**WEBINAR 2**

**ASBU-GAUM**

**Background to the “Backway”: Mobilities, development and social transformation in southern Senegal**

**The Upper Casamance case study**

*Abstract*:

The Upper Casamance, a region of Southern Senegal bordering with Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau and The Gambia, is a region of intense historical mobility. It served as a reserve of seasonal labour for the peanuts producing areas of Northern Senegal and The Gambia in colonial times, and into the early independent period. Since the colonial period, it has also welcomed settlers fleeing the more difficult living conditions of Guinea Conakry and Guinea-Bissau. For long, its net migration rate was negative, as immigrants outnumbered emigrants. This trend has reversed at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. This presentation takes cue from research carried out, since 2017, in the eastern part of the Upper Casamance, the department of Velingara (Kolda region). Throughout the twentieth century, this part of Senegal stood onto the margins of national politics and economy. It was a region of peasants, largely illiterate, all engaged in commercial agriculture and led by a minority of intellectuals whose social background rooted in the socio-political and economic hierarchies of the colonial period. While in other parts of Senegal migrations to Europe started already in the 1950s, youths of the Upper Casamance begun to tread this path only in the 1980s. Which are the root causes of this mobility? How has it affected local communities?

The Valletta Summit of 2015 has made these questions relevant for the European Union. International Organizations, NGOs, humanitarian associations have started to focus on migrants’ home contexts in the effort to curb down young people’s attempts to reach Europe by the “backway”. On the ground, “irregular” migrations, as the European Union classifies them, hit at the core of family and community life with grief for the drowned at sea, heartache for the disappeared in Libya, and concern for the repatriated, which in 2018 amounted to almost ten-thousands, some voluntarily and many involuntarily. This presentation summarizes some of the outcomes of the various researches that the University of Milan-Bicocca is leading on these issues in the effort to historicize “the backway” and understand its origins and consequence from a grassroots perspective.

Alice Bellagamba is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Milan-Bicocca, and a specialist in African Studies. She graduated in Philosophy at the University of Turin and earned her PhD in socio-cultural anthropology at the same institution. In 2004-2005, she was Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the University of Bayreuth, and in 2011-2012 EURIAS Senior Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. Her long- term research experience in The Gambia and Senegal has resulted into several publications on memory, colonialism, the legacies of slavery, and the history of international migrations. She was the Principle Investigator of the project “Shadows of Slavery in West Africa and Beyond. A Historical Anthropology (SWAB)”, European Research Council under the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013), ERC Grant agreement n° 313737. She is now leading “The Aging African Diasporas” (TAAD) funded by Fondazione Cariplo and focused on Eritrean, Egyptian and Senegalese diasporic communities of Milan, Bergamo, and hinterlands, and “Genealogies of African Freedoms “, a national research project coordinated among the University of Milan-Bicocca, Turin, Pavia and Bologna. She is also responsible for the research activities of the project “Ripartire dai giovani: pro-motori dello sviluppo locale e della migrazione consapevole”, funded by AICS - Italian Agency for the Development and focused on dynamics of migration in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau.

Dr. Valerio Colosio works as Assistant Professor at the African Studies Department of the Social Science University of Ankara since February 2020. He completed his PhD in Social Anthropology at the University in Sussex in May 2018, where he also worked as Research Associate and Doctoral Tutor. His research explored the legacies of slavery in the Guéra region, in central Chad, where he did a 9-month fieldwork. The research focused on a group locally discriminated as made of slave- descendants and argued that dynamics and issues related to the memories of slavery are contingent and may be better analysed as outcome of specific political reforms, rather than just considered as survival of pre-existing hierarchies. Before starting the PhD programme, he has achieved an MA in Anthropology at the University of Milan - Bicocca and an MSc in Anthropology and Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2012. Between 2010 and 2020, he also worked in different NGO projects, mainly in Chad, where he spent a total of 16 months, but also in Zambia and Senegal.