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# **Aligners, Lovers and Deceptors: Aspirations and strategies of young urban hustlers in the Gambia**

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**PhD in African Studies  
University of Edinburgh  
2016**

# Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me solely. It is based on results culminating from my own work except where I have explicitly indicated. It has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

.....

Ismaila Ceesay

## Abstract

This study investigates young Gambians' social and economic aspirations. It considers how young Gambians' aspirations are shaped and negotiated, and the strategies they employ to achieve their objectives. Whilst existing research tends to view young Gambians' social and economic advancement through a lens of international migration, this study focuses on the aspirations and strategies of those who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility' – that is, an aspiration to migrate but the inability to do so. The study looks at how two groups of young urban Gambians from low socio-economic backgrounds pursue local livelihoods. Known as 'beach hustlers' and 'chanters', these youths take advantage of the resources of the tourism sector and of opportunities provided by information and communication technologies (ICT) in an attempt to fulfil their aspirations.

Drawing on data collected from multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2014 in Kololi, the country's main tourism hotspot on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean, and Brikama, where internet use in cybercafés has rapidly grown over the past two decades, I use the cases of 'beach hustlers' and 'chanters' (cyber hustlers) to shed light on the life-trajectories of young Gambians. I discuss how 'beach hustlers' take advantage of the Gambia's booming tourism industry by engaging in diverse informal economic activities. I then consider how 'chanters' accumulate wealth by employing various methods and ruses in their interactions with *toubabs* (white westerners) through internet-mediated encounters.

This study shows that the majority of young Gambians who find it increasingly difficult to migrate to the West pursue local livelihoods to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement. The aspirations and strategies of the hustlers in this study are shaped and influenced by intervening social, cultural and religious obligations and expectations. The study argues that the formation of Gambian hustlers' aspirations is the result of an interplay between familial and societal dynamics; such as generational and gender relations and reciprocal social exchange, and personal desires of upward social mobility. The study further shows that the strategies young Gambians employ are influenced by the structural constraints and opportunities that appear in specific space–time conditions. By doing so, this study contributes to the literature on the aspirations of urban youths in developing countries and the strategies they employ to achieve them, and how young people experience and respond to conditions of 'involuntary immobility'.

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This thesis is dedicated to all the women who sell fruits and other items along the beaches to feed their families.

# Glossary<sup>1</sup>

*Attaya* – Chinese green tea served with lots of sugar (M)

*Babylon* – The emic name for western countries like the UK, US and other European countries. Mostly used by young people. (E)

*Barako* – Blessing (M, A)

*Bitique* – local shop selling small items from behind a wire screen (F)

*Depaas* – Daily food allowance (F)

*Duwa* – Supplications (M)

*Gele Gele* – Commercial minibus (W)

*Grand palace* – Places where young people congregate to socialise and past time. (F)

*Haftaan* – A full-dress, ankle-length, long-sleeve religious and traditional clothing worn by Gambian men (W)

*Haram* – Sinful (A)

*Koriteh* – Muslim celebration to mark the end of fasting or Ramadan (W)

*Mbalax* – popular form of Senegambian music (W)

*Mbaran* – Having multiple partners for financial and material gain (W)

*Mo Barakalingo* – A blessed person (M)

*Mo barakatango* – A person with no blessing (M)

*Morro* – spiritual leader (M)

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<sup>1</sup> The use of an ‘M’ and ‘W’ indicates that the word is in Mandinka and/or Wollof. ‘E’ and ‘F’ indicates that the word has English and French origins, respectively. ‘A’ indicates that the word has Arab origins.

*Nawetaan* – seasonal football tournament played during the rainy season (W)

*Nerves* – The psycho-social condition of wanting to migrate without the ability to do so (E)

*Semester* – A returning migrant (E)

*Tobaski* – Islamic feast where a lamb is slaughtered (W)

*Toubab* – A white westerner (W, M)



## **List of Abbreviations**

ACE – Africa Coast to Europe

AFPRC – Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council

APRC – Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Reconstruction

CFA – Communauté Financière Africaine

DOSCIIT – Department of State for Communications, Information and Information technology.

ERP – Economic Recovery Programme

GAMCEL – Gambia Cellular Company

GAMTEL – Gambia Telecommunications Company

GBOS – Gambia Bureau of Statistics

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GNA – Gambian National Army

GoG – Government of the Gambia

GTA – Gambia Tourism Authority

GTB – Gambia Tourism Board

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

IMF – International Monetary Fund

ISP – Internet Service Provider

ITO – International Tourism Organisation

MOBSE – Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education

NAWEC – National Water and Electricity Company

NIA – National Intelligence Agency

NICI – National Information and Communication Infrastructure.

PC – Personal Computer

PPP – People’s Progressive Party

PURA – Public Utilities Regulatory Authority

SSA – Sub Saharan Africa

TDA – Tourism Development Area

TSU – Tourism Security Unit

UKBA – United Kingdom Border Agency

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund

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Figure 3: Map showing the Tourism Development Area and the locations of major beaches and hotels. Image taken online from [www. Accessgambia.com/hotelweb/](http://www.Accessgambia.com/hotelweb/) Accessed: 12/11/2015.

GAMTEL



WALES



AON CYBERCAFE



# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### **1.1 Background: “There is no way but hustling”**

In 2012, I visited the Gambia for the first time as a doctoral researcher. My research then focussed on investigating the use and impacts of information and communication technology (ICT) on public sector performance. I had gone to the field with a focus on the developmental benefits of ICT, having read a lot about the dominant theories of ‘ICT for development’. However, my frequent visits to cybercafés to access the Internet exposed me to the contextual and ‘non-developmental’ (Molony, 2008) uses of ICTs, mostly by young people. Deeply immersed in the chat rooms that appeared on their screens and not particularly perturbed by the humid and muggy environment of the cybercafé as I was, local youths appropriated the Internet in ways that supported their income generation and livelihood strategies.

This type of ICT use, locally associated with ‘online hustling’ (Wyche, Forte and Schoenebeck, 2013), ignited my research interest in the everyday use of ICT by marginal populations to support their urban livelihoods – or making ends meet. In particular, I became interested in exploring the factors that drive specific users to adopt and appropriate technologies in particular ways. I returned to Edinburgh to carry out the bureaucratic process of changing my PhD topic. I went back to the field in 2013 to conduct research on Internet youth hustling. My primary objective was to investigate the hustling activities of Gambian youths in cybercafés. Hustling is a comprehensive term that has been used to describe both criminal and noncriminal economic activities of an increasing number of urban youth (Carmichael, 1975). In the Gambia, the term has been used to describe the livelihood strategies and informal income generating activities of young people.

Back in the field, the first observations and interviews I carried out took place at the AON cybercafé, only a short walk away from the compound where I was staying. Located in a densely populated neighbourhood called New Town in Brikama, the AON cybercafé is typical of the sort found in other Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries (Smith, 2008; Steiner, 2011; Burrell, 2012). Alkali, the proprietor, had named it after

an advert on Manchester United's match jersey, as he was a fan of the football club. The AON cybercafé is situated in a small shop at the entrance of Fadera Kunda (the home of the Faderas), Alkali's family home. The café is always full of young people, predominantly males, who sit attentively in front of personal computers (PCs) that are separated by wooden privacy partitions. Oblivious to surrounding activities, they chat with online partners in chat rooms such as Yahoo, Facebook, Skype and MSN. These partners are mostly *toubabs* (white westerners) living in either Western Europe or the United States of America (USA) as shown in their online profiles.

My first visit to the AON as a researcher was uneventful. I arrived at 10 o'clock in the morning and the place was nearly empty, except for Alkali and his cousin Buba. They were sitting on a wooden bench placed on the veranda of the cybercafé. Alkali informed me that there was no electricity but it was expected to come back on at any time. As if he could predict the actions of the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC), the electricity came back on half an hour later. The resumption of electricity was immediately followed by excited cheers of '*light natale*' (meaning electricity is back in the Mandinka language) in the neighbourhood. This precipitated the arrival of customers whose faces expressed a sense of urgency. Within minutes, all the available PCs were occupied and the AON was full to capacity. The customers who came a bit later sat themselves on one of the wooden benches placed on the veranda and waited for a PC to become available.

As the majority of the café users left for their compounds just after 2pm to have lunch, a flock of secondary school students from the nearby Brikama Upper Basic School arrived. Perhaps excited that another school day had ended, they chatted happily as they settled themselves down on benches outside the AON. A few ventured inside the café to occupy one of the few available PCs. Dem, a tall and shy 18 year old boy was among the students. His physical features and his maturity indicated that he was far older than his classmates. I later learned from him that this was because he had to repeat classes a couple of times due to a combination of factors, including failed examinations and a lack of money to pay the examination fees. Alkali identified Dem as one of the more experienced hustlers who could provide me with valuable information on the phenomenon of youth Internet hustling in cybercafés.

My attempts to talk to Dem that day were unsuccessful. With his friends around and paying attention to what he was going to say, Dem felt uncomfortable having a conversation with me on the issues I was interested in. I then proposed to meet him at a later date and in a more convenient place. We decided to meet the following day at a spot called *Wales* during his lunch break. *Wales* is a popular spot situated between the old Brikama cinema, the community radio station and the Upper Basic School. It is the *grand palace*, also called *vous* or *ghetto* (Gaibazi, 2010) (a place where groups of young males converge to listen to music, exchange news and rumours and share their social and economic frustration whilst drinking *attaya*<sup>3</sup>) for a group of youths who call themselves the *bere boys*.

The spot is called *Wales* as most of the boys who sit there have ambitions and dreams to travel to Wales in the United Kingdom (UK). Gaibazzi (2010) also found that the youths he studied in Sabi, the Gambia, name their ghettos after different transnational icons, from hip hop music, to reggae, to European football teams, and popular migrant destinations such as “Barcelona Team, Hannover, Blessed Yard and Los Angeles”. The names of these ghettos locate young people’s transnational aspirations in and through particular physical spaces (Crivello, 2015). Informal meeting points like *Wales*, where young men often converge to spend their free time have been found to be a common feature of the lives of urban youths in other African countries. For instance, similar patterns of socialisation are known as *grin* in urban and rural Mali (Jónsson 2008), *bases* in Ghana (Burrell, 2012) and *fadas* in Niger (Masquelier, 2013).

I arrived at *Wales* five minutes before midday and sat myself under the *neem* tree on one of the wooden logs that the boys use as makeshift benches. The *neem* tree had the word ‘*Wales*’ graffitied on it in red paint. *Wales* is normally empty at this time of the day as the boys do not start their *campe* (social gathering) until late afternoon. At midday exactly, the school bell rang alerting students about their lunch break. From where I was sitting, waiting for Dem, I could hear the silence of the school compound rupture with students talking in excitement leaving their classrooms. Dem arrived a few minutes later, watching behind him to ensure he was not being followed by his friends. He sat himself on one of the wooden logs facing towards me with his back to

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<sup>3</sup> Chinese green tea.



the school. He told me he had limited time and that his lunch break would only last for 45 minutes. We therefore got straight to business.

Dem started by launching into the details of his life history and then his online 'hustling' activities. He has lived with his grandparents since he was five years old following the divorce of his parents. His grandfather is the local chief of Brikama. His grandparents initially paid for his education and supported him financially but old age and the rising cost of education and other consumables diminished their ability to provide these essentials for Dem. None of his relatives were willing to help when he sought assistance from them. He was subsequently left to his own devices to pay for his education, to buy his uniform and to support himself financially. He also took over the responsibility of taking care of his grandparents by buying them a bag of rice every month and paying for their medical bills. Dem recounted his problems of fulfilling his financial obligations and the dilemma he faced between continuing his schooling and supporting his grandparents. He gave an account of the period he considered quitting school to work as a carpenter to earn some money.

Dem's struggles took place during a period that coincided with the emergence of Internet access and its use in cybercafés in Brikama. Many youths, perhaps inspired by the beach hustlers who spend the off-season in cybercafés to maintain contact with the *toubabs* they established relationships with on the beaches of Kololi and Senegambia (the hub of the Gambia's tourism industry), saw the Internet as a tool to form new, profitable relationships with foreign contacts online. Hence, cybercafés, and the Internet in particular, became spaces that provided young people with the opportunity to orchestrate encounters across distances and to accumulate foreign contacts. These encounters and the negotiations inherent within them became sources of income generation as youths started inventing ways and means to receive financial support from foreign contacts. Thus, the Internet opened up livelihood opportunities for many youths. Drawing on their study on Ghanaian youths' engagement and contact with foreigners through Internet-mediated encounters, Slater and Kwame (2005) argue that Ghanaian youths' Internet use is connected with existing long-term livelihood and poverty reduction strategies. I observed a similar situation among Gambian youths.

This is not to say that Gambian youths' initial encounters with the Internet were primarily done in the context of hustling. Some youths, like Dem himself, had long started hanging out in cybercafés using the Internet to play games or to watch YouTube videos. However, rumours of success stories that were sometimes visible through the socio-economic transformation of one hustler revealed the economic and material opportunities of online encounters with *toubabs*. With word of these opportunities spreading among youth circles, Dem started spending more time in the cybercafés 'to try his luck'. "The Internet was making my friends rich. I saw my mates making money and taking care of themselves and their families so I decided to give it a try". As among young Internet users in Accra, Ghana (Burrell, 2012: 82), rumours amplified instances of successful encounters with the Internet among the youths in Brikama. Through the retelling of rumours, many people in Brikama, who never use the Internet, expressed the conviction that it is being widely used by 'clever boys' to acquire loads of money.

Dem proceeded to share his experiences and aspirations with me. He talked about his marginal status in society due to his poverty and how, due to his hustling activities, reactions towards him from the rest of society were defined by ambivalence. Whilst those outside his closed circle see him as an idle student who wastes all his time at cybercafés, others, particularly family members, see him as a young man fulfilling his social obligations. They would pray for him and assure him that his acts would be a source of blessing for him. With these prayers and assurances in mind, Dem is optimistic about his future. His dreams and aspirations are to get good 'toubab contacts' who will financially assist him to pay for his education, to build his own house, to renovate his grandparent's compound and if possible to send them to Mecca to perform the *Hajj* or pilgrimage<sup>4</sup>.

The ringing of the school bell announced the end of lunch break and abruptly interrupted Dem's explications. This brought us back to the present as in recounting his experiences and aspirations we were both transported into the pendulum of his life. Dem paused and looked at me. I could see relief on his face. Perhaps the relief of having the chance to share his story. He told me, "I will come to see you at your

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<sup>4</sup> The annual Islamic pilgrimage to the city of Mecca, in Saudi Arabia. It is one of the five pillars of Islam and so it is a mandatory religious duty for Muslims. It must be carried out at least once in a lifetime by all adult Muslims who are financially and physically capable of undertaking the journey.

compound after school”, got up and disappeared into the crowd of students rushing to enter the school gate before it closed.

