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From war refugees to environmental refugees: problems of governance and the meaning of land in Guinea-Bissau

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CLIMATE CHANGE-INDUCED VULNERABILITY



- Climate change extreme phenomena are increasing in frequency and intensity
- The vulnerability conditions of poor people in marginal regions is worsening
- People's vulnerability increases when:
 - livelihoods are dependent on natural resources;
 - climate change induces food, water and/or land shortages;
 - people live in politically unstable countries or regions
- Climate change can amplify conflicts over land and other natural resources

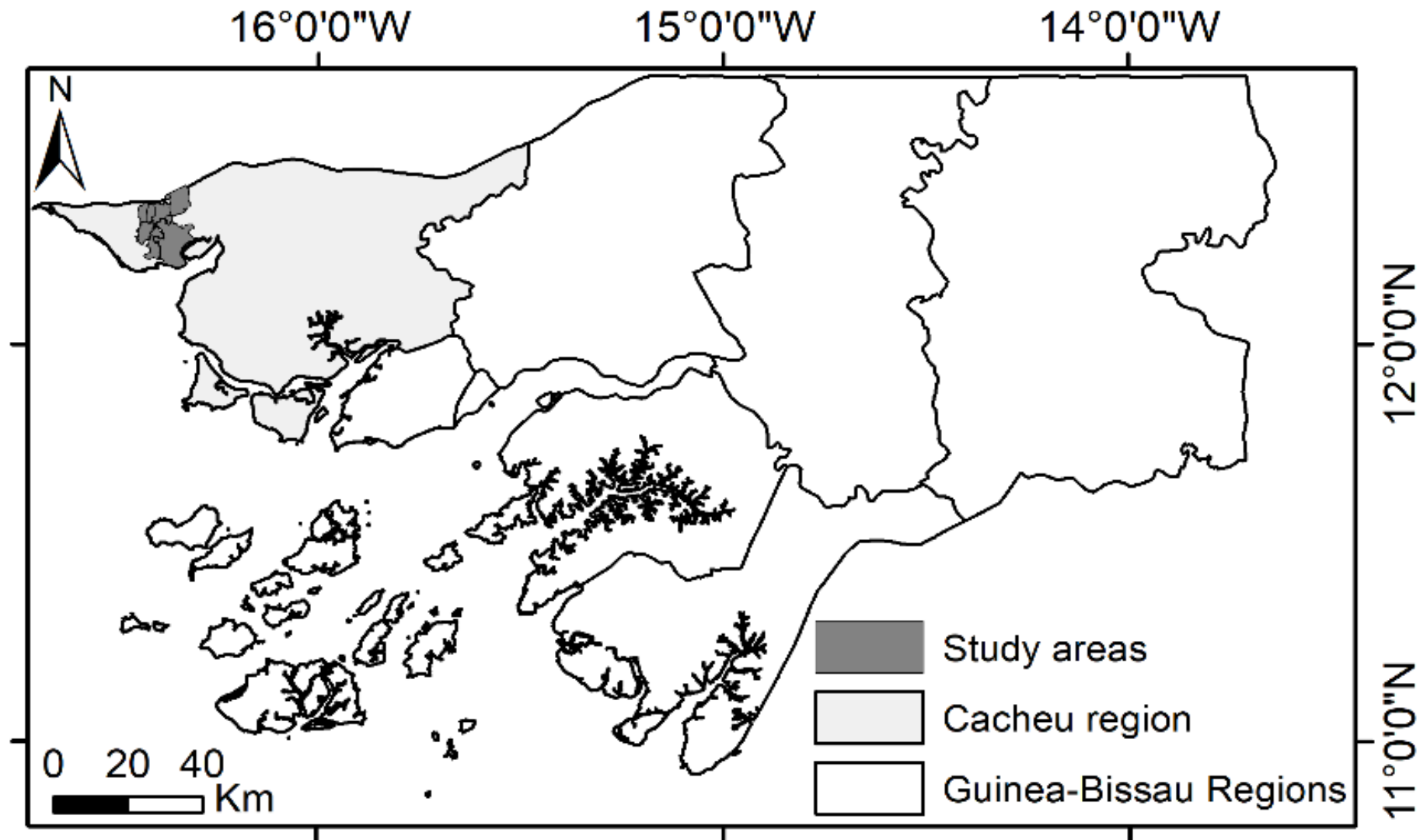
Mainstream narrative

“Southern climate refugees will create security problems in Northern countries”

