# We. Are. Not. Done

Stories of Gambians during the dictatorship



A Memory House



On 7th January 2019, the first public hearing of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, TRRC took place in Gambia. Following Yahya Jammeh's departure, the Commission was set up to investigate and establish an impartial record of **human rights violations** committed in the country under his 22-year brutal regime.

After over 871 days of testimony covering some of the darkest periods in Gambian history, the Commission heard from 392 witnesses, which included victims, perpetrators, and expert witnesses. On 24th November 2021, the Commission submitted its recommendations for addressing the legacies of the past regime in order to move the country towards a more just, peaceful and democratic future.

However, the submission of the TRRC recommendations was not the end of the story – it merely marked the closing of one chapter.

Amid the enormous scale of the crimes committed by Jammeh and his accomplices, the TRRC still only heard a fraction of the voices of those who were victimised and whose fundamental rights were trampled upon.

This exhibition presents the stories of Gambians who risked their lives, and those of their families, for refusing to stay silent in the face of government abuse; whose loved ones perished as a result of Jammeh's witch-hunt campaign, having been forced to drink a toxic concoction; whose livelihoods were ruined and dreams shattered by illegal expulsions at the hands of Jammeh's security forces.

Many stories are yet to be told, and every individual story counts.

**WE. ARE. NOT. DONE.** 

#### Behind the exhibition

The stories in this booklet were temporarily exhibited at **Memory House** from May 2022. They were captured by three young women "artivists"-activists who harness the power of art to convey their messaging and bring about change- using **only their mobile phones** and as part of a workshop organised by ANEKED. The workshop engaged young people to go beyond the perceived notion that the transitional justice process in the country is over and extend the impact of the TRRC.

Armed with the skills and knowledge acquired during the workshop, the young women went on to lead small visual storytelling training sessions at Memory House for selected high school students, thus creating a ripple effect and driving new generations of storytellers to take the lead in sharing the stories of Gambians and the impact of the dictatorship, advocating for **truth** and **justice**.

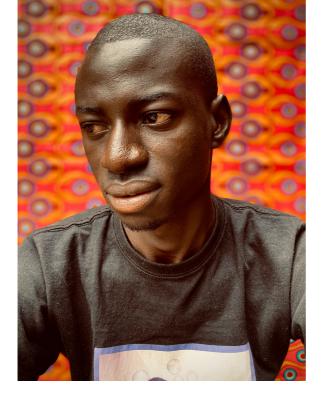
#### **About Memory House**

**Memory House** serves as a memorial centre where the permanent exhibition *The Duty to Remember* is housed. A first of its kind initiative in The Gambia, it aims to promote peace, justice and contribute to building a lasting culture of human rights and empathy in the country.

In addition to housing *The Duty to Remember*, Memory House is also a space used by other Gambian grassroot organisations engaged in the transitional justice process as a platform to showcase their work.

Educational programmes at **Memory House**, in collaboration with schools and youth groups, are promoting constructive dialogue around human rights and justice. As a centre for excellence, leadership and international exchange workshops foster the next generation of changemakers.





# ALASANA NDURE

Alasana's mother was one of many abducted during Yahya Jammeh's witch-hunt campaign.

When the soldiers came to the house, we had just finished eating and they entered the house. The soldiers said they were going to break the door. We were too young and could not do much, so we started crying. They took my mum away and during that time, she was breastfeeding my little siblings who are twins.

They took them to Barra and when they were going, we ran after them to get our mum back or have them take us along. Things were really hard and though we were only kids, we felt sorry for our mother and really wanted her to come back home.

When my mum came back the following day, she told us that when they took them away, they put them in a really tight room. She said they were given 'kubejaro' to drink, and after drinking a lot of it, they were drunk. Some stripped off naked unconsciously and that is what happened with my mum".

Alasana recalled when one day his mother called his name and told him "I can't make it B".

She died shortly, after

"It was not easy", deplored Alasana. "I envy people with their mums when I see them talk because I don't have that. I never really shared what happened to my family with anyone. I keep it all to myself and think a lot. I am always thinking. The only time I have a free mind is when I go out to play football and t distracts me from thinking about my mother. We are still being stigmatised in society and going out is still a problem. Most of the time I'd rather stay home than go out.









# **MBA JAI DRAMMEH**

Mba Jai was the target but she was in Casamance (Senegal) when the witch-hunters came. They took her daughter instead.

She was never sick or ill before the event. It took about a few months after they took her before she passed. She was a very young woman when she died.

Since the witch-hunt, my family and I have been accused of witchcraft. Even some family members don't associate with us anymore. Our neighbours don't associate with us in any social gatherings now. This discrimination has made people run away from us. They all call me a witch and my family. It's even difficult to do anything within the community. It's sad but we hold onto God and have faith. People have said so many things, they look at us as witches. Even after my daughter got sick, people said it was because of witchcraft that's why she got sick.