Dem’s story and those of other online hustlers, together with the narratives of a group of young men and women who make a living by engaging in diverse informal activities in the Gambia’s tourism sector, highlights the theme of this ethnography. Known as ‘beach hustlers’, I had spent some time with them in Kololi during my previous visits to the Gambia. These narratives, which centred on economic hardship, strategies of survival, poverty and humiliation, experiences of marginality, family obligations and personal aspirations and supporting parents to be blessed and successful provide the ethnographic materials of this study. The study merges the lives and links the economic strategies and aspirations of ‘beach hustlers’ and cyber hustlers (who refer to themselves as ‘chanters’). The term aspirations as used here refers to hustlers’ wishes and goals of fulfilling family and societal expectations and attaining upward social mobility, whereas strategies are the activities and practices they employ in their interactions with *toubabs* to realise their aspirations.

The hustlers in this study are unified in their struggles to survive and, in particular, their passions to meet *toubabs* either at the beach or online, who would help them with the financial support they need to fulfil their aspirations. They expressed their aspirations in terms of achieving ‘social and economic advancement’. For them this means having the ability and the economic capacity to fulfil socio-cultural obligations, to gain access to consumer goods and to attain upward social mobility. Socio-cultural obligations means providing subsistence and other material support for parents, other family members and others within the community. The combination of fulfilling socio-cultural obligations and having access to consumer goods leads to enhanced social status.

In a context of economic decay and increasing socio-economic restraints in neoliberal post-colonial Africa, youths have progressively faced difficulties in securing the means to fulfil the moral and financial requirements with respect to their parents, households and their communities, and thus be considered adults (Cruise O'Brien 1996; Masquelier 2005; Vigh 2006; Roth 2008). This impasse has engendered a relative sense of marginalisation among youths in several urban African contexts,

prompting some scholars to suggest that it has been a key factor in a number of violent conflicts in which young people have been the protagonists (Richards, 1996; Vigh, 2006). The Gambia's failure in postcolonial modernization and development compounded by socio-economic stagnation saw many young people becoming disenchanted about their future prospects. Even though a regime change in 1994 gave new hope to the youths, by the turn of the millennium these hopes vanished in the face of continued economic hardship.

In contemporary Gambia, hustling seems to be one of the main ways in which young people have chosen to change their situation. In fact hustling has become a well-entrenched livelihood strategy among urban Gambian youths. With the increasing scarcity of conventional economic opportunities to achieve their aspirations, the protagonists of this study resort to forms of informal economic activities or 'hustling' that provide opportunities for them to fulfil their aspirations. As Dem solemnly told me: 'There is no way but hustling'.

## **1.2 The Focus of the Study**

This thesis documents the hustling strategies of young urban Gambians who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility', those who Gaibazzi (2015) refers to as the 'stayers'. It explores the aspirations they want to achieve by engaging in hustling, and the factors that shape these aspirations. Specifically, this study is about how a group of young Gambians experience and respond to the constraints they face in their attempts to travel to the West to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement. Drawing on Cape Verdean examples, Carling (2002) uses the term 'involuntary immobility' to describe the situation of young people who wish to migrate to fulfil their aspirations but are unable to do so due to a number of constraints such as restrictive immigration policies and overwhelming travel costs. The notion of 'involuntary immobility' captures well the situation experienced by many of my interlocutors.

From the mid-1990s, the impact of neoliberal restructuring saw the consolidation of international migration among Gambian youths, whose compelling aspiration to travel (out of Africa) was symptomatic of an actual or imagined exit option from a situation

characterised by a lack of perspective in relation to self-realisation at home (Gaibazzi, 2010). Thus, many rural (as shown by Gaibazzi on example of the Soninke in rural Gambia) and urban youths began to explore the prospect of migrating particularly to the West, to pursue education or to work. The Gambia does not seem to be an exception in this situation as many other youths in other African contexts were experiencing similar trajectories (Horst 2006; Mains 2007; Vigh 2009).

In the years following independence from the UK, in the 1970s to be more precise, migration to the West, the UK and the USA in particular, was easier for the majority of Gambians than it is today. Gambian citizens were not required to have a visa to travel to the UK and obtaining a visa to the USA was much easier. With limited opportunities to achieve their aspirations at home, many young Gambians resorted to international migration. During this period, there existed primarily two established ways of achieving social and economic advancement among urban youths in the Gambia. The first was to migrate to Europe, the US and/or other countries like Libya and Sierra Leone and hustle and send money or return with the capital needed to buy a compound and build a house for one's family and possibly invest in an additional small business. The second option was to go abroad (either UK, USA or other West African Countries like Sierra Leone and Ghana) for university-level education<sup>5</sup> and return as a trained professional and work as a top civil servant in the Gambian government and state-owned enterprises or acquire a job in the private sector and international organisations.

Hence, and broadly speaking, the majority of today's middle-aged Gambians who have achieved social and economic advancement followed either or both of these trajectories. Beach hustlers, who were active in the tourism industry in the 1980s constituted the majority of young Gambians who took advantage of the visa-free regime to go and hustle in the West. Through their interactions and contacts with *toubabs* in the tourism industry, they not only became exposed to the opportunities available in the West, but also established the networks that facilitated their journey.

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<sup>5</sup> The Gambia did not have a university during this period.

Consequently, the majority of the younger generation of Gambians anticipated their future prospects in terms of these options and possibilities. However, these possibilities have narrowed down due to strict visa restrictions. From the mid-1990s, just after the military took over power, restrictions on immigration to the West increased. A few days after the military coup in 1994, the UK government announced the imposition of visa requirements for all Gambians who wished to travel to the country. This led to the deportation of a flight half full of Gambians from the UK as they were already on the flight when the new regulations were announced and enforced. Following this, it became more difficult for Gambian citizens, young people in particular, to obtain either US or Schengen visas. This is compounded by the overwhelming cost of a plane ticket to the West<sup>6</sup>. Today, young Gambians' prospects of pursuing the trajectory of previous generations by making a livelihood based on international migration are therefore bleak. As a result, many of the young Gambians I encountered during my fieldwork expressed a sense of 'involuntary immobility' - an aspiration to migrate, but inability to do so (Carling, 2002).

Aware that their chances to migrate to the West are becoming ever slimmer, the beach hustlers and chanters of this study pursue local livelihoods by taking advantage of the resources (the tourism sector and internet availability and access in cybercafés) available to them and turn them into income earning opportunities in order to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement. It must be noted that migration to the West still forms part of the idyllic life trajectory of social and economic advancement envisioned by most Gambian youths. For example, Mr. Fatty, one of my key interlocutors, is a school teacher who engages in chanting activities. Although he primarily considers chanting as providing opportunities to complement his meagre salary, he still anticipates the prospect of meeting a *toubab* who can help him 'travel to the UK to further his studies'. Over a bowl of porridge, one Saturday morning, he confided to me that he will quit his job if he has the opportunity to travel to Europe. He admitted that he does not envisage this happening any time soon so he must 'hustle to help' his parents.

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<sup>6</sup> The cost of a plane ticket to Europe, for example, has quadrupled during the past fifteen years. A return ticket to the UK now costs around 35, 000 Dalasis, ten times more than the average monthly income of the majority of Gambian.

## **Conceptualising ‘Involuntary Immobility’**

Involuntary immobility is a term coined by Carling (2002) to describe the plight of non-migrants, like Mr. Fatty, who wish to fulfil their migration aspirations but who are unable to do so. Binaisa (2011) draws on the term to describe the under-researched phenomena of those migrants in Britain who wish to return to Uganda but whose plans are frustrated by a range of factors. Carling’s model of ‘involuntary immobility’ is representative of the studies that try to explain the causes of immobility, though it takes into account the ‘consequences’ or implications of migration by drawing attention to the discourses and socio-cultural practices that make emigration more desirable and predictable. Nonetheless, the sheer number of people wishing to change their socio-spatial configurations but not being able to do so indicates that ‘our times are characterised by involuntary immobility as much as by large migration flows’ (Carling, 2002: 14). Indeed, one of the most striking aspects of today’s migration order compared to the recent past, is the degree of conflict over mobility and the frustration about immobility among people in many countries of emigration such as the Gambia.

Carling’s notion of ‘involuntary immobility’ aptly describes the situation of the majority of young people I encountered during fieldwork in the Gambia, where fewer people are able to migrate to the West than the number who aspired to do so. It is also a condition that young Gambians seemed to share with many other youths on the continent, who longed for migration but were forced to indefinitely postpone their departures (Horst 2006; Jonsson 2007; Pandolfo 2007; Vigh 2009). Gaibazzi (2010) contends that migration scholars have paid only scant attention to the fact that people do not move, and have focused instead on outmigration as the element to analyse and explain the trajectories of postcolonial African youths.

A study on the experiences of urban Gambia youths in a condition of ‘involuntary immobility’ requires some clarification of the concept of immobility. In common usage the term immobility is synonymous with non-migration. However, the term has also been used to describe social immobility. For instance, in Lusaka, Zambia, Hansen found that many of the young people she observed are likely ‘to get stuck in the compounds’ as the odds against their transcending the socioeconomic space in which

they find themselves constrained are high. For this study, I use the term immobility to signify a condition of not being able to or not wanting to migrate.

This thesis, therefore, is an attempt to understand how young urban Gambians experience and negotiate their social positions in a context of ‘involuntary immobility’ by engaging in diverse forms of hustling. In a setting where international migration is a longstanding feature of social life, resulting from the long tradition of migration due to its geographic location, which has seen many Gambians migrate abroad to study and/or work, the dynamics of staying behind are equally significant as people deliberately discuss the roles, duties and entitlements of those who stay.

Consequently, in the Gambian context, immobility can be perceived as a threat to masculinity, ‘as a liminal period in which young men draw on available resources to move out of their place in order to move up the socio-generational scale’ (Gaibazzi, 2010). Similarly, Jonsson (2012) has shown that in a Malian village, ‘immobile youths’ who are ‘stuck’ in the village and fail to experience progress are stigmatised as lazy or worthless people. Hence, ‘involuntary immobility’, in this respect, appears to be a multifaceted phenomenon. Not only may people be unable to move out of the country, but they may also be unable to secure a place at home, as if they were suspended between moving and staying (Gaibazzi, 2010).

I am not claiming that all the hustlers I encountered during fieldwork in the Gambia are experiencing a state of ‘involuntary immobility’. The stories of a few hustlers, the most successful ones in particular, indicate that they are quite content to stay in the Gambia. And so, they are not actively pursuing mobility in the form of migration. Rather they pursue social mobility through hustling. Even those hustlers who consider themselves to be ‘involuntarily immobile’, restrictions on immigration looms so large that they have resigned to changing their situations through migration. Hence, aware that the ability to travel is becoming highly unlikely for them, if not impossible, they actively engage in hustling as a means to fulfil their immediate needs and long term aspirations.

This form of adaptation to restrictions of migration is also informed by an understanding of the dynamics underpinning the intersectionality of hustling, social position and gender. In the Gambia, the significance of social position and gender



underpins the social structure of society. Notions of status and power are strongly associated with masculinity. To some extent hustling has altered the relationship between social position and gender nowadays. As income plays an important role in determining one's social position, the access to income through hustling by some women has led to less obvious gender demarcations of social status.

It is worth mentioning that 'involuntary immobility' does not entail that constraints to migration are stopping young Gambians from migrating. Although many of the hustlers I encountered during fieldwork consider themselves as 'stuck', some still pursue mobility in the form of migration to the West. Certainly, many young Gambians still actively pursue their migratory dreams to the West through 'irregular migration' by taking the so-called 'back way' either through the Sahara or the Mediterranean. The people whose lives this study recounts are young Gambians who aspire to migrate legally and safely to their desired destinations, particularly the United Kingdom, the USA and other Western European countries. Several factors make these destinations more attractive to the majority of young Gambians, the majority of my interlocutors in particular, who expressed a sense of 'involuntary immobility'. These include the perceived success of '*semesters*'<sup>7</sup> or returning migrants from these destinations and the potential economic opportunities that cannot be matched by migration to other African countries or Asia.

### **The Hustlers and the Wider Socio-Economic Context**

The 'beach hustlers' in this study consist of small entrepreneurs, principally peddlers, vendors and others who provide formal and informal services to *toubab* tourists within the Gambia's tourism industry. Operating on the margins of the industry and employing diverse income generating techniques, they benefit both financially and materially from their interactions with *toubabs*. I examine how they achieve their goals by navigating tourist spaces, making use of contacts and networks. I also explore how they use dress, appearance and language to portray an image of themselves that not only elicits trust, but also sympathy from the *toubabs*. The second group, the online

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<sup>7</sup> Term is derived from *Semester*, which means holiday in Swedish. The term is used in the Gambia to refer to someone who has travelled to either Europe or the US, is considered to have accumulated enough wealth and has now returned home on holidays. Semesters can be distinguished by their style of dress, the cars they drive and the wealth they display.

hustlers who call themselves ‘chanters’, entails a group of youths, like Dem, who engage in and make a living through Internet-related activities. Mostly found in cybercafés, they operate individually, competing for status and material success. I examine their ‘itineraries of accumulation’ (Ndjio, 2006) by exploring the techniques and strategies they employ to make money from the *toubabs* they establish relationships with online.

Urban youth hustling in the Gambia takes place within the contexts of economic crisis, political uncertainty and social ambivalence (more in Chapter 2). Misplaced policy priorities have seen the country register its highest rate of youth unemployment. This is partly due to the lack of educational opportunities, such as skills training, beyond the national secondary certificate, engendering a mismatch between the available skills and the needs of the private sector market. Compounding this issue is the poor performance of the Gambian economy in the past 20 years due to both exogenous and endogenous factors. This has seen the majority of Gambians sliding into poverty with people struggling to make ends meet, particularly the unemployed. Saine, a Gambian Professor of Political Science living in the US, provided a compelling characterisation of the situation:

The country is experiencing the adverse effects of the present serious economic crisis. This has resulted in hardship and increased poverty. The failure of the government to address the current situation will aggravate the already pitiful poverty status of the majority of Gambians (Saine, 2009: 92).

