always kept up the spirit. I am very happy to have come to know you better and I hope we will continue to meet often, in Ghana, the Netherlands and in Spain.

A large number of friends made my stay in Ghana a particularly pleasant one. Besides the ones I already mentioned, I would like to thank the following persons for sharing enjoyable moments and helping me out in numerous ways: Patrick Nakpenaa, Festus Langkuu, Mr. Stanislaus Nasaal, Mr. Nilus Kabubah, Mr. Boniface Nakaar, Mr. Raymond Zinser, nurse Mary Bagdome, Dick Elhorst, Brother Wim Luyten and Father Patrick.

During my long fieldwork, several Dutch friends came to visit me. Their many critical questions and comments helped me to see my life and work in Ghana with fresh eyes. Their visits also encouraged me to take short breaks from the fieldwork and to explore parts of the country that I was not yet familiar with. Thank you, Arjen Schijf, Monique Lempers, Geeske Hovingh and Albertine de Lange for sharing
those good times. One visit, by Eva and her sister Raquel had a very special outcome. Ten years after we first met in Granada (Spain) and fell in love, her visit to Ghana rejuvenated the old love that never died, and made us decide to embark on a life-long journey together. Five years later, in September 2009, our beautiful son Ruben Kontana was born. I dedicate this book to both of you. Os quiero muchísimo! Evita, thank you for standing by me in tough times and sharing many beautiful moments. Sorry for being absent-minded, totally absorbed by my work and not in the best of moods sometimes. I look forward to the future now the thesis work is over!

Although I originally planned to do part of the write-up in Ghana, love made me to travel back to Europe as soon as the data gathering was completed in December 2004. In 2005 and the first half of 2006 I enjoyed the liberty that comes with writing a PhD thesis to alternate between the Netherlands and Spain. During periods in Spain, I could withdraw to write. In the Netherlands, I could communicate more intensively with my supervisors and be part of an active academic community. I was very lucky to have Ton Dietz and Kees Burger as my supervisory team. Kees, thank you for initiating this research, for always having time for me and for being so open to my human geographical approach of the research topic. In the past years, I have met quite a number of econometricians and economists who seemed to speak a different language. I never met one with whom it was so easy and pleasant to communicate – for a human geographer – as with you. Thank you for our long, intensive and constructive meetings, which always gave me new ideas and the energy to move on. I want to apologize for the delay in the completion of this thesis. You were the one who had to send progress reports to the funding agency and it must have been frustrating to have one of the three PhD projects delaying so much.

Ton, where should I start, thanking you? You are my father in human geography. Thank you for your confidence and patience. You never doubted that this project would be completed successfully and this gave me the strength to carry on even in times when there was little progress. You were the best supervisor I could imagine because you gave me the freedom to develop my own ideas and the time to let these ideas mature. When you saw that it was really taking too long, you increased the pressure, but always in a constructive and realistic way. Thank you also for your inspiring visit to my fieldwork area in the Brong Ahafo Region – in the equally inspiring company of Valentina Mazzucato. Lastly, I would like to thank you for supporting my decision to write a PhD dissertation based on journal articles. This decision caused extra delay, but it was a step I felt I needed to take in a time when publishing in international journals has become such an important yardstick of success as an academic scholar.

In the summer of 2006, I was asked to take up a position as junior lecturer in the department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies at the
University of Amsterdam. My tasks would be to teach the courses ‘human geography of developing countries’ and ‘environment and sustainable development’, to assist in a lecture series on education and development and to supervise students in their Master’s thesis project. Erroneously thinking I was pretty close to completing my own thesis work, and assuming that I would have enough time in between the teaching tasks to finish the dissertation within a year or so, I accepted the offer. The reality was different. Teaching used up most of my time and for two years there was very little progress in my PhD work. Things changed for the better after I moved to Spain in the autumn of 2008. I still had to divide my energy between thesis writing and earning an income, but the work I did was less fragmented in time, which allowed me to make more progress in the thesis work.

The demanding nature of the teaching duties was not the only cause of my lack of progress between 2006 and 2008. In the summer of 2004, I had followed a fantastic course at Open Studio in Amsterdam that taught me the basics of video filming and editing. The reason for taking this course was that I wanted to integrate the use of video in my research and, if feasible, make a documentary to disseminate my findings to a wider audience. The first result was a short film, called Shit & Chicks, about a poultry farmer in Northwest Ghana who uses an age-old and environmentally sustainable technique to feed his chickens. I initially made this film as a try-out before embarking on a larger film project covering the findings of my PhD research. Despite the simplicity of its storyboard and the primitive camera work and editing, Shit & Chicks became a success and reached a large audience after it entered the short-docs competition at the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in 2006. In the following years, the film was screened at over twenty documentary film festivals worldwide, on all five continents. I had a great time visiting some festivals and engaging with other film makers from whom I learned a lot. After the success of Shit & Chicks, it was difficult to resist the temptation to concentrate more on film making. However, I realised that it was important to finish the thesis first and explore possibilities for new films afterwards. In the past three years, I did get a few opportunities to combine development studies and film making, for example for the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam and for the PADEV research project (see below).