Sometimes I do not sleep during the night when I think of the children she left behind. Having a mother figure is very necessary because there are things one can only tell their mother. The kids are going to school and they get called names. They look at them as the children of a witch. They are kids and are powerless so they cannot protect themselves or retaliate. [...] It has been a long time, but people never forget. They look at my kids and tell them that you are a family of witches. I cannot do anything about it.

Mba Jai accompanied her grandson Alasana Ndure to share his story. And though she had already testified before the TRRC, she asked to tell her story again as a form of healing. We agreed.

# FATOU TEREMA JENG

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I was dishing lunch when someone came and told me 'Jammeh's people have taken your husband', Fatou Terema remembered.

My husband was at his radio technician when he heard something was happening at the bantaba. When he arrived, they went to him, looked into his palms and told him 'You have a disease in your body, come let's cure you'.

Before my husband was taken by Jammeh's people, he was not sick but when he came back, he came home sick. He was coughing and he told me his body was heavy.





Then he told me they made him drink the concoction and he lost consciousness. After that day, he always complained of pain in his chest.

Before he died, he told me 'I don't know what time I am going to die but I will die today'. Before he took his last breath, he thanked me for taking care of him and being by his side all the time he was sick then he prayed for me and gave me his blessings.

The children were young that's why I couldn't tell them about their father's death. When the children grew up, they started asking about their father's whereabouts, but I'll always tell them he travelled and he'll come back soon. As time went on, they ended up knowing their father is late. I had no other choice than to give my children to my relatives to take care of them because the load is too much for me and I can't go begging everyone.

Our neighbours will not allow my children eat with them because they said their father was a witch".

We asked Fatou Terema Jeng how she felt about sharing her story with us. She responded, "I was crying when they told me some people are coming to listen to your story, I had joy in my heart coming here.  $\_$ 

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## MARIATOU FANNEH

The discrimination does not only stay with you, it also affects your kids and your family. You are worthless and nobody wants to listen to you or your family because you are supposedly a witch or wizard. Just the shame of that can lead to death.

On the day of the incident, no one cooked lunch in Sintet because we were all worried. Some people ran away but the ones who stayed back were taken by the witch-hunters in a bus and truck. My baby was breastfeeding when they took me. When we arrived, they did not give us food to eat and we had not eaten the entire day.





Instead, they gave us concoction to drink. After drinking the concoction, they started burning some stuff to smoke us. Since that encounter, some people died shortly and some are still undergoing treatment myself included.

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Soon after surviving the witch-hunt campaign, Mariatou was taken again to go work on Yahya Jammeh's farm. They were promised money but never got paid.

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That year, we did not farm in our own farms and that affected our feeding that summer. While working on the farm, they didn't care if we had babies or not. [...] We worked on the farms from morning till afternoon. We paid our own fares expecting that we would get paid. We sowed maize and weeded as well and this was during Ramadan. After we worked all day while fasting, we were not given even a cup of tea to break our fast. By the time we reach home, it would have already been after the last prayer. That is the suffering we went through.



# MUSA CAMARA

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I was 14 years old when they came for my dad. When they came, they went into the rooms with their drums and said to my dad, 'We are here to take you'. When my dad came back, he started falling sick. He told us he was beaten by the soldiers with batons because he refused to drink the concoction that was given to him and some of them were stamping him. He had health complications due to the beatings and sometimes we helped him remove the blood clot from his bodv.

Life was very hard for us as our dad was the breadwinner of the family. I was young when this incident happened but I'm still stressed about it and it hurts me a lot. Till today we are traumatised. We are being neglected in some of the village activities. We can't contribute or say anything in the meetings because they say our father was a witch. Sometimes, my mum will come home crying because she will get into a quarrel and they will throw unpleasant words on her because of what had happened.

It is hard losing a father at a very tender age. I was closer to my father than all my elder siblings, I was his best friend, we went places together. I was the last person he spoke to before he died.







# **FATOU**

My mum was 8 months pregnant when she was accused of being a witch. She lost the child and had 2-3 miscarriages after that. My grandmother is still affected. She gets angry for no reason; she throws stones at us and closes the gate saying nobody will leave the house.

I always wanted to graduate but I dropped out of school at grade 5 because I was being bullied that my mother is a witch, which is why I agreed to get married at an early age. Till date, people mock us about being witches. I live in Barra with my husband. People here know about the witch-hunt incident so I'm always at home. I have no friends.

This is my first time sharing this story. We never shared it until my mother went to the TRRC. We were afraid that something worse would have happened to us.

Fatou highlighted that though her husband was supportive, he did not know she was sharing her story. She agreed to speak with us and feature in the exhibition on the condition that we conceal her identity.