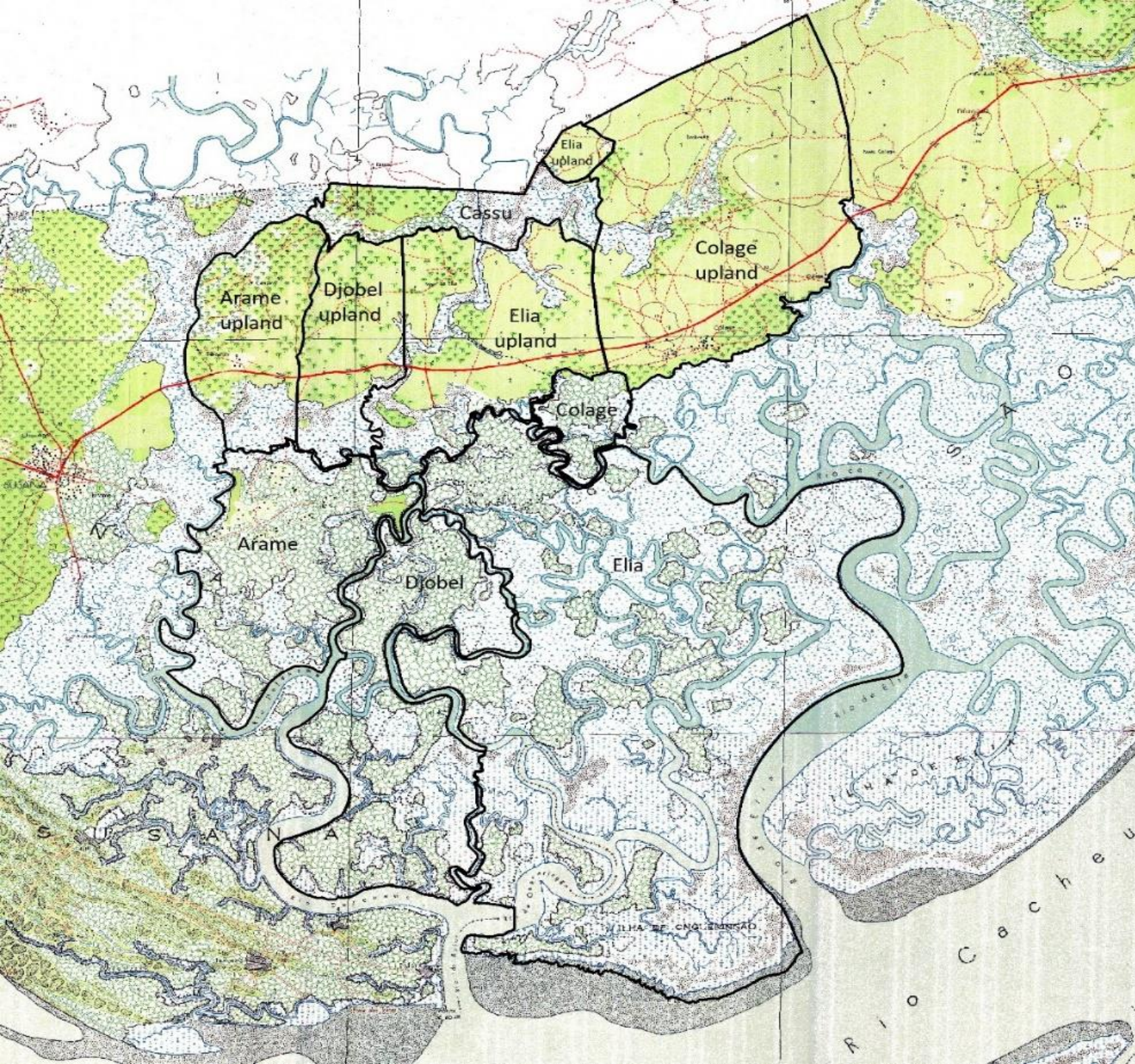
Other Explanations

- **Cross-border tensions/fights and intra-state civil strife among Southern countries**
- **“Land grabbing” and “Green grabbing” increase poverty and land scarcity in marginalized, vulnerable communities and can amplify climate change impacts, paving the ground for civil wars or local uprisings**
- **Small-scale and localized “invisible” conflicts over NR**