As Saine rightly predicted, the situation indeed depreciated. Poor economic policies and fiscal indiscipline have precipitated difficult economic situations, pushing many Gambians into abject poverty. Unemployment is pervasive, salaries are low, and the cost of living is rising on a daily basis causing a sharp fall in the standard of living of many Gambians. The combination of these factors has contributed to constraining the free global movement of young Gambians as Western governments consider them to be economic liabilities.

The majority of Gambians, young people in particular, responded to this situation by engaging in informal activities. They create their own ways and means of generating income by making use of the opportunities and resources available to them.

Anthropologists working in other contexts have shown how the people they studied responded to their socio-economic predicaments (see Thieme, 2010, 2013; Venkatesh, 2006; Pryce, 1986; Smith, 2008; Macgaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000 amongst others). In particular, Sandbrook and Barker's (1985) observation that the survival strategies adopted by many Ghanaians in the 1980s was as a response to the country's economic crisis is consistent with the case of Gambian youths. The authors showed how Ghanaians coped with the collapse of their formal economy by engaging in informal economic activities. This recourse to 'fend for themselves and getting by', they contend, 'is a creative adaptation to a deteriorating situation' (pp.24). Gambian youths adapted to and invented ways to deal with the economic challenges that threaten not only their everyday livelihoods but also their social status.

### **Conceptualising the Informal Economy**

The term 'informal economy' became current in the 1970s as a label for economic activities which take place outside the framework of corporate public and private sector establishments. As with many other social scientific issues, the theoretical underpinnings of informality or informal economic activities can be approached from a variety of perspectives which might include their emergence, their purpose and their social perception. Informal sector is a term coined by the British Anthropologist, Keith Hart in his ground breaking study of the low-income activities of unskilled FraFra migrants in Accra who could not find wage employment (Hart, 1973). Hart's particular interest of inquiry revolved around whether the surplus mass of urban unemployed and underemployed 'constitute a passive exploited majority' or do their informal economic activities "possess some autonomous capacity for generating incomes"? He concluded that the masses who were surplus to the requirements for wage labour in African cities were not 'unemployed', but rather were positively employed and proposed that these activities be contrasted with the 'formal' economy of government and organized capitalism as 'informal income opportunities'.

Hart proposed that these activities be contrasted with the 'formal' economy of government and organized capitalism as 'informal income opportunities'. Moreover, he suggested that the aggregate intersectoral relationship between the two sources of employment might be of some significance for models of economic development in

the long run. In particular, the informal economy might be a passive adjunct of growth originating elsewhere or its dynamism might be a crucial ingredient of economic transformation in some cases.

This view of informality is increasingly being challenged by an alternative perspective which has developed since the early 1980s which saw an essentially structuralist approach which has shifted the focus from informality represented as a marginalized sector to 'informalization' conceived as a wider economic response to crisis (Meagher, 1995). The informalization approach criticizes much of the conventional informal sector literature as being based on abstract and often idealized models that fail to grasp adequately the shifting social processes at work in the development of the informal economy, and the relationship of these processes to the broader context of the changing world economy. According to the informalization perspective, informality must be analysed, not as a product of bad state policy, but in terms of shifts in the possibilities for accumulation in the context of the current global economic crisis.

Nonetheless, Hart noted that informal activities encompass a gamut of activities from marginal operations to large enterprises. He distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate informal activities. The former includes primary and secondary activities such as farmers and self-employed artisans; tertiary enterprises such as housing and transport; small-scale distributors such as petty traders and street hawkers and those who provide informal services such as shoe shiners and barbers. The latter includes hustlers who trade in stolen goods, drugs and prostitution, confidence tricksters (e.g. money doublers) and gamblers.

In the same vein, Roitman (1990: 679) defines informal economic activities as economic activities that are unmeasured and unrecorded. Hence 'some of its activities are illegal, others are not illegal in themselves but are carried out in a manner that avoids taxation or in some way deprives the state of revenue'. Whether legitimate or illegitimate, legal or illegal, informal economic activities emerge in response to desperate situations. Individuals facing economic uncertainties are forced to create ways of acquiring the resources they need for their basic survival. In investigating the alternative economic strategies of youths in Nairobi's largest and oldest informal settlement, Mathare, Thieme (2013: 13) notes that the youths' engagements in the

informal waste economy was considered a “last resort survival and livelihood strategy” in the absence of access to legal spheres and formal modes of employment.

It follows from this that informality is in the eye of the beholder (Hart, 2000). This means that the informal economy is multifaceted and has been perceived in a number of different ways. Different people in different contexts construct their own notions of informal economic activities. This is reflected in the multiplex use of the concept of informal economy, which includes but are not limited to, the black market, the hidden sector, the peripheral, shadow and un-official economy (Ferman et al, 1973; Guttman, 1977; Simon and Witte, 1982). In the Gambia, the concept has been indiscriminately used to refer to the activities of the hustlers in this study and the Lebanese and Indian businessmen who control large segments of the country’s economy.

Although Gambian youths used the term ‘hustling’ to describe their informal economic activities, many other street expressions have been used to describe the concept or idea of hustling as relates to informality or the informal economy, particularly within Africa. For instance, in Senegal, Venables (2009) interprets the idea of *gòrgòrлу* as a means of ‘getting by’ or ‘making do’. In Kenya, it is called *jua kali* (a Kiswahili term meaning harsh sun) and refers to the creativity and resourcefulness of labourers in Kenya’s informal economy (King, 1996). *Kalabule* is the word used by Ghanaians to refer to their activities of getting by- a word both loaded and derogatory, signifying ‘practices involving business undertakings that use foul means to achieve excessive economic gains’ (Adjibolosoo, 1995).

With an emphasis on ‘getting by’ or ‘making do’, the above expressions invoke similar connotations with ‘*je me débrouille*’, a stock phrase commonly used by young people in Cameroon to explain how they cope with unforeseen everyday life situations and challenges in the urban social environment (Waage, 2006). For Reed-Danahay (1996:62), the term ‘*se débrouiller*’ possesses a ‘positive connotation of shrewdness and is connected with the value of social fluidity’. In essence, it suggests the ability to be resourceful and manipulative in equal measure, yet making the most out of difficult situations.

The above expressions vividly convey the extemporaneous nature of the lives of young urban Africans, the protagonists of this study in particular. Lévi-Strauss’s (1966)

concept of *bricolage*, describing the *bricoleur* as someone who takes ‘advantage of situations presented to her/him’, is a useful analytical tool to understand the situation of the hustlers in this study. For the protagonists of this study, informal economic activities such as beach hustling and chanting where *toubabs* are primarily targeted provided opportunities to respond to their social and economic challenges. These economic activities involve the use of certain tactics based on manipulation and taking advantage of circumstances to generate the income needed to fulfil their aspirations.

These expressions, commonly used in urban African settings, signify a shared way of interpreting everyday challenges and precarious survival situations in a socio-culturally complex society. They also reflect the common survival strategies and the ways by which they are negotiated through the social landscape (Waage, 2006). Through the narratives and everyday life challenges and strategies of beach hustlers and chanters, this thesis does not only contribute to the analysis of the flexibility and creativity needed to ‘make it’ in an urban milieu beset by socio-cultural inhibitions and economic decay, it also enriches our understanding of how young people use hustling to renegotiate their social position.

The economic activities of the hustlers in this study entail income earning tactics that can to some extent be considered to straddle the line between the formal and the informal economy and at the same time transgress the boundaries between the licit and illicit and the moral and immoral. Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 38) aptly describe this situation:

African youths find their own ways and means which sometimes involve the supply of hitherto unimagined services that may involve illicit or stigmatised forms of work blurring the lines of legality/illegality.

### **Other Forms of Income-Generating Activities**

It is worth mentioning that beach hustling and chanting are not the only income generating opportunities available to Gambian youths to improve their social and economic conditions at the time of this fieldwork. Just as Fergusson (1999:78-79) underscores the variation of trajectories and strategies that draw on rural and urban resources in a variety of ways when he discussed labour patterns in the Zambian

Copperbelt, this study is also mindful of the ‘full house of variation’ (Ibid) that was available for Gambian youths to achieve social and economic advancement. During the period I was carrying out fieldwork in the Gambia, hustling among Gambian youths included a plethora of economic activities. Not drawn (both socially and economically) by the Gambian government’s clarion call to go ‘back to the land’ and engage in agriculture and fishing, and not tempted to take the ‘back way’, some young Gambians generated income by engaging in a gamut of economic activities, such as gambling, buying and selling of imported second hand goods like mobile phones, that can provide them the income they need to fulfil their aspirations.

For instance, it has been reported that the strategic use of sexual relationships for financial and material benefits is being used by young Gambians, mostly female, to generate income. Locally known as *mbaran*, it involves establishing multiple and sometimes simultaneous relationships with financially superior partners. In a context where young Gambians feel that one relationship can no longer fulfil all desires, the young females I spoke with and who engage in *mbaran* emphasize that they need both affective connection and material resources, but that it is not always possible to obtain both from the same relationship. Like young women in Dakar (Nyamnjoh, 2005) and South Africa (Hunter, 2009), whose specific desires cause them to cultivate different relationships for different ends, so too, do the Gambian girls who engage in *mbaran* create multiple relationships that are both for economic gain and emotional attachment.

Chant and Evans (2010: 353) explored the strategic use of sexual relationships in bolstering the ‘economic well-being’ of young low-income women in the Gambia and noted ‘the increasingly prominent place of cross-generational relationships in the livelihood strategies of young women struggling with unemployment in a constrained labour market often resulting in multiple, concurrent relations’. Young Gambian girls under pressure to support their families, to fulfil various basic survival needs and/or aspirations for socio-economic mobility enter into unions with older men or so-called “sugar daddies”. Other young people, like the ones Janson (2014:79) studied, sought solace in spirituality by joining the Tablighi Islamic movement where they attempt to ‘escape the burden of their everyday reality in the Gambia, which is marked by emptiness, depression and unemployment’.

Other young Gambians encountered during fieldwork did not pursue any particular economic activity to change their life trajectory. Instead, they resorted to hanging out in their *vous* fantasising about their dreams and chances of migrating to the West. Jonsson (2012) found similar forms of adaptations to ‘involuntary immobility’ among the youths she studied in the village of Kounda in Mali. In the Gambia, the *nerves* syndrome or simply *nerves* (Gaibazzi, 2010) has come to epitomise the condition of the young Gambians who, mostly male, experience ‘involuntary immobility’ by sitting in *grand palaces* and talking about their aspirations, which hinge on travelling to Europe to achieve success and provide for their families, and their frustrations of not being able to migrate. I must underline that the *nerves* syndrome does not only reflect an aspiration to travel and a frustration about the inability to do so, but is also rooted in everyday hardship or ‘suffering’ as the majority of my interlocutors who declared themselves ‘to be suffering from nerves’ intimated to me during my field work. Thus the *nerves* syndrome can be seen as a variant or elaboration of the discourse on hustling, emphasising pro-active attitudes as a precondition to socio-economic success.

The Somali word *Buufis* has been used by Cindy Horst (2006) to describe a similar phenomenon among Somali refugees living in Dadaab refugee camp, Kenya. *Buufi* is a Somali word that means ‘to blow into or to inflate’ and ‘indicates a longing or desire blown into someone’s mind’ (Horst, 2006:143). In Dadaab, *buufis* is used both to refer to someone’s hope, longing, desire and dream to go for resettlement and the aspiration for emigration and its failed attempts. This can increase the blowing of the *buufis* to such an extent that it becomes a form of spirit possession and a cause of madness (Horst 2006). Brad Weiss (2005) has described similar phenomena in his study of Arusha (Tanzania) young men. Weiss finds that everyday hardship generates a stream of thoughts in young men’s minds, which is perceived as pain and which he also associates to spirit possession. The concepts of *nerves* and *buufis* illustrate how the opportunities, constraints, hopes and dreams that Gambian youths and Somali refugees experience are often determined by transnational factors.



### **1.3 Theoretical Contribution**

This ethnography offers to open up a new theoretical territory through which to understand young people's aspirations and how they are fulfilled. The study suggests ways in which we can conceive of and investigate the aspirations of young urban Africans and how they are achieved through the ways in which they experience involuntary immobility. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of research that sought to understand the livelihood trajectories of urban youths (Nyanzi, Rosenberg-Jallow, Bah & Nyanzi, 2005; Ebron, 2002; Wagner & Yamba, 1986; Brown, 1992 and Venables, 2009) by focusing on young people's experiences of 'involuntary immobility'.

I approach the topic by focusing on the importance of local livelihoods to the achievement of social and economic aspirations. Existing scholarship on the aspirations of urban youths in the Gambia and elsewhere in developing countries, and how they are achieved tends to put too much emphasis on international migration as a means of achieving social and economic advancement (see Cabezas, 2004; Venables, 2009; Meiu, 2009; De Francisco, 2004 and Nyanzi, Rosenberg-Jallow, Bah & Nyanzi, 2005; Ebron, 2002 and Wagner & Yamba, 1986). These studies contend that young Gambians consider international migration as the only way to attain socio-economic advancement. For instance, the majority of studies on beach boys in the Gambia emphasise their ultimate wish to migrate out of their country to either Europe or North America through relationships with foreign women. Leaving for Europe, and changing their present condition, is seen as an opportunity to create a better life for themselves (Brown 1992:365).

Whilst these approaches have provided useful insights through which to understand the aspirations of some young Gambians, they ignore the efforts and experiences of those who seek alternative means of achieving social and economic advancement by pursuing local livelihoods. Failing to tell their stories implicitly supports dominant Western-centric notions that African youths are excessively fixated with the idea that success and financial autonomy and socio-economic advancement can only be achieved through migration to the West. These notions are further reinforced by recent media images of the attempts of young African youths to enter Western Europe

through either the Mediterranean or the Sahara by risking their lives. Hence, this study principally contributes to the growing body of anthropological literature on young people and the ways they internalise local opportunities to achieve social and economic advancement. It suggests ways in which we can conceive of and investigate livelihood strategies of young urban Africans that is not based on migration.

In the chapters that follow, I shift attention to the experiences of Gambian hustlers I encountered during fieldwork, who rather than wait to migrate, take advantage of local opportunities to achieve social and economic advancement. By exploring their economic activities and aspirations, I intend to demonstrate the empirical grounds for my assertion that, in many cases, in the Gambia, some young people pursue local livelihoods to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement. In other words, finding themselves in a condition of ‘involuntary immobility’, they take advantage of locally available opportunities and resources to create a better life for themselves and their families. This study supplements the works of Africanist anthropologists who have recently made attempts to bring to the fore of social analysis the lives and experiences of young Africans who ‘stay behind’ (Gaibazzi, 2015). For example, in an attempt to present an alternative to the view that migration has become a default option for many young people in Africa to pursue their livelihoods and fulfil their aspirations, Gaibazzi explored the lives of young men who ‘stay behind’ in the Gambian village of Sabi whose ‘settled lives’, he argues, have been taken for granted.