## MAMA AFRICA

Isha Fofana fondly known as 'Mama Africa' was one of the first women artists in The Gambia. After struggling as a woman in the arts in Gambia, she moved to Germany and enjoyed international success. Between 2001 and 2008, she created 9,000 paintings. She eventually decided to move back to Gambia to give back to her country and opened the first women's art centre, which was also used to educate the youth and the community.

Upstairs where I lived, I made my gallery. I made it very beautiful and sent my container with some artwork. I started building my museum and art centre in Batakunku. It took me one year to build the museum and art centre".

Mama Africa's art centre attracted high profile visitors including ambassadors. Unfortunately, Yahya Jammeh took notice. "The first time I met Yahya Jammeh is when he took some of my paintings to gift some of his visitors from England [...]. Anytime he came for paintings, he never paid and I also never asked". Yahya Jammeh eventually appointed her president of the board of the National Center for Arts and Culture but after three months, she resigned as she did not feel comfortable. "Maybe he was angry with me, I don't know but he was still friendly and he was still liking me as a very hard working woman", she recalled.

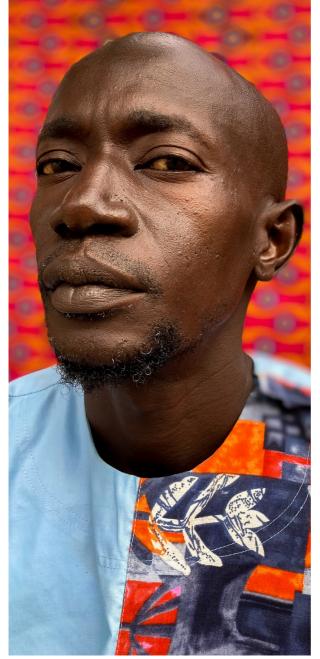
Shortly after, her problems started. Mama Africa noticed that she was under surveillance and was certain that her house was broken into at night by the NIA. She also noticed that gradually Yahya Jammeh started claiming all the properties and lands around her art centre but she remained undeterred.

"One day, I was sent a letter that they have to demolish the place in 48hrs, failure to do so they will demolish it at my own cost. A lot of people came and see the place because it was so beautiful. **So he broke it to break me**. First day they came, they broke the fence. I think that was to show me that they were really going to demolish the house. After they broke the fence, they came everyday with their black cars just to stare at me but I was not afraid. After three days, the bulldozer arrived but I wasn't home. I received a call and I had to rush immediately. When I reached Batakunku, I met a lot of people, some were helping me remove my artefacts while some were taking for themselves. I spent about D12,000,000 to build Batakunku."

#### Mama Africa rebuilt everything from scratch and against all odds.

"I didn't feel anything back then because I was very strong. But after I built my second museum that is here, I started thinking about Batakunku and it hurts me a lot... I start to think about the children I was teaching...

I'm so happy I'm sharing this story with you and it's my first time.



## HASSAN NDOW

Hassan was the spokesperson for the 'beach bar youth'.

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I wrote a complete A4 size pleading to the government before the demolition. I was expecting something bigger too but when the reply came and I opened it, it was just 2-3 lines, which stated that when regulations are being enforced, they don't interfere. We were not given enough time to remove the things from the bars because we were informed two days before the demolition.

I witnessed the demolition of every beach bar. I cried. It's like you are standing helpless, watching your entire tribesmen being murdered. This was an investment of money, mind and hope. A lot of the beach bar youth took the backway [to Europe] after the demolition and most of them lost their lives. The beach is now polluted because we are not there to take care of it. It has impacted a lot of the youths, giving them doubts and not believing that they can make it home."

Hassan lamented about not been given the opportunity to share the story at the TRRC. "I believe is something that is part of a healing.

#### WANDIFA MANNEH

When the demolition started very early in the morning, they didn't even wait for the people to take their properties out [...]. We lose everything. That emotion, only God can tell [...], I was crying and lots of my friends were crying as well. You cannot imagine, you work for something for many years and you see a bulldozer come and in less than 3 minutes, everything was demolished just like that.

They came early in the morning and they put access roads and a checkpoint coming to the beach so that nobody could come down to the beach that morning because they knew what was going on, they didn't want people to report it, they didn't want people to hear it.





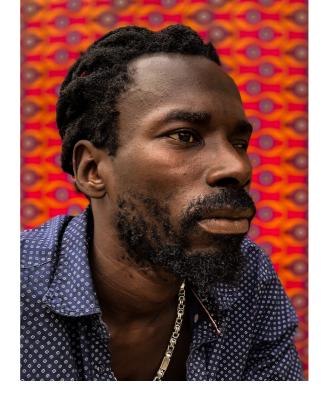
The demolition affected my family 100%, it affected myself, my friends and the people who work for me. That feeling... I was working for that for years. I thought I could make this country a better place, this tourism that many people are benefiting from.