CASE STUDY | Inter-villages conflict over land in Northern GB amplified by climate change

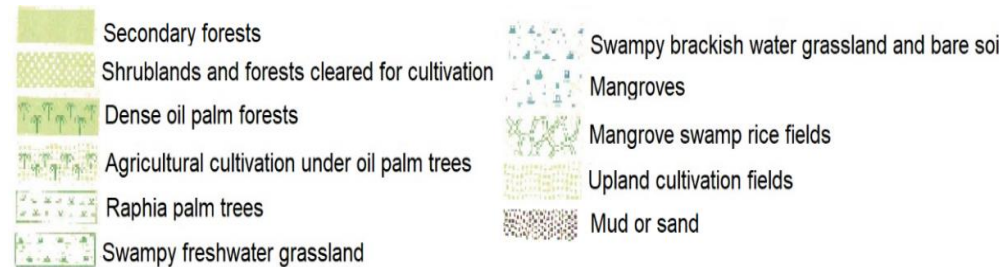


- **Baiote** are a sub-group of Felupes
- Latecomers in GB, so had to ask for land to Felupe villages
- **Arame** settled in “island”, **Elia** first bush then “island”, **Djobel** abandoned **Arame** to settle in island detached from mainland
- **Djobel** became Felupes’ rice granary, but highly vulnerable ecology (contour dike)
- **Colonial administration** created inter-villages borders for road construction
- **Borders adopted by local people** as inter-villages’ frontiers in relation to upland
- **Livelihoods:**
 - **Arame:** rice, palm wine and oil
 - **Elia:** rice, fish, palm wine and oil, pottery
 - **Djobel:** rice, fish