I very much enjoyed my time as a PhD candidate and junior lecturer at the geography and planning department of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the place where I started my academic training in 1994. Although I was sometimes frustrated by my lack of progress, I am grateful to our former teaching director Johan Post for giving me the chance to gain experience as a lecturer. The contact with enthusiastic students was very gratifying and the need to leave the niche topic of my own thesis to cover the broader field of development studies was very enlightening. Thank you, Niels Beerepoot, Mirjam Ros-Tonen and Mario Novelli
for co-organizing the courses. It was a great pleasure to work with you. Also, it was very nice to become a colleague of my old teachers, particularly Ad de Bruijne, Isa Baud, Fred Zaal, Johan Post, Maarten Bavinck, Michaela Hordijk, Leo de Klerk, Sjoerd de Vos and Joos Drooglever Fortuijn. Thank you all for your frequent, but not too frequent hallway or coffee machine inquiries about the progress of my work. Thank you, Sjoerd, for always having your door open to answer my questions about statistics. Thank you, Maarten, for having your house, garden and kitchen open for the great dinner meetings of our Geographies of Inclusive Development group. Thank you, Leo de Haan, for showing me the way in development geography.

The Amsterdam institute of Metropolitan and International Development Studies (AMIDSt) had a lively group of PhD candidates, including several who worked on Ghana. Our academic interaction was inspiring and constructive and our social interaction more than pleasant. We commented on each other’s work; some of us visited each other in the field; and we occasionally had a Friday afternoon drink. I hope – and I am confident – that our relation is strong enough to keep in close touch in the future. Thank you, in particular, Koen Kusters, Anna Laven, Marloes Kraan, Toni Verger, Lothar Smith, Udan Fernando, Aenne Post, Hebe Verrest and Mirjam Kabki for being great colleagues and friends. Thank you also, Joram Grünfeld, for being the best possible office mate one can desire.

Besides the UvA colleagues I already mentioned, I am indebted to many more and for many reasons. Thank you, Evert Verkuijlen and Els Veldhuizen, for your encouragement and assistance in integrating Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis in my work. Thank you, Marianne Heelsbergen, Puikang Chan and Guida Morais e Castro for your secretarial support and for being the lively social centre of our department. Thank you, Gert van der Meer, for being the kind of financial manager our university needs in order not to become a ruthless enterprise. Thank you, Arjen Sas, for your software support and for the leading role you played – with Anna Laven – in promoting the use of video in our work. Thank you, Clara Mulder, for your comments on an early draft of Chapter six, and for drawing my attention to the phenomenon of spatial autocorrelation. Thank you, Margriet Poppema, Olga Nieuwenhuijs, Reyna Veldhuis and Marian Hamann for always showing interest and sharing a smile or a laugh. Thank you, Annemieke van Haastrecht, for keeping me informed about the project budget, and thank you, Barbara Lawa, for carrying the administrative burden.

As I mentioned earlier, one of my teaching tasks was to supervise Master students in their thesis work. Lucky enough I managed to lure a total of seven students into doing their fieldwork in Ghana and most of them on a migration topic. Their work contributed a great deal to my understanding of migration dynamics and development issues in Ghana. Thank you, Wemmy Harteveld, Carolien Primavera, Hester

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1 In 2010 AMIDSt merged into the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR).
van Deutekom, Christa van der Berg, Kersti Wissenbach, Renske Meilof and Alexander Boer. Supervising you was the teaching task I enjoyed most. And thank you, Maarten Delmeire, for joining Carolien in the fieldwork. Initially, I did not think it was a very good idea for Carolien to bring her boyfriend to the field, but if you had not come, we would never have become such good friends. The Alhambra is waiting for you!

Besides colleagues and students at the University of Amsterdam, I had the privilege to work with or receive feedback from academics from several other universities. Ronald Skeldon and Hein de Haas (migration scholars at the University of Sussex and Oxford respectively) provided valuable comments on an early draft of Chapter five. Richard de Jeu (earth scientist at the Free University of Amsterdam) and Anton Vrieling (remote sensing specialist at the International Institute for Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation in Enschede) generously shared their knowledge of the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index, and contributed their skills in extracting, analysing and interpreting the vast amount of data this index generates. Thank you, Hans Eenhoorn (UN Task Force on Hunger and Wageningen University and Research Centre), for sharing your insights about the opportunities and constraints of smallholder farming in Northern Ghana. Laurens Nijzink (human geographer at the African Studies Centre in Leiden) joined me in some long, intensive and highly abstract sessions that aimed to disentangle the causal structure of migration, population density and agricultural development. In its simplicity, perhaps, the results of our brain-breaking sessions could have been invented by a school boy, but nevertheless, on these sunny afternoons in the beautiful village of Holysloot, I felt closest to being a social scientist.