Although the hustlers in this study earn a living through their interactions with *toubabs*, the aim is not to establish a systematic comparison between beach hustlers and chanters. Rather, the aim is to map out the crosscutting trajectories of young people, the economic activities they engage in to achieve their aspirations and the factors that shape these aspirations. Life story interviews with, and the narrated experiences of, key beach hustlers and chanters provided the empirical foundations that helped the study to juxtapose and socially contextualise the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters, and the strategies they employ to achieve their aspirations. The overarching concern of this study, then, is precisely to investigate young Gambians’ social and economic aspirations and the hustling strategies they employ to achieve their aspirations. The key questions that the study seeks to explore are: What are the social and economic aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters? How are these aspirations

shaped and negotiated? What strategies do they employ to achieve their aspirations? Drawing on this, the study aims to address the broad themes of aspirations, aspirations formation and livelihood strategies.

This ethnography provides an intricate account of how young Gambians in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ pursue local livelihoods by employing different strategies to achieve their social and economic aspirations. It further explores the social, cultural and religious factors that shape these aspirations. In order to locate the study within wider debates, the next section sets out in more detail and addresses the theoretical approaches to hustling strategies, aspirations and aspirations formation.

## **1.4 Anthropological Approaches to Hustling and Aspirations**

The young people whose life stories constitute this ethnography associate the livelihood strategies they employ to achieve their aspirations with everyday ‘hustling’. Hustling among Gambians conjures up ideas of hard work, smartness and determination to obtain something and the ability to overcome obstacles and adapt to new opportunities and positions. It speaks of an ideal of self-reliance. Although many consider it as a precondition of success, it is by no means a guarantee.

In the Gambia, hustling is both an activity and a social construct that emerged among unemployed youth in post-independent Gambia. Certainly, regardless of socio-economic status, hustling has historically been a popular livelihood option for the majority of urban youth, particularly the poor. It was common practice, during the 1980s through to the 1990s, for both the poor and elite families to respond to worsening economic situations and political uncertainty by sending their children to study, but most importantly to work/hustle abroad. This led to the term ‘hustle’ being used interchangeably with migration (Gaibazzi, 2015: 22) as people who travelled to the West are said to be going ‘to hustle’. Hustling in the West, the UK and US in particular, has been a key livelihood strategy for many young Gambians in their attempts to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement.

Despite this general conception of the term hustling within Gambian society, I have observed multiple patterns of hustling mobilised along generational and gender lines. These differences are not only influenced by the motivation of the hustler, but also by

societal perceptions. For instance, hustling before the 1990s was very much a male project in the Gambia. Although women too hustled as well, the idea of hustling outside one's place of residence was usually associated with men only. Hence, it was uncommon for women to migrate for the purpose of hustling and hustling among women was confined to street vending near their homes.

However, a declining economy resulting from the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s saw many male family heads failing in their obligations as sole subsistence providers. The diminishing ability of men to take care of the families as it used to be, has induced women to assume a more independent role in securing an income to support themselves and their children as demonstrated by the women fruit sellers of this study. Consequently, Gambian women's lives take a different trajectory nowadays compared to the case some 20 to 30 years ago where women had to marry, sometimes very early, to get access to cash and other resources through men. Thus, marriage and having children was an important factor shaping a woman's life, mainly because it determined access to resources. Although this still is the case to some extent, its significance has somewhat diminished. In particular, female hustlers' income-generating activities has effected social norms leading to a more balancing of social relations. Hence, in the contemporary context, hustling in the Gambia provides women with a new role model that departs from established gender roles which confined women strictly to the domestic sphere. This new role model also applies to the men who are now more involved in domestic work resulting in new reconfigurations of gender roles and norms.

The first subsection of this section explores the anthropological approaches to the hustling strategies of urban youths by setting out in more detail the hustling strategies of young urban men that frame and motivate this study. I then look at the relevant scholarship on young people and their aspirations, and further explore the socio-economic factors that shape these aspirations. This not only helps us to understand, make sense of and situate the empirical discussions within wider scholarship on aspirations, it will also let theory inform the empirical data of the study. However, I first want to briefly set out how I intend to define youth, as this has implications for this study.

### 1.4.1 Conceptualising 'Youth'

The ways in which the young hustlers in this study express their aspirations and the attempts they make to fulfil these aspirations in the midst of limited opportunities runs counter to the views of many West African specialists who attribute the experiences and involvement of young people in urban areas to marginalisation, socio-economic failure, crime and violence, and armed conflicts (see for example Chauveau and Richards, 2008; Richards, 1996; Vigh, 2006). These attributes have led some scholars to pessimistically describe African youths as 'hopeless', or, borrowing O'Brien's (1996) phrase, 'a lost generation'. Taken together, such observations hide the more mundane dimensions of everyday life in many settings where physical violence is not the daily fare or where numerous young people continue everyday daily living in spite of violence. In the Gambia, if there is violence, it tends to be of a structural kind, inflicted on young people's lives. These result from poverty, economic depression and societal pressures to conform to masculine expectations and obligations.

I suggest that in such a situation, young people are not so much a "lost generation" as they are a segment of the population of whom many in fact might never become adult in a normative social and cultural sense. Thus, Temudo and Abrantes (2015) calls for a challenge of the current dominant narratives about the crisis of youths in contemporary Africa and highlights the need to study their aspirations and achievements from a holistic perspective.

The concept of youth is a socio-cultural construction bearing both 'biological attributes and time and culture bound characteristics' (Durham, 2004). For instance, international organisations like the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU) and the Commonwealth apply an age bracket of 15-24 years old, 15-29 years old and 15-35 years old respectively to define youth for operational purposes. Although these organisations classify those under 15 years of age as children, a 2007 World Bank report *'Development and the Next Generation'* expanded the range to include all people between 12 and 24 years old (World Bank, 2007). The Government of the Gambia's national youth policy uses a more flexible, but extensive range of 15 to 30 years old (or 10 to 39 years old depending on the policy area) to define youth.

Conversely, anthropologists and sociologists have drawn our attention to the fact that the concept of 'youth' as a social category is culturally and historically constructed (Thorsen, 2007; Christiansen, Utas and Vigh (2006: 10) and its meaning can differ in different times and contexts. For example, in one social context, a young man without the resources to marry and establish a household may remain a youth longer than his contemporaries who have achieved this status. In Kenya, for instance, the notion of youth has, across different cultural groups, traditionally been associated with a time of ambition. Similarly, Boehm (2006) observes a situation in Lesotho where youth is perceived as a transitional phase characterised by a certain degree of liminality. In order to be a complete socially and morally accepted adult, or what Vigh (2006) calls *homo completto* or complete man, access to symbolic and material resources and marriage are essential preconditions.

In the Gambia, the social category of youth is constituted by a characteristic set of conditions that begin somewhere in adolescence and extend for many as far as their late twenties or even early thirties. These conditions include having not yet attained the widely standard markers of adulthood which can entail income, marriage and child-rearing or a combination of them. Thus, young men in their late thirties or early forties who lack these markers are still considered youth. This illustrates that the age parameter alone is not adequate to conceptualise youth in certain contexts and that young people's social categorisation are related to context-specific norms and customs, which include rites of passage, assignment of social responsibilities and social status (Waldie, 2006).

The above situation has made the transition from youth-hood to adult-hood a challenge for young people in many African contexts. Economic crisis and its attendant deprivations has put many young people in a precarious situation, where they have to wait longer than normal to be accepted as adults. The attributes of adulthood are becoming increasingly unattainable by the majority of young people in Africa struggling with unemployment and sustainable livelihoods in the context of widespread social and economic crisis. An illustrative example can be found in urban Ghana where a recurrent theme amongst youths was the indefinite postponement of their ascent to adulthood due to lack of employment, marriage and the ownership of property (Burrell, 2012).

In discussing youth in Madagascar, Cole (2005) has suggested that youth no longer be conceptualized as a transitional phase leading up to adulthood. She argues that it now appears to be quite common to remain a youth indefinitely. In an environment of economic decline, individuals occupying this expanding category of youth experience a changed relationship to their future. Hence, Honwana (2012) and Sommers (2012) use the term 'waithood' and 'being stuck' respectively to describe the experiences of young people who find themselves in a 'period of suspension between childhood and adulthood'. Specifically, 'Waithood' (a portmanteau term of "wait" and "-hood", meaning 'waiting for adulthood') refers to the perceived period of suspension between youth and adulthood. Howana (2012) argues that 'waithood' accounts for a multiplicity of young people's experiences, ranging from daily survival strategies to having to resort to improvised forms of livelihood in the informal economy to involvement in illegal and sometimes criminal endeavours. She points out that:

Young people in waithood are pushed out of the system and forced to survive on the margins of society. Rejected by the state and the formal sector of the economy, they create new spaces and mechanisms for survival and operate in subcultures outside hegemonic structures (Howana, 2012:23).

The majority of my interlocutors expressed their situation through these terms. How they respond to these processes depends greatly on their socioeconomic (such as gender and religion) and spatial location and the kinds of skills and resources they can draw from within the organization of everyday life in their own household contexts and in the wider setting. Although the barriers to international migration constitute an important challenge to many hustlers livelihoods, it seems that they are not completely unprepared to cope with such a situation. This study shows that these hustlers have crafted alternative ways of earning an income by tapping on local and available resources. I suggest that this adaptation to immobility is a genuine opportunity to make money at home.

Immobility can be a dynamic condition (Jónsson, 2007) and studies have shown how young men adapt to immobility by resorting to particular socialising patterns and youth cultures (Christiansen et al, 2006). For instance, Abdullah (1999) observes that the socio-economic uncertainty faced by post-colonial African youths is compelling them

to socially redefine themselves in terms that reflect their marginal situation. The symbolism of this redefinition is reflected in forms of socialisation and the construction of sub-cultures. Most African urban youth are now attracted to embracing religion and joining religious movements such as the Tablighi as in the Gambia (Janson 2014) and Pentecostal churches as in Ghana (Burrell, 2012). In particular, Gaibazzi (2015: 130) found that Gambian youths see piety as directly related to ‘disenfranchisement and the delusion of unrealised migration plans’.

Other forms of socialisation among urban African youth is the creation of youth groups and gangs. Ya’u (2000) observes that such gatherings in Kano, Nigeria, provides male youth with an identity. In these spaces, the use of nicknames and the consumption of contemporary music like reggae and hip hop are an important part of identity re-invention. Evident in this respect is the interplay between youth’s aspirations and the dynamics of cultural globalisation as youths tap into ‘global youth cultures’. As a result, popular and mass culture in the West has become, to a large extent, part of the repertoire of African youth culture. In Examining the ways in which urban youth in Arusha, Tanzania, ‘inhabit fantasy’, Brad Weiss (2002) helps us understand this ‘glocal’<sup>8</sup> phenomenon. He details a world of barbershops named after distant geographies, filled with the posters and paintings of black American celebrities, in which young men listen to and watch the music and visual entertainment of an ardently engaged ‘imagined’ global world.

Although this study focuses on youths in a specific context and how they experience and react to conditions of ‘involuntary immobility’, the socio-cultural dynamics inherent therein evokes issues that have a wide resonance in Africa and in Africanist scholarship on youth. It is important to note that most African societies are gerontocratic, hence, youth is seen as a transitory phase to adulthood, and its elongation, in contrast to the Western view, is not perceived as a desirable outcome (Honwana and De Boeck, 2005; Alber, Van der Geest and Reynolds-Whyte, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Uncharted borderlands along which the global meets the local’ (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000: 308).



## 1.4.2 Hustling Strategies

Sociologists and anthropologists have used the term ‘hustling’ to describe a broad range of economic activities that the young people they studied engaged in as a livelihood strategy. For example, Ned Polsky (1969), the first person to introduce the concept of hustling into the social science literature (Fields, 1985: 28), used the term to describe the activities of men who earn a living by betting on pool and billiard games in the US. In his ethnography, *‘Hustlers, Beats, and Others’*, Polsky examines the occupation of a particular type of gamblers who make a living by betting in different types of pool or billiard games. Referred to as pool room hustlers, they engage in ‘deviant occupation’ by breaking enforced gambling laws to supplement their income.

Following Polsky’s work, anthropological scholarship on hustling as a livelihood strategy has undergone a gradual conceptual focus. Broadly speaking, the earlier use of the term from the 1970s to the 1990s focused on young men’s ‘deviant’ economic undertakings to fulfil their aspirations (Klein, 1989; Calhoun, 1992; McNamara, 1995:25). The subjects of these studies were young men who engage in ‘survival sex’ by selling diverse sexual services to other men for payment and/or other personal and material advantages. For example, In *‘The Times Square Hustler: Male Prostitution in New York City’*, McNamara (1995) provided an ethnographic account of the lives of male hustlers in New York’s Times Square who are involved in the trade to supplement their income. Times Square hustlers, according to McNamara, engage in diverse activities, which range from “voyeurism, posing nude, masturbating clients or sadomasochism and oral and anal sex” (McNamara, 1995: 28). Despite having sexual encounters with other men, male hustlers do not consider themselves to be gay and their greatest contradiction lies in juxtaposing their hustling activities and their heterosexual identity (see, Klein, 1989). Similarly, Klein’s (1989: 12) study of Southern California’s bodybuilders who were involved in the “widespread selling of sexual favours to gay men” has been identified as one aspect of the broader hustling strategies that young urban men employ to achieve their aspirations. Klein found this form of hustling to be an important economic strategy for his study participants in an environment where access to resources was very limited.

Research on male street hustling has also established the principal methods through which the majority of male hustlers are introduced into hustling (Calhoun, 1992). Through 'peer introduction' male street hustlers learn about and are introduced to the trade through interactions and associations with friends, siblings and/or other relatives who are already participants. Also referred to as 'significant others', they do not only introduce the new recruits to hustling but also provide instructions, techniques and motives for carrying out the activity. Calhoun, also found that others are introduced to hustling through what he calls 'situational discovery' which involves a situation where a young person learns about male prostitution without much effort by stumbling into the activity.