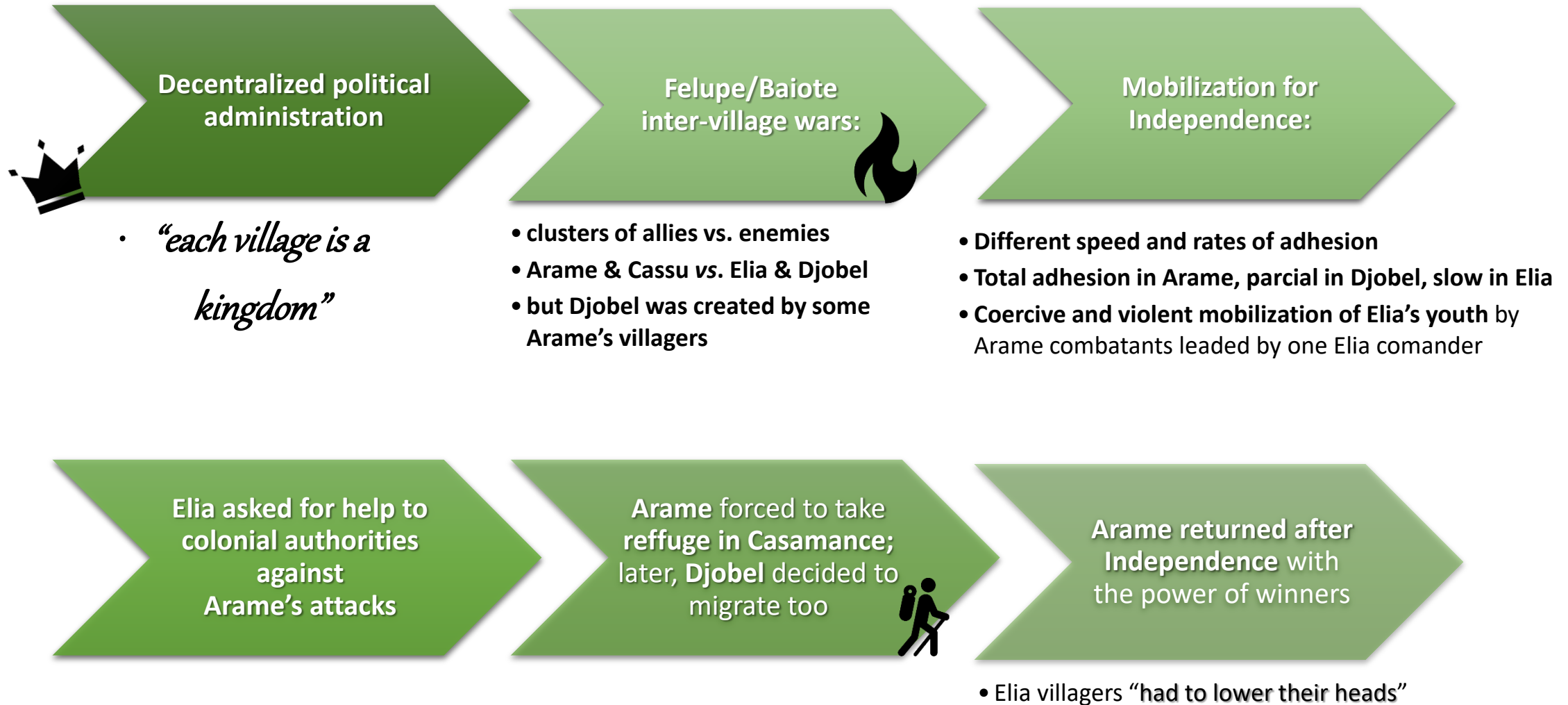


Location of the 9 study areas over a topographic map (1:50 000)

Produced by Ministério do Ultramar-Junta das Missões Geográficas e de Investigações do Ultramar (1953)



POLITICAL HISTORY: From grievance to greed



POLITICAL HISTORY: From grievance to greed (cont.)



Djobel and Arame
promised to help
each other in
reconstruction
efforts



Djobel helped
Arame, but Arame
refused retribution
advising settlement
in Djobel upland

