

# WASTESCAPES IN URBAN AND PERI-URBAN SENEGAL

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Non-biodegradable waste is an ever-increasing byproduct of urbanization and globalization in Sub-Saharan Africa. Senegal has experienced rapid urbanization in recent decades, and faces challenges in managing non-biodegradable waste produced in the country's urban centers. This waste marks changes in consumption patterns as urban centers increasingly rely on packaged goods compared with their rural counterparts. Despite rapid incorporation into a global market economy that facilitates access to packaged products and durable goods, Senegal's cities have not responded in turn by developing infrastructural capacity to absorb the resulting non-biodegradable waste. This unintended consequence of urbanization is not limited to major urban centers such as Dakar, but impacts smaller peri-urban centers as well. My summer research explored the spatial distribution of non-biodegradable waste in urban centers and peri-urban peripheries.

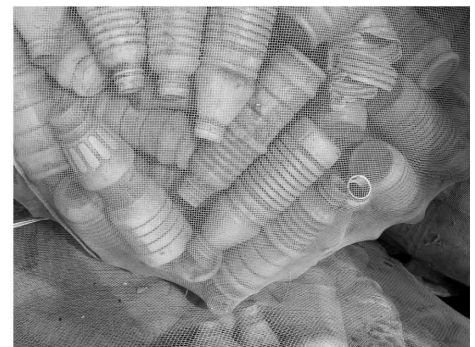
An exploration of wastescapes led me to investigate informal recycling of non-biodegradable waste at Mbeubeuss – Dakar's large waste dump located in the suburb, Malika. Mbeubeuss was scheduled to close in 2006, but failed planning for a new site resulted in it remaining in operation until present day with no further plans to close it. Informal recyclers – who make up the *Association Bokk Diom* – work and live at Mbeubeuss collecting non-biodegradable materials, namely plastics and metals, which they resell to nearby

industry. They sort through waste daily for items such as single-use plastic bags and PET bottles. This livelihood is one that grew out of a lack of efficient waste management on the part of the state. Despite low productivity of manual sorting, recyclers serve to manage waste volume at Mbeubeuss. The threat to health and wellbeing for recyclers is not to be dismissed. To meet needs, they were able to found *Association Bokk Diom*, which in turn established a school for recyclers and their children, and a medical clinic. While their struggles are profound, they are able to access some of the benefits of the infrastructure and development capacities of Dakar due to their close proximity to the urban center. The *Association Bokk Diom* is also currently in dialogue with municipal and state officials that calls for a reduction of urban consumption of non-biodegradables through restriction of single-use plastic bags.

Peri-urban zones far from the nation's capital experience a manifold burden with regards to their growing wastescapes. These small urban centers are increasingly engaging in consumption of non-biodegradable goods similar to the consumption of larger urban cities, however they also still rely heavily on local food production for economic and livelihood security – mainly agriculture and livestock production carried out in the adjacent lands. Peri-urban zones have little infrastructural capacity to direct the



waste stream away from residential areas, agricultural fields, and grazing pastures. Consequently, the potential for waste to contaminate drinking water, reduce soil productivity, and kill grazing livestock pose significant challenges to public health. Environmental changes that have resulted in low crop yields and insufficient pastures and water for livestock over recent decades has led to conflict between farmers and herders over access to land. Thus these vast wastescapes aggravate already strained resources for livestock and agricultural



production. As rural migrants continue to migrate to urban areas, wastescapes will continue to continue to increasingly strain the Senegalese landscape.

This research project served as a foundation for a larger doctoral project that will comparatively explore the health outcomes of those most impacted by these wastescapes in urban and peri-urban zones of Senegal.

Therese Ryley is a doctoral student in anthropology and FLAS fellow (2013-15). Research funding provided by the Center for African Studies and the UF Office of Research. The West African Research Center in Dakar was instrumental in coordinating this project.