The period after the 1990s saw the emergence of the definitive works on hustling in a developing world context. This was mainly due to the emergence of sex tourism in the 1990s in mostly the Caribbean and Africa. This phenomenon led to a slightly different use of the concept of hustling as the term was applied to describe the economic activities of young 'local' men who engage in intimate relationships with female tourists. Also known as beach hustling, it is defined as the activities of "young, unemployed black men who provide escort and sexual services to white female tourists of varying ages in exchange for economic goods and services which range from brand name clothes to airline tickets"(Kempadoo, 1999: 186; Phillips, 2008). The anthropological literature classifies beach hustlers into two categories depending on their economic activities and their money-making strategies. These are those who engage in transactional sex with tourists as a means of earning an income and those who offer diverse services such as guiding.

For example, in Kenya, Meiu (2009) examines the activities of the young Samburu men who migrate seasonally to coastal tourist resorts seeking the niche of tourism for material gains by developing relationships with white female tourists. Calling them the "Mombasa morans (warriors)", these young men engage in sexual relationships with "older and ugly white women for money" (Meiu, 2009: 126). Similarly, Phillips (2008) explored the interactions between white female tourists and local men in Barbados. The 'gigolos' as Phillips refers to the beach boys in Barbados, establish liaisons with female tourists which may start off as simply "sex for money," but if continued over a

continued period of time can escalate to emotional attachment and sometimes culminates in marriage.

Other studies on beach hustling have focused on beach hustlers who make money by providing unconventional guiding services to tourists. For instance, De Francisco (2004) studied the economic adaptations utilised by young men, known as the *papasi*, in Zanzibar to subsist at the margins of the tourist economy. Acting as local tour guides, key to the *papasi*'s (a Swahili word for 'tick', the blood-sucking parasitical insect) daily survival is the "Mzungu (or white man) commission". This commission, which normally amounts to about 5-10 percent of the value of the foreigner's custom, are paid to the *papasi* by hotels, guesthouses, tourist attractions and taxi drivers when they bring them business.

Correspondingly, the commission system is an important feature of the hustling strategies of beach boys in Malindi, Kenya, who also act as local tour guides for tourists (Eid Bergan, 2007) as they attempt to persuade tourists to book safaris or go for boat trips. Normally ten percent of the price paid, the beach boys in Malindi along with waiters or hotel employees, receive commission (from the place visited) for taking tourists almost anywhere; to a restaurant, to a bar or club, or to various tour-operators. Most often the commission is paid without the tourist knowing about it. In Cuba, Vertovec (2012: 29) reports that the dollars tourists spend in the country have created new unofficial opportunities for Cubans to make money. Working as *jineteros* (the Cuban name for hustlers), "they panhandle from tourists, offer their services as guides, and sell stolen merchandise such as cigars at below-market prices".

In the literature on the Gambia, studies on hustlers and their livelihood strategies that have received the most attention have focused on the sexual aspects of hustling. These include studies by Nyanzi, Rosenberg-Jallow, Bah and Nyanzi (2005), Brown (1992) and Wagner & Yamba (1986). They studied the activities of young men, locally known as *bumsters*, who provide sex to Western tourist women looking for holiday romance in return for money, goods and an opportunity to travel. To secure economic advancement through overseas migration or remittances and social respect at home, young Gambian men often cultivate relationships with older foreign female (and sometimes male visitors). In the absence of viable economic alternatives, international

and inter-generational sexual relationships are often perceived as highly desirable (Nyanzi et al., 2005).

For instance, in '*Bumsters, Big Black Organs and Old White Gold: Embodied Racial Myths in Sexual Relationships of Gambian Beach Boys*', Nyanzi et al (2005: 557) found that the key hustling strategies of *bumsters* consist of "indulging in a complex web of sexual activity ranging from commercial to non-commercial, voluntary to socially-imposed, individual to peer-driven, heterosexual to homosexual, casual to regular, particularly with foreign tourists". As part of their hustling strategy, *bumsters* establish multiple partnerships either concurrently or in sequence and having regular sexual relationships with older White women, although some also engaged in sex with younger women (ibid). Similarly, in her study on the hustling strategies of *bumsters* in the Gambia, Brown (1992) found that *bumsters* target tourists to make money from them by employing deception and spinning false stories of personal plight.

There seem to be some convergence in the hustling strategies of Gambian *bumsters* and the beach hustlers in the Caribbean, East Africa and other West African contexts. Firstly, as part of their hustling strategies, the findings reveal that beach hustlers use dress to construct a particular image as a means of conveying a certain message. Writing about Senegalese beach boys, locally known as the *cotemen*, Venables (2009) highlighted the importance of imagery as a key hustling strategy. Drawing on the works of anthropologists like Hendrickson (1996) and Newell (2005) who focus on the symbolism of clothing and body image, she argues that *cotemen* use dress and appearance to construct a particular image and convey a certain message to the tourists they interact with. Secondly, the ability of beach hustlers to speak several European languages in addition to their local languages has also been highlighted. For instance, Venables (2009) notes that *cotemen* often spoke French, Spanish or Italian in addition to their vernacular tongue and some also spoke English. Similarly, Pruitt and LaFont also assert that "learning to speak a little German occurred" among Jamaican beach hustlers (1995:431).

The forms of hustling strategies discussed above fall under the typology of economic activities that are considered to be deviating from widely acceptable norms (Miller, 1948; Polsky, 1967; Kowalski & Faupel, 1990). As a result, such hustling strategies

have engendered stigma for the hustlers involved in their respective societies (Goffman, 1968; Klein, 1989; Calhoun, 1992). Early studies on hustling strategies that portray the deviant nature of the economic activities of hustlers has given way to attempts by later scholars on the hustling strategies of urban youths to draw on the entrepreneurial nature of hustlers (Munive, 2010; Candace, 2011; Di Nunzio, 2012; Thieme, 2013; 2014). In particular, Thieme (2014: 230) described the activities of Kenyan youths, whose work within the informal waste economy are “continuously entangled in references to hustling” as a form of entrepreneurship. In her work, *‘Turning Hustlers into Entrepreneurs, and Social needs into Market Demands: Corporate–Community Encounters in Nairobi, Kenya’*, she described as entrepreneurial the hustling strategies of urban youths living in the slums who use the resources of waste in their neighbourhoods to generate income.

The beginning of the new century saw the emergence of novel forms of hustling strategies that make use of new information and communication technologies (ICT). In particular, a growing body of empirical work, particularly within social anthropology, has demonstrated the ways in which the internet has been or is being used to support the hustling strategies of young people in urban settings. Similar to the ways the chanters in this study appropriate the internet to support their hustling strategies, the studies focus on the economic activities of young people in urban settings, mostly found in cybercafés, who resort to various strategies to make money from the people they interact with online.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been a marked increase in ethnographic studies that have contributed to these theoretical insights. In Nigeria and Ghana respectively, Ndjio (2008) and Whitty (2013) reported on the internet hustling strategies of the so-called Nigerian *419*<sup>9</sup> email scammers and the Ghanaian *sakawas*<sup>10</sup>. In both instances, the scammers randomly send emails to people claiming to be a wealthy former member of the corrupt government network with access to millions of dollars and requesting help to quickly transfer the money out of the country. Email recipients are asked to provide

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<sup>9</sup> Name derives from the Nigerian Criminal Code (419) that deals with offences of obtaining property by false pretences.

<sup>10</sup> A widespread practice in Ghana which combines modern Internet-based fraud practices with traditional or religious rituals.

financial assistance to make the transfer of this money possible and is promised a substantial percentage of the money as a reward. A potential victim who believes the story and sends money will later realise that they have been defrauded as both money and scammer disappears. Internet scams can take many forms including claims about lottery winnings, church projects, or business deals (Burrell, 2008).

Forms of scams such as the 419 are not new. Ampratwum (2009: 68) reports that as far back as the 17th century, early versions of this type of scam were in use in Europe. Known as the 'Spanish Prisoner fraud', the scam in that case consisted of a correspondence in which the 'criminal' would claim to be a prisoner who knows where some buried treasure is located. The 'prisoner' would ask for money to bribe the prison guards so that he could escape and get to the treasure. In return for such money, the 'prisoner' would promise to share the treasure with the target of the scam.

Similarly, anthropologists have also reported on the emergence of new forms of online fraud known as 'romance fraud'. These are mostly popular in Ghana (Whitty, 2013) and Ivory Coast (Ford, 2014). For instance, Ford's work on the hustling activities of the "*brouteurs*" in the Ivory Coast capital of Abidjan shows how cheap and fast access to the Internet has attracted young Ivoirians into the cybercafés, where they make easy money by initiating online love affairs with Westerners. Like their Ghanaian counterparts, the "*brouteurs*" create multiple online profiles and initiate contact with potential victims through chat rooms or dating web sites with the aim of luring them into a romantic relationship. By employing various tricks, the prospective foreign "partner" is seduced into sending money for travel or medical expenses. As Abugri (2011) observes,

In these romance scams, the criminals prey on single people and lonely hearts who are looking forward to having some fun or marrying their internet dates. In the course of the Internet dating they manage to convince their victims to send them money or obtain their victims' bank accounts and empty them.

With respect to new forms of hustling strategies where the internet is used as a principal tool, two things need to be highlighted. Firstly, it is important to note that not all internet related hustling strategies are fraudulent in nature. For instance, a study of youths and cybercafé internet use in Viwandani, an informal settlement in Nairobi,

Kenya, found that Facebook has been used among youths to support income generation by searching for “employment opportunities, marketing themselves, and seeking remittances from friends and family abroad” (Wyche et al., 2013). The study reveals that constraints such as unemployment among slum dwellers created an informal economy where hustling was used as a key strategy to generate income livelihoods. Consequently, Facebook was used as a hustling platform to support some slum dwellers’ livelihood strategies by connecting them to formal employment, support entrepreneurial efforts and seek remittances, or small sums of cash, from friends and family members abroad. This type of “consolidated” use of ICTs provides income generating opportunities for peripheral users (Ibid).

Secondly, the study of the internet in hustling is not new as studies have shown how it has affected the dynamics of male street hustling or male prostitution. In ‘*In the Company of Men: The Inside Lives of Male Prostitutes*’, Smith and Grove (2011) indicate that the internet provided an outlet for male prostitutes and customers to effectively locate each other while remaining anonymous behind a computer. Experienced and novice hustlers were able to advertise their sex work by accessing computers in coffee shops for little or no cost.

In addition to the works that have provided a framework for our understanding of the hustling activities of urban youths, a few studies have emerged among Africanist anthropologists, in particular, that has approached the hustling strategies by focussing on the activities of young people who find themselves in a condition of ‘involuntary immobility’ (Gaibazzi, 2015; Jonsson, 2012; Carling, 2002). In many developing countries, ‘involuntary immobility’ has become a central concern for people who have lost a strategy for creating a better life for themselves and their families. For instance, in her study on the ‘experiences of immobility’ among young Soninke men in the village of Kounda, Mali, Jonsson (2012) showed how young Soninke men, whose aspirations to migrate relate to ‘structural and cultural features of Soninke society’, pursued alternative forms of livelihoods not based on migration as a strategy to achieve their aspiration of ‘social becoming’. In their study on Balanta young men in Guinea Bissau, Temudo and Abrantes (2015) document the agency of many rural Balanta young men in using agriculture as a means to fund their education, to feed their families and as a route to prosperity. Similar to these experiences of immobility in

Mali and Guinea Bissau, young urban Gambians adapt to immobility by resorting to hustling activities and in some cases adopting particular socialising patterns and youth cultures.

Not all young people who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ are gainfully occupied. In Sabi, the Gambia, for instance, Gaibazzi (2015) found ‘sitting’ around with friends in ghettos and drinking *attaya* characterises the experiences of some young Soninke men who find themselves in a condition of ‘involuntary immobility’. Referring to them as the ‘stayers’, the youths in Sabi resort to ‘sitting’ as a temporal strategy to ‘deal with their spatial problems’ (Ibid: 116). Unlike some of their counterparts in Sabi who engage in either agriculture or hustle, ‘just sitting’ does not accrue any value to the ‘sitters’.

### **1.4.3 Aspirations and Aspirations Formation**

Broadly speaking, aspirations are born out of the desire and ambition to achieve something. Usually, it is used to refer to the career and educational ambitions of young people, but it can also be used to refer to more general life ambitions, such as wanting to start a family or live in a particular area (Gutman and Akerman, 2008). Although aspirations embody a sense of the future, they also influence and represent people’s orientations, values, and actions in the present (Allport 1955; Zimbardo and Boyd 2008). In other words, aspirations are not only the outcome of conditions; they ‘do’ something and play an important function in people’s everyday lives. While the study of aspirations is marginal within mainstream research on the urban livelihoods of young people, perhaps because it is unclear how aspirations relate to actual outcomes (Crivello, 2015), an attempt will be made here to explore existing literature on the aspirations of young people and how they are shaped and negotiated.

The social science literature presents two primary ways of conceptualising aspirations. The first is of aspirations as expressing some component of reality – that is, what people expect to achieve (see MacBrayne, 1987). Second are aspirations as ‘hopes and dreams’ which are not necessarily rooted in reality (Gutman and Akerman, 2008; Leavy and Smith, 2010). Venables’s (2009) work on the migratory aspirations of the young people she studied in Southern Senegal, ‘who aspire to migrate but whose attempts to do so remain largely unsuccessful’, illustrates the latter.



The literature tends to provide a somewhat narrow conceptualisation of the aspirations of young people. For instance, the majority of earlier studies on aspirations were carried out in a Western context and focussed on the career aspirations (educational attainment and future occupations) of young people (see for example MacBrayne's 1987; Leavy & Smith 2010 for reviews). However, the last decade saw an emergence in a body of work that focusses on the aspirations of young people in Africa. A recent study in South Africa by Mosavel, Ahmed, Ports and Simon (2015) explored the aspirations and dreams of youth living in a low-income, urbanised, South African community. The findings suggest that the youths viewed education as their primary aspiration and the key to future success because it enabled upward social and economic mobility. A few other studies focussed on the aspirations of rural youths, particularly within the agricultural and cocoa farming sectors (see for example Anyidoho, Leavy and Asenso-Okyere, 2012; Leavy & Smith 2010) or the vocational aspirations of African students (Nwagwu, 1976).

The aspirations of many of my interlocutors diverge from those discussed above. For these youths, their aspirations for success is motivated by achieving a better life. In the case of the hustlers in this study, all acts of consumption are considered to be part of strategies for advancing personal success. Although Rowlands (1999:147) contends that the desire for success as an index of social mobility is hard to define and evaluate, the stories of the hustlers in this study suggest certain common themes in the evaluation of success. Whereas success in the 1960s and 1970s was evaluated by educational qualification and gaining access to state positions, the agenda for success and self-affirmation in neo-liberal Gambia is recognised through a preference for conspicuous consumption in the form of driving new cars, driving fancy clothes, building houses and distributing cash to family members and other people in the community.