Help to Djobel
came from Elia, but
contour dike less
strong

Mid-80's liberalization of
GB economy → Arame
cashews cultivation in
upland

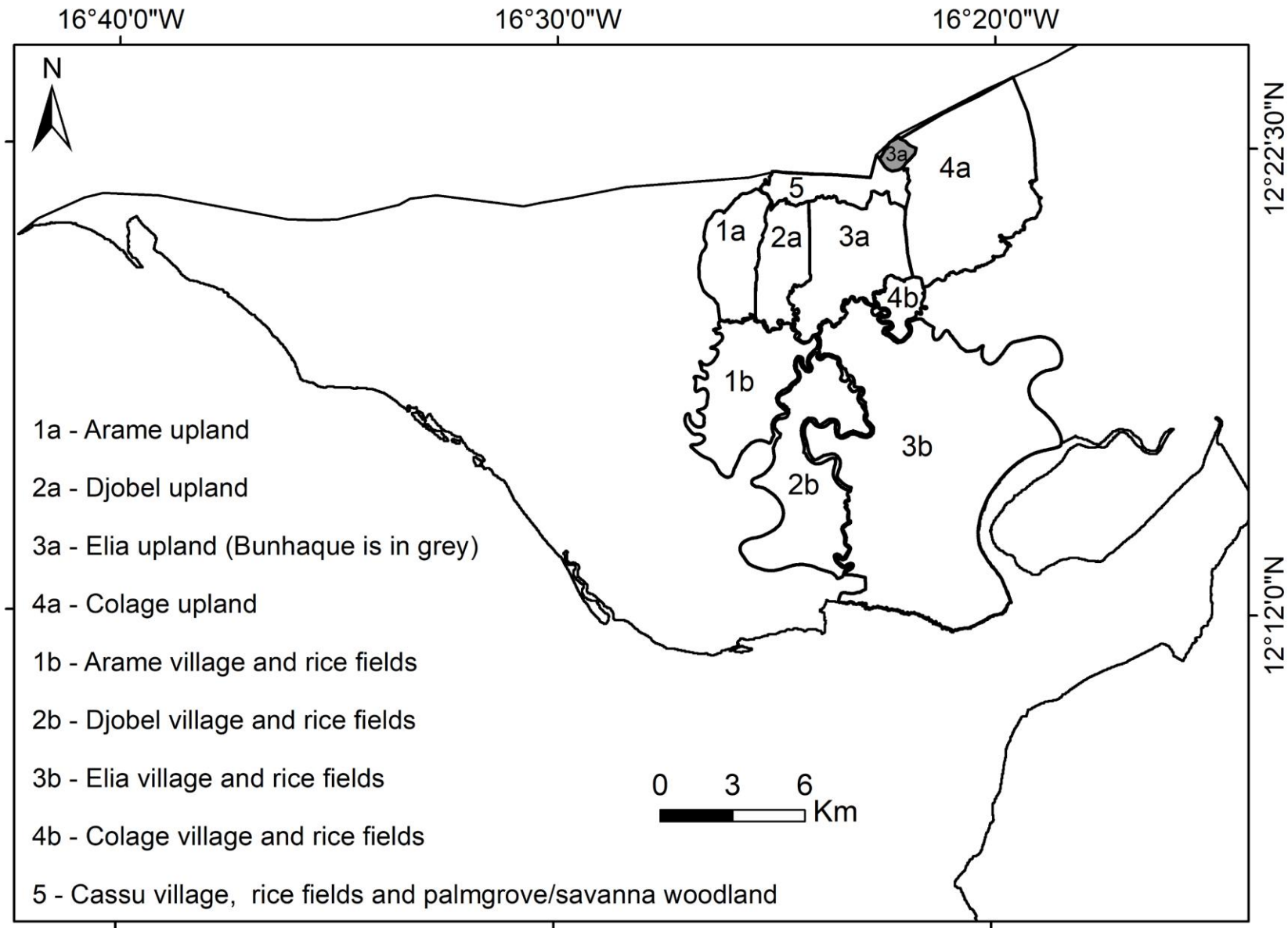


Early 90's Djobel asked
the state to create a
market in their upland,
but Arame placed there a
symbolic declaration of
war against Djobel