After having acknowledged the efforts of so many colleagues and friends, it seems paradoxical to state that conducting a PhD research is a lonely enterprise. But it is, at least in my experience and particularly in the writing phase. I spent most of the time behind a computer, trying to make sense of the data and struggling to find the right structure and words to convey the most relevant findings to paper. Even though there were people around with the same disciplinary background or geographic focus, nobody in my direct environment had the same thematic interest. This changed when I was invited by Alfons Fermin and Han Entzinger (Erasmus University of Rotterdam) to conduct a Ghanaian case study for the Environmental Change and Forced Migration Scenarios (EACH-FOR) project. This research, in which seven European universities participated, involved case studies in over twenty countries across the world. Through intensive e-mail contact, newsletters and several workshops and conferences, this project created a network of researchers studying the migration-environment nexus, from which I benefitted greatly. Thank you, Olivia Dun, François Gemenne, Oscar Alvarez Gila, Koko Warner, Tamer Afifi, Stefan Alscher, Jill Jäger, Janos Bogardi, Thomas Faist and Marc Stahl, for
sharing ideas. And thank you, Valentina Mazzucato, for drawing Alfons Fermin’s attention to my work.

A second research project that alleviated the loneliness of the PhD writing process involves the – ongoing – Participatory Assessment of Development project (http://www.padev.nl). In this research, the joy of teamwork rules, thanks to a large extent to the contagious enthusiasm of its coordinator, Ton Dietz. The team is very diverse in terms of nationality and academic status. Master students, PhD students, junior lecturers, senior lecturers, full professors and development practitioners from seven different countries work together, not as equals, but with much freedom, or even encouragement, to express one’s point of view and to criticize one’s seniors. Being taken seriously produces a sense of ownership that brings out the best in the team members. Thank you, Ton, for bringing me on board, for the many lessons I am learning, and for keeping me in the shade – temporarily – to complete the thesis work. Thank you, Fred Zaal, Wouter Rijneveld, Dienneke de Groot, Adam Belemvire, Saa Dittoh, David Millar, Francis Obeng, Richard Yeboah, Nicky Pouw, Anika Altaf, Agnieszka Kazimierczuk, Roger Bymolt and other PADEV colleagues for the good times in the field.

This preface may seem a dizzying trip through names, but I have not mentioned the most important ones. Who would I be without my wonderful parents and sisters? I was privileged to grow up in a home with a worldview that combined the tender care of nursing and the openness to other cultures of anthropology. Thank you, Sjaak and Betty, for introducing me to Ghana, even before I was born. Thank you for your continuous support over the years, for your confidence and patience, for your love. Thank you for having your doors open in those in-between periods in which I did not have my own place to stay. Thank you for opening my eyes to the beauty and adventures of the world while at the same time showing me the importance of a warm home. Now that I have become a father myself, I often think of the Chinese poem on my birth announcement, about a bird in an open cage, about the green summerwood with all its attractions, and about the tender care that awaits the bird at home any time it pleases to return. Thank you for putting these beautiful words into practice. Thank you, Rimke and Geertje, for being not only my sisters, but also my best friends. It is amazing how much we share. You are always close to me, no matter how far away.

I would also like to thank my in-laws for welcoming me in the family so warmly. Thank you, Melitón and Mari-Angeles, for letting me use your comfortable and quiet apartment in Granada to write. Many thanks also to my brother-in-law, Pablo, for letting me benefit from his great skills in graphic design, and to my other brother-in-law, Miquel, for introducing me to the great game of chess. Thank you, Raquel, for always letting us use your car to escape the city and go to the country-
side. And thank you, Fernando, for too many things to mention here. I hope we will come to visit you in Niger soon.

Finally, I would like to thank the African Studies Centre, and particularly Dick Foeken, for making this publication possible and for their incessant effort to make research on Africa available to a broader public. Thank you also, Howard Turner, for correcting my English in part of this thesis (Chapter three to six). Thank you, Koen Kusters and Bram Buscher for agreeing to be my paranimfen. It’s a big honour to have two great scholars in the field of environment and development by my side. It is also a big honour to have Richard Black, Saa Dittoh, Valentina Mazzucato, Isa Baud and James Sidaway as members of the reading committee. Thank you for your effort to read my work and for coming all the way to Amsterdam to be present at my defence.

Jesse, a few days before this book went to press, you lost your brother in a horrific bomb attack in Marrakesh. As I write these words, I am still in a shock and there are tears on my keyboard. I cannot even start to imagine the pain and emptiness of losing your big brother Sem. He was so full of energy and he had such a positive attitude towards life. I always enjoyed talking with him about his many journeys through Africa. Sem is irreplaceable, but I will do whatever I can to be like a brother to you.