Other scholars have focussed on the migratory aspirations of urban youths (Del Franco 2006; Thorsen, 2007; Whitehead et al, 2007; Venables, 2009). In Southern Senegal, Venables (2009) reveals that the activities of the *côtémen* within the tourism sector formed part of their migration strategies. The dreams of young Senegalese men are adrift on the Atlantic as they attempt to reach the Canary Islands in order to create employment opportunities that will generate income to send back to their extended families and also enhance their status. Young Senegalese men and women are both

striving for opportunities in what they imagine to be the economic paradise of Europe. Other scholars who did research on beach hustlers in other contexts also emphasise their ultimate wish to migrate from their country to either Europe or the USA through their relationships with foreign women (Ebron, 2002; Cabezas, 2004).

The existing studies on the aspirations of young Gambians mainly focus on their migratory aspirations (see for example Nyanzi et al., 2005; Brown, 1992; Wagner and Yamba, 1986). For instance, in their encounters with Gambian beach boys or *bumsters*, Nyanzi et al. (2005) observe how they openly fantasise and discuss their aspirations to travel to Europe or North America through their relationships with ‘older white women’ in order to escape the misery of the Gambian existence. The aspiration to migrate to the West to achieve social and economic advancement among the *bumsters* is often referred to as the *Babylon* syndrome. *Babylon*<sup>11</sup> is the emic name for the West, ‘a dream destination flowing with wealth which forms the core of the *bumsters* fantasies and aspirations to travel abroad and escape poverty’ (ibid: 567). Just like the Gambian *bumsters*, young people in Cape Verde also aspired to migrate to the West to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement (Carling, 2002). These ‘life-making projects’ are usually seen as a quest for material stability and relative comfort in an owner-occupied house with a stable family.

In addition to conceptualising the aspirations of young people, anthropological studies have also examined the ‘determinants and correlates’ of aspirations (Leavy & Smith, 2010). These focus on how aspirations are formed and how they develop in response and in relation to different environments, contexts and circumstances (Ibid). They highlight the tendency for aspirations to be formed early in childhood but shaped and modified over time by environment and experience. In other words, aspirations cannot be viewed as personal attributes entirely under an individual’s control. Rather, they are situated within and affected by particular opportunities, constraints and circumstances. Appadurai (2004: 67) views aspirations as part of wider “ethical and metaphysical ideas derived from cultural norms, that are either complementary or may substitute each other, and are never simply individual as they are formed in interaction and in the thick of social life”.

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<sup>11</sup> As oppose to *Zion*, which means ‘home’ and all its hard conditions.

Other research presents aspiration formation as a dynamic process, developing within and influenced by the context in which a person lives (Anyidoho et al., 2012). This context encompasses personal beliefs, societal expectations, and structural opportunities and constraints. Young people's economic activities are shaped by an interplay of socio-economic dynamics and the quest for their transition to adulthood. The by-product of this interplay shapes the aspirations of many young people in Africa (Kabiru et al., 2013).

For example, in his work in rural Bangladesh, Del Franco (2006) explores this dynamic, looking at how the emphasis placed by young people on commitments to family and also their own personal complex networks of social relationships influence aspirations. Similarly, drawing on empirical work by the DFID-funded Migration Development Research Centre to analyse inter-generational relations and independent child migration, Whitehead et al. (2007:18) use a specific interpretation of the concept of 'inter-generational contract' which stresses that intra-household relations "may be simultaneously relations of dependence, interdependence and autonomy on different terrains". As inter-family interactions involve constant negotiations around the long term balance of support and reciprocity, the aspirations of young people are thus framed within implicit and explicit expectations placed upon them by family and kinship networks, which in turn are influenced by gender-specific societal customs and norms (ibid:15). This corresponds with aspiration formation in the Gambia, where I have observed that youths are influenced by a strong sense of community, social support and social influences in general. Both the environment close to the individual and the broader societal context and cultural norms therefore influence aspiration formation.

It should by now be obvious that this study seeks to develop an understanding of the hustling strategies that young people employ to fulfil their aspirations. Hence, the first part of this review paid close attention to anthropological perspectives and understandings of hustling strategies. The review of previous works on the hustling strategies of young people in urban settings provides a useful theoretical lens through which to approach the hustling activities of the beach hustlers and chanters of this study. Two of the three ethnographic chapters are devoted to examining their hustling

strategies. The second part of the review explored the literature on aspirations and aspirations formation, and those which motivate and frame this study.

## **1.5 Thesis Structure/Outline**

This introductory chapter (One) provides a general introduction to my research in the Gambia. I started the introduction with a vignette partly to give the reader a foretaste of the lives and activities of Gambian hustlers who constituted the majority of my interlocutors. I provide an insight into the focus and theoretical relevance of the study by situating the study within wider scholarly debates on urban youth livelihoods and aspirations. I also set out in more detail the theoretical considerations that frame this study. I address the main theoretical approaches to aspirations, aspiration formations and livelihood strategies in order to situate the three ethnographic chapters within wider anthropological debates.

Chapter Two provides a methodological discussion which centres on how the research was conducted as well as the challenges of doing fieldwork at home and the hazards of ethnographic field work in general. In Chapter three, I introduce the Gambia as the setting of my study and briefly describe the social context of and family dynamics in the Gambia. I situate my research within the context of the contemporary political economy of the country. I evaluate the perspectives on the impact of the political and economic developments of the past 20-30 years on the ability of young Gambians to fulfil their social and economic aspirations. I then provide a brief background and context of the tourism sector, and access and use of ICTs in the Gambia.

Chapters Four, Five and Six constitute the empirical core of this study. The chapters document the hustling strategies of beach hustlers and chanters. The chapters further explored the aspirations that the hustlers aim to achieve by engaging in hustling activities. The factors that shape these aspirations were also discussed.

In Chapters Four and Five, for example, I show the strategies that beach hustlers and chanters employ to achieve their aspirations in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’. I begin by introducing the hustlers by describing the places that I met them and the settings in which I observed their operations. In particular, Chapter Four looks at beach hustlers who engage in diverse income earning activities within the informal sector of

the tourism industry. The chapter pays particular attention and gives an account of their different income earning strategies. Chapter Five is concerned with a different category of hustlers, locally known as chanters and examines their 'itineraries of accumulation' by establishing relationships with *toubabs* and resorting to various tactics to make money from them. I focus specifically on two very common ways in which my interlocutors earned money, which I refer to as 'the love method' and the 'deception method'. I explore how these methods are carried out and the tensions inherent in them.

Following on from this, Chapter Six relates hustlers to their societies by demonstrating how hustlers' activities and aspirations are shaped by both family and societal expectations and the quest for social and economic advancement. I discuss the opportunities that hustling provides for the participants of this study to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement. I examine the complex interplay between fulfilling socio-cultural obligations that hinge on reciprocity and inter-generational contracts and having access to and displaying modern consumer goods and the accomplishment of upward social mobility. I further suggest that the desire to fulfil socio-cultural obligations among my interlocutors can be understood through the notion of acquiring *barako* (blessing). The conclusions of the study are developed in Chapter Seven, where key ethnographic findings are summarised and weaved together in order to relate Gambian youths' hustling activities to ideas about aspirations of social and economic advancement, fulfilling socio-cultural obligations and achieving upward social mobility.

# CHAPTER TWO

## The 'Hustler'-Cum-Ethnographer

### 2.1 Introduction

The accounts and stories of the hustlers in this ethnography culminated from eight months of fieldwork in the Gambia. The fieldwork was carried out in two phases between 2013 and 2014. The first phase was carried out from September to December 2013. This was followed by a second phase from March 2014 to July 2014. To understand the aspirations of hustlers and how they are shaped and the strategies they employ to achieve them, I followed the lives of prominent beach hustlers and chanters. Their accounts and personal stories reflect the lives of many hustlers who find themselves in a condition of 'involuntary immobility'. Using three ethnographic chapters, I connect their trajectories and tell their stories in a way that evokes some sense of their situations and economic activities.

To achieve this, I interacted with hustlers in their natural settings. This is the context in which the activities of interest to the researcher occur (Blaikie, 2010: 114). For instance, to understand the lives, aspirations and hustling strategies of chanters, I spent time observing and talking to them in cybercafés in Brikama, where the activity is prevalent among the town's youths. I also spoke to Internet café operators and owners, people in the neighbourhood and the families and friends of hustlers. Although I conducted observations and interviews in all the cybercafés in Brikama, the AON and GAMTEL and their surroundings served as my main research setting.

My encounters with beach hustlers mostly took place in Kololi, the Gambia's tourism industry's largest and most populated beach section. Considered the hotspot of Gambian tourism, it boasts many hotels and restaurants. In addition, I also spoke to beach hustlers who operated in Bakau, Bijilo and Senegambia. In these spaces, I approached participants in their occupations as taxi drivers, bird watchers, fishermen, local tour guides, fruit sellers, juice pressers and souvenir vendors. In particular, I followed the hustlers whose stories make up this ethnography, observing their work on the beaches, in taxi stands and the airport, amongst other places. This chapter reflects upon and discusses the salient methodological issues that emerged during my

encounters with the hustlers in these environments. Specifically, the chapter explores how access to hustlers and their milieu was negotiated, how the research was conducted, the problems encountered in the field and how they were tackled.

Despite observing and talking to many beach hustlers and chanters, this ethnography is drawn from the life stories of ten hustlers. They provide an expanded representation of participation which includes everyday engagements with *toubabs*.<sup>12</sup> The ten hustlers were selected from people I directly approached in the field and others recommended by research assistants and gatekeepers. Although I used the term ‘hustling’ for soliciting participants, I specified that I was mainly interested in their aspirations and the strategies they employ to fulfil these aspirations. A significant feature of my fieldwork experience was the way I had to deal with the dilemma of my dual identity as both an insider and an outsider. This conflict began to surface when my recognised identity as a *semester* who had gone to Europe to ‘hustle’ overshadowed my new identity as a researcher. This dual identity, the “hustler-cum-ethnographer” played a fundamental role during the research process, affecting the way people perceived, approached and interacted with me.

This chapter therefore describes my attempts to reconcile these dual identities and the corresponding methodological consequences. Before doing that, I first introduce the field sites and discuss how access was negotiated, gained and sustained. I further locate the study within the qualitative tradition and explain why I chose the ethnographic methodology and its principal methods of data collection. To produce the life stories of hustlers in their own words, I discuss how in-depth semi-structured life story interviews were used to supplement the findings generated from observations. I conclude with a discussion of the hazards I was exposed to during my fieldwork and how general ethical issues around informed consent, privacy and harm were dealt with.

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<sup>12</sup> Attempts to talk to the *toubabs* they deal with proved unsuccessful. The ones I approached on the beaches and online by creating online profiles on social networking sites were suspicious of my motives and were consequently reluctant to talk to me. Their lack of voice does not affect the quality of this study as the principal focus is the alternative economic activities of hustlers and their aspirations. However, I interviewed the *toubab* wife of one of my principal interlocutors.

## **2.2 Gaining Access to Hustlers and their Settings**

All ethnographic research involves the need for the researcher to “gain and maintain access to the research setting or social group in order to successfully carry out social research” (Coffey, 2006). The issue of access is therefore a key concern that the ethnographer must grapple with both before and during field work. Bryman (2008) observes that one of the key and yet most difficult steps in ethnographic research is negotiating and gaining access to the setting relevant to the research and the informants. Hence, it is crucial for researchers to not only successfully negotiate access to the research setting, but also to maintain on-going access. The inability to achieve this might cause problems for any researcher. The methodology literature (Ibid; Fielding, 1993) makes a distinction between physical and social access. This means that in situations where access is granted to the physical setting by virtue of it being an open/public setting, access to prospective research participants still has to be skilfully negotiated. Achieving this delicate balance can be a difficult task as it “requires the researcher to draw on his or her interpersonal resources and strategies” (Atkinson, Delamont & Lofland, 2007).

This section reflects on the strategies I used to negotiate and maintain access to both the research settings and the participants. Due to the nature of this study, access was negotiated in two different settings, the beach and the cybercafé, by utilising multiple entry points.

### **2.2.1 Doing Research on the Beach**

The beach hustlers I followed carry out their activities on the beach and its surrounding areas and at the airport. Although across the world such spaces are often open to the public, this is not the case in the Gambia. Beach hustlers and other locals who lack acceptable reasons for going to these spaces are prevented by security from entering or hanging around in them. Only registered beach hustlers are allowed controlled access, meaning they can only operate where their GTB cards permit them to. Fortunately, I did not have any problems gaining access to and hanging around along the beaches, the surrounding areas and at the airport. When I wondered why this was



the case, David, my research assistant, told me that this was to do with my appearance as a *semester*. In fact, David was only allowed access when he was with me.

Accessing the spaces where beach hustlers operate was not enough to study beach hustlers and their activities. To do this, I needed to have access to the beach hustlers themselves. I needed to observe and talk to hustlers who would be willing to share their knowledge of beach hustling and their aspirations with me. At first, I did not know where to start. Before I considered hiring the services of David, the few attempts I made to talk to people I perceived to be beach hustlers were unsuccessful. The few juice sellers and fruit sellers who mistook me for a tourist interested in buying their produce initially accommodated me by exchanging a few pleasantries with me. They suddenly changed their attitude towards me once I introduced myself as a researcher, perhaps due to the sensitive political context.

In addition, my unfamiliarity with the geography of the industry prevented me from navigating through its complex terrain. I did not know the right spots where I could find beach hustlers. I needed a social navigator. I needed someone who understood both the social and physical terrain of the tourism industry to help me navigate its complexities. Someone with an extensive social network within the industry to provide access to not only beach hustlers, but also people with knowledge of beach hustling. After a few days of contemplation, I decided that only a beach hustler could possess these qualities. It was then that David came into my mind.

I first met David during my first field visit in the Gambia. I was introduced to him by BJ, a youth leader in Brikama. BJ was aware of my research due to an interview I had carried out with him on chanting in Brikama. My initial encounter with David himself was to discuss chanting as he sometimes carries out the activity. With extensive knowledge of hustling and the aspirations of hustlers, I spent the next few days with David, discussing hustling while drinking *attaya* in my living room. It was during these interviews that David revealed to me that his main occupation was beach hustling and that he works as a local tour guide in Kololi. He has also plied his trade in Senegambia and Bakau. Having run into trouble with the security forces where he was beaten on many occasions, locked in a cell for a few weeks and taken to provide free labour at one of the President's farms as a punishment, he decided to settle down in Kololi.