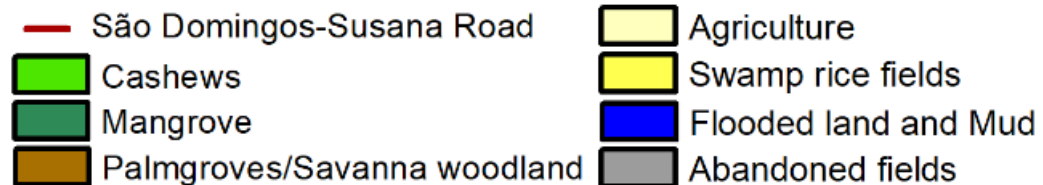
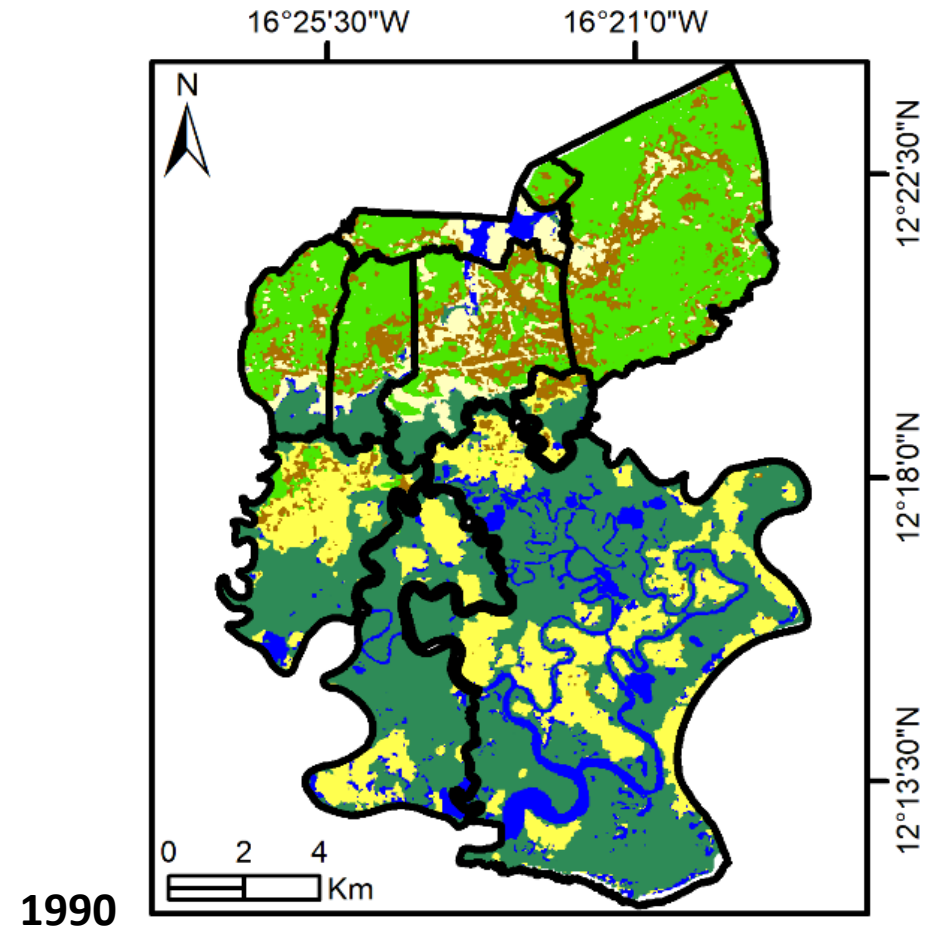
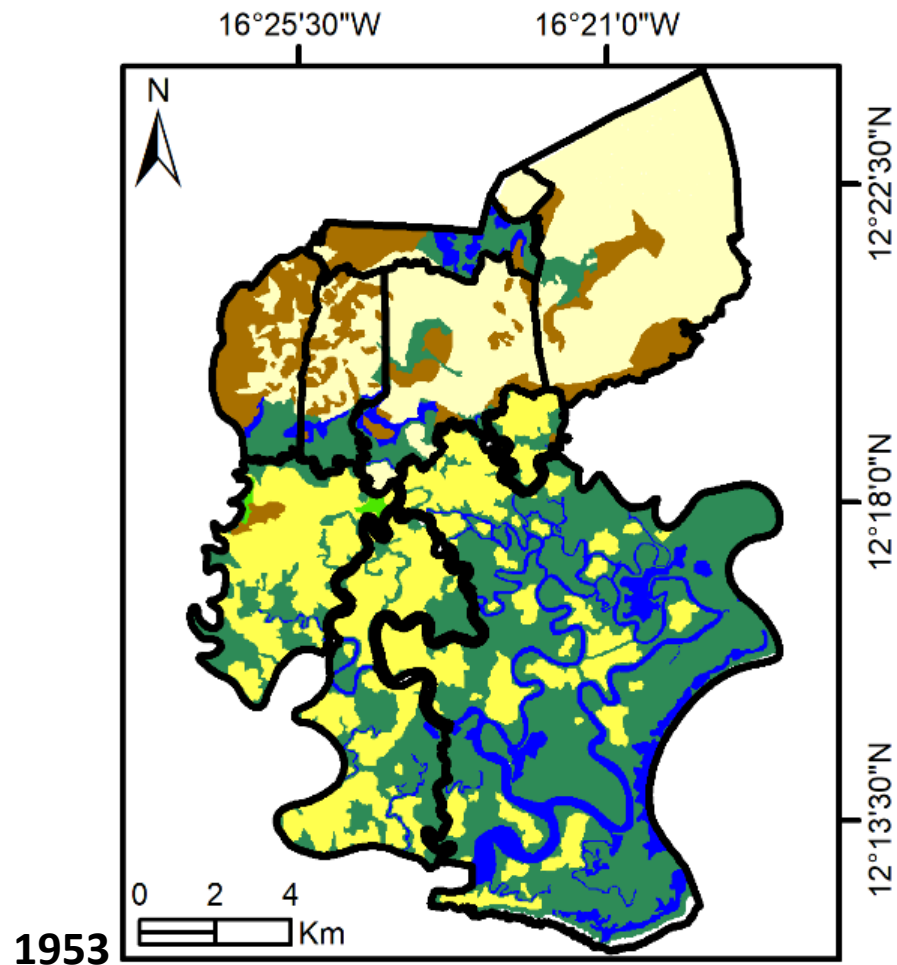
Since then, Djobel felt
strong climate change
effects and informed state
authorities they wanted
to settle in their uplands
against the will of Arame