Many people after the demolition went through the backway to Europe. Most of them passed away through this backway, which is not good for the country. We decided to stay and try to do something in this country, that is where we are up to now and we are still struggling with the authorities. Whatever we want to do we cannot do it because we have been denied. Some of the tourism workers know me very well personally and those people are proud to tell me anytime they see me 'Don't forget, we are the ones who demolished you guys', and they are proud of it.

## BABUCARR CEESAY

Babucarr Ceesay had three houses and a bar at the time of the government's order to demolish the properties and structures along Brufut beach.

It was in my presence when they came with a bulldozer and started destroying my house, starting with the roof. What I spent on those houses is about D450.000, just on three houses excluding the bar and the other stuff that I put in my garden, which are also not included.





I planted a lot of coconut trees, but they came and bulldozed everything. At that time, I was a very good planter [...] but after the demolition, I saw how they destroy my trees. It killed my spirit for planting. After the demolition we were homeless, we had nowhere to go so we had to struggle to find a place to rent and live. People who felt for us, bought tents and donated them to us. That is really sad. We are good citizens.

From that day it was really difficult for me to start up again. It was really hard for me all those days but thank God I was able to start from somewhere. So many youths who were victims got frustrated, they had nothing, no work to do so they took off the journey to the backway and many of them died.

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#### JAMA JACK

Everyone knows the hashtag #GambiaHasdecided. It inspired hope and sparked a movement for Gambians to peacefully stand up against Yahya Jammeh's unconstitutional attempt to stay in power despite being voted out in December. However, what is little known is about the women who were pivotal to the movement. Jama Jack was one of them.

We were living in a dictatorship where we all knew who not to talk about, we all knew what not to say and where not to say it, but we were not calling it a dictatorship even though we were living under it. I don't think people fully appreciated the extent of the dictatorship until it got to the point where it was like in your face.





Outraged by Yahya Jammeh's refusal to concede power, she got together with other Gambians and created the hashtag #GambiaHasDecided. It spread like wildfire.

I couldn't be open about being a member of 'GambiaHasDecided' because I was working at the UN at the time and we had rules about engaging with politics, but I was like 'this is an exception, it's no longer about politics, it's about our survival as a people and also as a country'", she defiantly recalls.

A post was published to warn the leaders of 'Gambia-hasDecided' that they were being targeted by the government and Jama's name was made public. She had to leave home and go into hiding. "Some NIA men went to look for me at my mother's house. I was lucky that my mum and sister knew about what was happening and they managed to help me escape the NIA officers. I felt a lot of anxiety and I had one fear: it wasn't getting arrested and killed, it was getting arrested and raped. My mother wanted me to go to Senegal but I refused. I was afraid that they will die and I can't live without them.

Jama Jack shared with us that she is still afraid of being arrested for what she posts on her social media because the same laws repressing freedom of expression from the previous regime are still in force.

#### **About the Photographers**

The visual stories on display were captured by three young women "artivists"- activists who harness the power of art to convey their messaging and bring about change- using **only their mobile phones** and as part of a workshop on storytelling organised by ANEKED.

#### **Rohey Cham**

Rohey Cham has a background in journalism and enjoys sharing stories through mobile photography. She is also a fervent advocate for women and children's rights and is dedicated to improving how they are treated in Gambian society. Rohey is an avid basketball player.

Instagram @rohia blackchamp

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#### **Fatou Ndure**

Fatou Ndure is a photojournalist who is currently pursuing a degree in Art Journalism and works as a communication officer for Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia. She is passionate about working with women/girls and capturing impactful stories through her lens. Instagram @fatis\_photography1

#### **Cecilia Wuday Sanyang**

Cecilia Wuday Sanyang is a self-taught photographer with a background in journalism. She seeks to bring change in Africa and Gambia through visual storytelling. Cecilia sees photography as her true calling. Instagram @cecci's\_photography

#### **About ANEKED**

Led by women African human rights activists, the **A**frican **N**etwork against **E**xtrajudicial **K**illings and **E**nforced **D**isappearances **(ANEKED)** is an independent, non-political and non-religious civil society organisation.

We campaign against forced disappearances and summary executions, advocating for justice for victims and their families.

We place an emphasis on **women survivors** who, despite leading the struggle for **truth** (when, why, who, how) and **justice**, are often overlooked and invisible.

Scan to support our work



#### **Thank You**

We would like to express our profound gratitude to those who entrusted us with their stories, even though sharing them meant revisiting painful memories and experiences that they are still healing from.

Our gratitude also goes to Katherine Taylor and Muhamadou Bittaye "Bitz" for their guidance and support throughout the process. Additional thank you to Fantanka and Wave Gambia for facilitating the storytelling.