In his eight years as a beach hustler, David would normally relocate to Cap Skirring, in Southern Senegal, during the off season to hustle. However, a minor illness prevented him from embarking on this journey in 2013, when I was doing my fieldwork. He instead stayed in Brikama where he spent most of his time in the cybercafés chanting to survive and staying in contact with the *toubabs* he established relationships with on the beach. At 26 years old, David is not married. Born and bred in Brikama, he became a school dropout due to difficulties in finding someone to pay for his education. When he was 8 years old, his father abandoned him and his mother and moved to France where he never got in touch, until very recently. With his mum struggling to raise David and her other children, he was adopted by his uncle who initially paid for his education but later stopped due to financial difficulties. His uncle worked as a labourer on a building construction site and David joined him after quitting school. As he narrated his ordeal then: “these were days of hardship and labour. No dad, no mum and with an uncle who was struggling to feed me, I had to do something”.

While working with his uncle, David would follow his friends to the Brikama tourist market on Thursdays when tourists would visit the craft market, which is also known as the tourist market. The tourists would throw biscuits, books, coins and other items to the many kids who hung around. David and his friends would use the opportunity to make friends with the tourists by exchanging addresses. When David met a Dutch couple who invited him to go to see them at the hotel, he unlocked the secret world of pleasure, leisure and opportunities in the tourism industry. From then on, David would hitch-hike to the beach every day. At 16, he left the labourer job and became a beach hustler.

When the idea of hiring a research assistant came up, David’s name crossed my mind. Without hesitation, I called his cell phone as I had his number from our previous meeting. Luckily, he was around Kololi and I was close by so we arranged to meet at ‘The Village’, a popular meeting point in Kololi. After a brief discussion, David accepted the offer of being my research assistant and we decided to start the next day. As with all other beach hustlers, David refused to set a fixed price for his services, instead telling me to give him whatever I thought was appropriate. As we shall see later, this is a strategy used by beach hustlers to gain more than they would have

bargained for. David saw this as an opportunity not only for economic gain but also for material and other types of gain. After every session, I would give him some cash.

The following day, during our first session in the field, I quickly began to appreciate his many qualities. I soon came to realise his mastery of both the social and physical terrain of the industry, his attention to detail and his proficiency of the English language. He took me to the fishermen, the bird watchers, the juice pressers, the fruit sellers and all those who operate within the industry. He introduced me to unregistered local tour guides who move about touting for customers and evading security. The nature of their work makes it difficult to get access to them. David provided this access as he is considered to be one of them and also through his outstanding social skills. These are skills he did not learn through formal education, but through his long career as a beach hustler. These skills helped to ensure that participants had confidence in me and my research. His charisma also created a personal chemistry with participants who not only offered to talk to us but also allowed us to sit in their spaces and observe them whilst they served us *attaya*.

David's extensive social network in the industry and his familiarity with its social and physical terrain significantly helped to ease access to both beach hustlers and the areas where they operated. He introduced me to almost all the participants that took part in this study. He introduced me to Andy who agreed to be interviewed and who shared his life, aspirations and experiences as a beach hustler that helped greatly with this ethnography. His presence gave confidence to Buju and other fishermen to open up and discuss their lives and activities with me. Wherever we went, I would be reminded by beach hustlers that they were talking to me because of David, who they consider as one of them.

The vital role played by research assistants in the research process is highlighted by Deane and Stevano (2015). Drawing on a political economy approach, they argue that research assistants often act as more than translators or interpreters. Based on the authors' experiences of fieldwork in Tanzania and Mozambique, they emphasise the crucial role that relations with research assistants play in mediating relations between researcher and participants and the way this influences the research process and outcome.

Despite his presence being valuable for my research, David's constant complaints about his difficult life situation, his intermittent requests for financial help and his strong desire to travel to Europe at all costs almost jeopardised our working relationship. For example, while his father was on holiday in the Gambia, he tried to convince me to speak to his father about taking him to France. I was initially reluctant to do this as I felt it was none of my business. When David realised that I was not willing to help him with this, he changed his attitude and would miss our appointments. To appease him I went to see his father on the condition that we spoke in private, without David. When I finally met him, I just told him about how David admires him and that he should do something to help his son. His father's reaction was great and he appreciated my intervention, confiding that this was something he had long been contemplating. In the end, David was happy and things went back to normal.

If getting involved with private family issues was a problem, constant requests for financial help both in the field and after returning to Edinburgh was agony. David would miss appointments, citing financial problems that I was forced to bail him out with. I did what I could do just to keep his services. However, while back in Edinburgh, David would still bombard me with messages requesting financial help. The message below is just one of the many messages from David requesting help:

Hi. Benn (sic) a while. Hope u ok. Not ben (sic) easy my boss. Well am just managing especially during this month Ramadan. Well today I was at your home in brikama I was talking to your mum for hours and she was very happy. Well my boss I was thinking if things are fine with you over there I would be very happy if you can kindly help me with 20 pounds so that I can fix one nice haftaan<sup>13</sup> for the koriteh<sup>14</sup> feast please my boss. (Extract from SMS sent by David).

In *'The Friendly Financier: Talking Money with the Silenced Assistant'*, Molony and Hammett (2007) draw on their fieldwork experiences in Tanzania and South Africa respectively, to highlight the ways in which the relationship between the researcher and research assistant can be affected by wealth asymmetry. Although their paper

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<sup>13</sup> Full-dress, ankle-length, long-sleeved traditional clothing men wear for big occasions like Koriteh and on Fridays.

<sup>14</sup> An Islamic feast celebrated at the end of the fasting month.

focuses on the dynamics of an ‘outsider researcher working in a southern context’, my experiences show that the dynamics of perceived financial asymmetries also affect researchers going back home to do field work.



Figure 5: David talking to some fruit sellers in their stalls in Bakau beach

### **2.2.2 Doing Research in the Cybercafés**

Cybercafés are public places where anyone can go to buy time online and to browse. Therefore, accessing these spaces did not pose any challenge. However, to understand the lives, aspirations hustling activities of chanters, having access to the spaces where they operate is not enough. To provide a comprehensive description of their activities, I needed to fully interact with them. I wanted to tell their stories using their own words. Gaining access to chanters who were willing to open up about their activities proved to be difficult in the beginning. This is due to the sensitive nature of their activities. According to Li (2008: 102), sensitive research “refers to the study of secretive, stigmatized, or deviant human activity and behaviour involving vulnerable research subjects”.

Chanting, just as gambling is a sensitive research topic, and as we shall see later in the ethnographic chapters, is characterized by a mixture of deviance, secrecy, and stigma in this context. Although not illicit, some of the strategies used by chanters to make money from the *toubabs* they meet online can be considered by mainstream society as immoral. As such, they keep their activities secret, making it difficult for an outsider to access their lives and activities. The difficulty of gaining access to people who engage in deviant behaviour that generates stigma was discussed by Klein (1989:169) in his study on body builders in California who sell sexual services to gay men. He observed that “the stigma attached to hustling is so great that only six hustlers granted me an interview on the subject”. Entering the subculture of people who engage in deviant behaviours poses a serious challenge for researchers as they are mistrustful and suspicious of outsiders, especially those seeking information about their activities and their involvement in it.

This challenge has led researchers interested in such activities to use covert methods by feigning their identity in order to access research participants and to avoid suspicion (see for example Erickson and Tewksbury, 2000). I decided from the outset that I would take the role of an overt observer. This means that I would reveal my identity as a researcher. Carrying out covert research would have raised ethical issues with which I was not comfortable so I chose to remain open and honest about my work, even if this did affect the number of hustlers who were willing to talk to me. Being overt also provided me with the opportunity to provide appropriate assurances to my research participants which subsequently eased the social access problem.

Having access to the physical spaces of the cafés guaranteed, my task was to negotiate social access, meaning access to participants who would be willing to share their stories with me. This access comes in two levels. The first entails establishing a relationship with hustlers, and the second entails sustaining this relationship over a longer period. Initially, my instinct was to go into the cybercafés and start talking to people randomly. However, I heeded advice on the use of gatekeepers (Bryman, 2008; Coffey, 2006; Fielding, 1993) to carry out such research. A gatekeeper is someone who has control over the researcher’s access. Establishing a rapport with a gatekeeper is vital in obviating the obstacles to social access. This is due to the ability of

gatekeepers to ease access to key interlocutors through enhanced credibility as a result of their mutually trusting relationship. An incidental benefit of the gatekeeper is that they may in the long- term become key interlocutors themselves (Bryman, 2008).

To access participants, I used the services of a few gatekeepers I was in contact with through local networks. One of my gatekeepers was Alkali, the proprietor of the AON cybercafé. I have known Alkali for many years as he and his family live on the same street as mine. However, our acquaintance deepened during my previous research visits when I frequented his café. Alkali did not only allow me access to his cybercafé, he also introduced me to many hustlers who showed their willingness to be interviewed. These hustlers also introduced me to their friends in their network. This snowball approach proved to be extremely pragmatic in generating a reservoir of interlocutors. With extensive knowledge of chanting, Alkali also became a principal informer. I interviewed him on many occasions as he provided valuable insights into chanting. In addition to Alkali, other cybercafé owners and managers also became useful gatekeepers, facilitating both physical and social access.

Having established access to participants through gatekeepers, my next challenge was to maintain this access throughout the research period. As Bryman notes, “access does not finish when you have made contact and gained access to the group” (Bryman, 2008: 299). Therefore, securing access is a constant activity. I maintained on-going access by developing long-term relationships with participants, based on reciprocity, trust and honesty. My cultural and social identity, which I share with them, was a great asset. It also took patience and time to gain the hustlers’ trust and to clear any cloud of doubt that they might have had surrounding my intentions. I noticed that the ways in which the interlocutors answered my interview questions and the things they confided was due to the trust established. The role of a research assistant with an insider perspective also helped enormously.

I used the services of Sait, a former chanter and a university student, to act as my research assistant. I chose Sait due to his networks with a lot of chanters and also because he eased my access. He is also an experienced researcher as he works as a consultant for many organisations wanting to do research in the Gambia. His experience working as a conventional research assistant and a former hustler

contributed extensive insights into the activities of chanters. However, a few months ago, Sait was arrested with two Ghanaians for doing research in the Gambia. They were arrested by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA)<sup>15</sup> for distributing questionnaires asking 'political questions' such as people's perception of the Gambian president. This demonstrates the problem of doing research in autocratic political dispensations.

### **2.3 Ethnography: Telling the Tales of Hustlers**

Research strategies provide researchers with a set of procedures to answer research questions. Blaikie (2010: 18) contends that "the choice of research strategy constitutes the second most important research design decision" that a researcher should make and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) find research strategies to consist of the general plan to answering the research questions. Although a plethora of research strategies with distinctive characteristics have been identified, albeit with certain overlaps, this study finds the ethnographic research strategy to be the most appropriate for this study.

By and large, ethnography falls under the umbrella of qualitative research, where the intent is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice or what Geertz (1973) referred to as "thick description". Qualitative research provides a rich and solid description of social phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and puts emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world and events that allow the researcher to view the people under study through their own eyes and in their natural setting (Bryman, 2008). The use of the term "qualitative" is meant to distinguish this kind of social science inquiry from more "quantitative" or statistically oriented research. The quantitative and qualitative approaches have different aims, although they can complement each other.

Ethnography is both a qualitative research process (one conducts ethnography) and a product (the outcome of this process is ethnography). The aim of ethnography is to

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<sup>15</sup> The National Intelligence Agency was created by the government in 1995. It is a secret service agency formally controlling anti-state activities (Wiseman 1996:928). The NIA, thanks also to a network of informants, keeps the populace and opinion makers under close scrutiny.



interpret culture. As a strategy of social inquiry, it has been developed within social anthropology to study and describe cultural systems, contexts, processes and meanings (Punch, 2005). As such, cultural interpretations have been considered to be the ethnographer's main contribution to knowledge. The strategy involves the study of behaviour in a natural setting which is based on the idea that adequate knowledge of social behaviour cannot be fully grasped until the researcher has understood the meaning people apply to their own experiences (Fielding, 1993).

Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:3) view ethnography as a research strategy that involves a process where the ethnographer participates "overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions and collecting relevant data" with the aim of describing what is happening in a particular setting and how the people involved see and interpret their own actions. The beauty of ethnography is immersion in another society and culture that offers insights and perspectives that would otherwise not be available through other methods of social science. Immersing myself in the daily lives of hustlers generated insights into their social world, their aspirations and their economic activities.

In line with ethnographic principles, I combined the use of several methods, participant observations and in-depth unstructured interviews in particular, to collect appropriate data to produce ethnographic monographs. Data was corroborated by supplementing interviews and observations with other methods such as informal conversations, writing field notes following observation sessions as ethically and logistically as possible, using photographs taken by me to elicit narratives and comparing information across a variety of interlocutors and settings. I also made sure that I elicited honest accounts from interlocutors by making sure I interviewed only those who wished to be interviewed. The combination of these methods will to a great extent ensure the reliability and validity of this study.

### **2.3.1 In the Company of Hustlers: Participant Observation**

In ethnographic research, a wide range of qualitative methods are available for researchers to use for collecting data. Blaikie (2010: 163) asserts that “data can be collected from individuals, small groups and many kinds of larger groups” from four different types of setting. These are “the natural settings, the semi-natural settings, the artificial settings and social artefacts” (Ibid). In carrying out this research, I studied hustlers in their natural settings. This means that I spent a significant amount of time in the company of hustlers as they went about their activities in cybercafés, on the beach and its surroundings and at the airport, amongst other places. The data generated provided a rich description of the activities of hustlers and the settings under which they operate.

I used the process of participant observation to embed myself into the world of hustlers. The deep interactions with the hustlers enabled me to make sense of complex and hidden phenomena. In *‘Hustling and Other Hard Work: Life Styles in the Ghetto’*, Valentine (1978) illustrates this point when she reflects on the participant observation she conducted on the lives and economic strategies of Afro-Americans in Blackstone. In relation to this study, I carried out participant observation in multiple settings. Observation was also extended to the wider society to understand the aspirations of hustlers and how these are shaped. The limits of using participant observation to study hustlers was the tension that arose between participating and observing (Rabinow, 1985:79). This is because the activities of hustlers in terms of the strategies they employ are not conducive to the ‘participatory’ element of participant-observation. Even though I was accepted by hustlers by spending more time in their company, I was unable to participate fully in their world for ethical reasons.