LOCATION OF EACH VILLAGE upland and lowland (rice) fields



Arame, Cassu and Colage cashews' plantation expansion (light green)



Land cover maps for the study areas: 1953 was obtained from the topographic map (1:50 000) produced by Ministério do Ultramar-JMGIU, and the 1990 map was obtained from Landsat satellite images.

POLITICAL HISTORY: From grievance to greed (cont.)



Arame increased expansion of cashew orchards into Djobel upland since the 1990s

Elia was late in planting cashews in their upland

2004 and 2005 high tides constituted a turning point for Djobel

- rupture of main dikes and invasion of saltwater

2009, 2014, 2015 and 2016 extremely **high and strong tides** further destroyed the contour dike of Djobel

2017, marine storm surges and extreme waves **destroyed most rice fields'** infrastructures and **10 families became houseless**



Djobel



Google Earth high-resolution image 09/11/2018

Djobel | IMAGE OF ISOLATED HOUSEHOLDS



Djobel | IMAGE OF ISOLATED HOUSEHOLDS IN A KIND OF RAISED ISLANDS



POLITICAL HISTORY: From grievance to greed (cont.)



Since 2004 Djobel regularly asked for support to local and central governments to settle in their upland

2019 & 2020, **Djobel and Elia people** were **injured and some killed** during the attempts to settle in upland. Arame was helped by Casamance rebels

Arame used party-political connections with PAIGC to refuse giving back Djobel' land and continued cashew expansion into it

Arame urbanites launched a misinformation campaign blaming Elia for Djobel land usurpation

Civil society misguided and misinformed attempts to mediate conflict

- Elia became scapegoat in the media

POLITICAL HISTORY: From grievance to greed (cont.)



Arame villagers argued that **Djobel should abandon** their land and political identity

- each family should look for relatives in other villages

Felupe traditional authorities tried to mediate, but they feel **powerless**

Presidential elections: Djobel & Elia shifted alliance away from PAIGC

New government forced Arame to accept Djobel settlement near the road, delimitating swamp land not occupied by Arame (similar to previous governments)

- but **not** the full restitution of Djobel's territory

Elia still scapegoat, not being able to harvest cashews in 2020 in their upland

Arame shifted from grievance against Elia to greed over Djobel's and Elia's land

- Climate change acts in synergy with other human-induced changes, but in adaptation to climate change it is mandatory to **acknowledge issues of equity and justice** namely when the very **survival** of the population is **at risk** and social **conflicts over natural resources** are emerging.

“As engaged scholars we have the obligation to ask for help for the people whose voice is unheard”

CONCLUSIONS



- **Climate change** was simply the **last trigger** of a long-lasting conflict
- Land had a **culturally-embedded local meaning**; cashews transformed land into a high-value commodity
- Although a **cursory analysis** could **classify this conflict within the**
“greed and grievance” paradigm,
long-term poor governance at multiple levels was the cradle that created the
conditions of possibility and amplification

NOTE FOR READERS

This is a short version of a forthcoming article in which the history and complexity of the conflict will be presented in detail, as well as the scholarly literature grounding the theoretical framework.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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The first author wants to pay tribute to her friend **Sumba Dias**, who was cowardly killed due to his support to Djobel islanders in the attempt to settle in their upland occupied by Arame.



AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The first author designed the research, conducted fieldwork and conceived and wrote the manuscript. The second author performed all the remote sensing analysis and produced the maps.