#### **2.3.1.1 Observing Beach Hustlers**

Based on an initial tour of the tourism industry and guidance from David, I carried out observations in four key settings to study the activities of beach hustlers. These included along the beaches, where juice pressers, fruit sellers, fishermen and horse riders operate; the ‘strip’ in Kololi and its restaurants where local tour guides operate; and the taxi stands and the shelters where bird watchers congregate. These settings

were selected based on a variety of factors, many of which included accessibility, unobtrusiveness and both physical and social familiarity.

Observation was used in these settings to obtain insight into the daily activities of beach hustlers in terms of how they make contacts and interacted with the *toubabs*, how they make money from them and how they interacted among themselves. Whether hanging out with taxi drivers in their taxi stands, drinking *attaya* with bird watchers, taking a break from the sun under the big baobab tress with horse riders, following the trails of local tour guides, or as a guest at a restaurant, my primary role as observer-participant transformed the dynamics of the events I observed into an activity. To do this, I was always very attentive to detail to avoid overlooking crucial information (Wolcott, 1994).

My observations also involved regular visits to the airport, restaurants within the industry, tourist attractions and street corners where unregistered local tour guides tout for customers. The observations I carried out were focused and engaging in a way that provided an account of the daily activities of beach hustlers including descriptive and sensory details such as hustlers' conversations and imagery, the nature of their environments, the names of horse riders' horses and juice pressers' kiosks. These sensory descriptions were recorded at the end of each day of observation. At the end of every week of observation, these notes were consulted again together with David to ensure the accuracy of the recordings.

Consent for observations in public settings could not always be ensured. Although, consent was always sought from beach hustlers like taxi drivers and juice pressers prior to observations inside their taxi stands and kiosks, this however did not apply to all those other hustlers who move around along the beaches, at the airports or on street corners as it was difficult to seek consent from them.

### **2.3.1.2 Observing Chanters**

Most of the observations of the activities of chanters took place at the AON and GAMTEL cybercafés. Issues of access and the representative nature of these cafés determined this decision. The observations were carried out both inside the café and in its outer spaces and surroundings. At GAMTEL, I also observed hustlers as they

used other institutions near GAMTEL such as the post office and the Western Union outlet and also their interactions with the wider society. These provided insights into the hustlers' aspirations and how these are shaped. This offers an understanding of their lifestyle and the role that hustling plays in their relationship with the wider society. This was achieved by socialising and hanging out with hustlers in their *grand palaces*, on football fields watching *nawettan*<sup>16</sup> and at other social events.

Inside the cybercafés, I spent hours observing how hustlers use the Internet to make money. My observations were mainly focussed on the websites they used, how they communicate with *toubabs*, how they interacted among themselves and with the café managers and the tactics they employed to make money. Although I endeavoured to stick to a pre-planned observation schedule, impromptu visits to the cybercafé proved to be useful. Observations were carried out daily using different shifts. For instance, I divided my shifts into morning and evening as hustlers work in a shift pattern due to their various social and professional engagements.

My observations in the cybercafés were overt in the sense that the café managers knew I was doing research. Through rumours, hustlers also came to know I was doing research. However, in some smaller cafes, I carried out covert research as I would buy Internet browsing time and observe as a mere customer. As is the case on the beach, the nature of cybercafé Internet use and the number of visitors makes it impractical to gain consent from individual cybercafé customers. So I decided to only inform the café managers about my presence and purpose and to do observations.

### **2.3.2 Unstructured Interviews and Informal Conversations**

In addition to participant observations, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews and informal conversations. Interview questions were open-ended rather than closed (Venables, 2009). This provided the basis for in-depth discussions and allowed interlocutors to give their own accounts of the issues that were important to them and their activities. It gave them the opportunity to talk about their experiences and perspectives on hustling. Interviews were started by asking questions which revolved around hustlers' biographies such as place of birth, educational and family

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<sup>16</sup> The local football tournament played during the rainy season.

background, their career paths to hustling, why they choose to hustle, their aspirations, the strategies they employ to make money from hustling, the opportunities of hustling and how these fulfil their aspirations, their interactions and relationships with *toubabs* and their engagements with and how they are perceived by with the wider society. Interviews were carried out with both hustlers and those close to hustlers and potential hustlers.

This type of interviewing proved to be a useful way of understanding hustlers' individual stories and was particularly beneficial in helping to create the stories of the few hustlers whose life stories made up the ethnographic chapters. In addition to generating new insights, the interviews backed up and emphasised the findings which had emerged from the participant observations. To create a more relaxing environment for the interviews, I started the interviews by first introducing myself, particularly to those hustlers who did not already know me, and my research. I informed them that I am a student interested in researching and writing about their lives, aspirations and the economic activities they engage in to fulfil their aspirations. A few hustlers questioned my interest and what the research would be used for. However, I allayed these concerns by explaining my background as a PhD student working on my thesis. In some instances, I would mention my affiliation with the University of the Gambia (UTG)<sup>17</sup> as this made many people willing to talk to me.

Informal conversations were also carried out to complement the interviews. The insights generated from these natural and impromptu conversations proved to be valuable as they added to my understanding of the lives of hustlers, particularly their aspirations. Informal conversations also facilitated a degree of openness that allowed space and time for hustlers to talk comfortably about their activities. Due to the irregular and busy schedule of hustlers, these impromptu conversations proved to be a valuable way of obtaining further clarity and elaboration without being interrogative.

Two methods were used during the interviews to save the data. Audio tape recording of interviews was complemented by taking notes. Taking into account the advice of Leslie and Storey (2003: 93) about the need to ascertain cultural ramifications before

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<sup>17</sup> I have worked, and I am still employed, by the University as a lecturer.

using tape and video recorders, I first sought the permission of my interlocutors before the interviews. Despite a few expressing their apprehension about this, the majority gave their consent. Aware of the sensitive nature of the issues discussed in the interviews, I made sure that the recordings were saved in files and stored securely. Except for a few interviews and conversations, the majority of the interviews were either done in Wolof or Mandinka as expressed by the preferences of interlocutors.

Ethical issues became central to the interviews. Most interlocutors expressed concerns about not getting into trouble by talking to me. I reassured them that I was only interested in information and that I was not an NIA spying on them. I, however, made it clear that the information they provided may be published or presented at conferences and could become accessible in the public domain. This meant that their hustling activities and tactics could be made public. I nonetheless expressed my commitment to anonymise and protect their identity using pseudonyms. This approach was to some extent successful, leading to lengthy and richly detailed interviews with those willing to get involved in the study. However, the demeanour of most interlocutors was understandably cautious, but open. All interviewees were advised about confidentiality and anonymity before the interviews commenced.

Unlike the challenges faced concerning informed consent while making observations, this has not been the case with interviews. According to Bryman (2008), the principle of informed consent means that research participants are provided with enough information to make an informed decision about whether they wish to partake in the study. The interlocutors who were interviewed were asked to give their consent. I took my time to explain to them about my research and the implications for them taking part in the study. This was mostly done orally.

Although it was easier to inform interview interlocutors about their consent to participate in the study, I had to grapple with a few minor challenges. The culture of informality is so embedded into Gambian society that some interlocutors became suspicious when I attempted to discuss issues such as ‘informed consent’, ‘confidentiality’, ‘privacy’ and ‘anonymity’. Most found these words to be too formal and this frightened some interlocutors judging by their hesitations after these introductions. I would start the process again by explaining to them that this is a

standard procedure and it has nothing to do with the government. On a few occasions, I lost valuable information as some people were reluctant to open up after initially indicating their enthusiasm to be interviewed. For example, a café manager at the Montego Bay cybercafé initially agreed to be interviewed and was in a cheerful mood until I read him the informed consent. He then found some excuse to make the interview as short as possible.

### **2.3.2.1 Interviewing Beach Hustlers**

To understand the activities of beach hustlers, I conducted 43 interviews including life history interviews with 4 beach hustlers. I am not claiming to make over-arching generalisations about beach hustling in general. My intention is to give an account of the economic activities of a particular group of people who find themselves in a condition of ‘involuntary immobility’, operating on the margins of the tourism industry in an attempt to fulfil their aspirations. Although the hustlers I interviewed cover a broad spectrum of informal service providers from juice sellers to bird watchers, excluded from this sample were those hustlers whose main preoccupation is to sell sex to female tourists for material and financial gain. Their stories have been reported elsewhere (see for example Nyanzi et al, 2005; Brown, 1992; Wagner & Yamba, 1986). The officials of institutions with a stake in the industry such as the GTB, TSU the head of the Gambia Hotel Association were also interviewed to acquire broader knowledge of the industry and the roles they play.

Interviews with beach hustlers were mostly conducted within the TDA. This was done not only because it was convenient for the hustlers, but also because I wanted to interview them at their place of work. My key interlocutors allowed me to visit them in their homes and some interviews also took place there. Regardless of the place, my interlocutors made the decision about where the interviews should be carried out. For unregistered beach hustlers or the so-called local tour guides who lack a fixed place, we mostly met at one of the restaurants within the TDA.

The drawback of interviews within the TDA was that interviews were sometimes disrupted by others who intervene to ask questions and the sound from the sea also sometimes affects the quality of recordings. Beach hustlers never work and sit alone

in their shops. For example, in the taxi stands, at least ten or fifteen people will be there. They would all be interrupting the interviews with their own views while I am interviewing one of them, who they identified as their leader. In some occasions, while having informal conversations with tourist taxi drivers, others who overheard us talking came to join our conversation. Even though I had told them I was a researcher, they still thought I was in a position to help them with solutions to the problems they face in the industry. They told me to tell the authorities about their plight and they were so excited to have someone from outside come to talk to them that they were all talking at the same time, telling me about what to tell the authorities. I had to be patient and listen attentively to their complaints.

I also experienced situations when a few beach hustlers refused to be interviewed perhaps due to the sensitive political climate in the Gambia which creates agitation among hustlers. Furthermore, most hustlers were difficult to interview due to their busy schedule. This was particularly the case during the tourist season, between October and April. Being interviewed for hours was something they could not accommodate. This was made worse by the unpredictable nature of the industry in terms of varying arrival times and the randomness of when tourists ask for services. Research with beach hustlers was also an expensive affair. Although I did not offer payment to interviewees for them to be interviewed, for ethical reasons, I was obliged to pay for restaurant bills if the interviews took place there, to buy juice and fruit and other products from them after every interview and I had to offer to buy lunch and *attaya* for the taxi drivers and bird watchers. Although other researchers have offered payment in exchange for the time the interviewee is giving, I did not consider it appropriate to do so in this instance (see Shaver, 2005, for example).

### **2.3.2.2 Interviewing Chanters**

To study the economic activities of chanters, I conducted 35 interviews with young people who engage in this type of hustling. Fifteen of these were extensive in-depth life history interviews with six chanters. Interviews were also done with people who frequented cybercafés. These generally fell into one of three main categories: the cybercafé owners, the operators they employ and the cybercafé users. The latter, however, made up the bulk of my interlocutors. In addition, I also interviewed other



people in society who either benefit from chanting or who are close to the people who are involved in the activity.

One of the many problems I faced was finding a suitable place to conduct the interviews. This was particularly apparent when interviews were to be conducted with chanters and café owners/operators who always insisted on carrying out the interviews in their place of work or “natural setting” as Blaikie (2008) would call it. Most chanters spend a significant amount of their time in cybercafés which made it impossible to conduct interviews in their homes or somewhere else. Moreover, some never wanted me to meet them in their homes to discuss what they do in the cybercafés.

The majority of the interviews with chanters took place outside the cybercafés, in surrounding spaces such as café verandas or under any tree where we could find enough shade to shield us from the scorching African sun. As these were situated on highways, there was lots of noise from passing cars and trucks and the occasional greetings of passers-by who either recognised me or the interviewee. Most chanters did not wish to be interviewed inside the café for fear of others hearing what they were saying or being seen talking to me during the interview. On a few occasions, I interviewed chanters inside GAMTEL and these interviews were conducted inside a small room used as a mosque. Although some interviews were held in my own home, I tried to avoid this due to interruptions during the interviews from family members who would occasionally come to pay me a visit. As Gambian culture dictates that one must show hospitality to visitors, I always had to interrupt my interviews to attend to my guests. For example, one morning whilst having an interesting interview with Buba, I was interrupted when an uncle came to see me for financial help.

In addition, the chanters were not always good at honouring appointments. The majority would come late at best or would never show up at all. A few initially agreed to be interviewed by arranging a time and place to meet just to never show up and they refused to pick up my calls. A casual conversation with some of my trusted interlocutors informed me that some hustlers suspected me of being an agent of the notorious and most feared NIA. Although I could not ascertain the rationale for this assumption, I would suggest that it is related to a more general suspicion about my

intentions. It is likely that those who refused to be interviewed were engaged in activities they did not feel comfortable discussing with an outsider.

Interviews with café owners took place inside the café as they would be working. These interviews posed some challenges as we were almost always interrupted by customers who had questions or who wanted to buy more browsing time, but I had no choice as the café owners expressed their preference to be interviewed at their place of work. These interventions disrupted the natural flow of the interviews. Sanders (2005) describes how interviewing participants at their work place can be disruptive, as was the case with her research which was conducted at a female massage parlour.

Secondly, interviewing café owners at their place of work in the presence of customers prevents them from providing an honest account on their perspectives of chanting as this might seem to undermine the privacy of their customers. This was the case with my interview with Bas, the owner and manager of Bass Internet Café. We conducted the interview behind his counter inside the café and he started providing insightful information on chanting until his Dutch wife, who works with him in the café, came to sit close by to serve customers. Some, however, have provided honest and detailed accounts during interviews when the café is empty during electricity blackouts or, as in the case of Alkali, when he came to see me at home.

Another challenge was the constant demands for financial or other material help by some interlocutors after the interviews. They requested things ranging from money to watches and mobile phones. I knew I had to be smart not to outright reject these requests as this could alter the nature of my relationship with them, but at the same time I had to avoid making promises I could not fulfil. Although this left me with a dilemma, my familiarity with the cultural context gave me an advantage in dealing with such situations. I treated each case individually and did what I could or sometimes give less than requested. For example, Dem, the chanter I introduced in the introductory vignette, called me a few days before I left the field requesting help to pay his fees. Below is an excerpt of the correspondence:

**Dem:** Hello IS, I still did not get any response from you...Please i am in need with this urgently please do something and help me (sic).

**Dem:** Hello Iss, I still did not get any response from you.. Please...i am begging you I need this help. Please (sic).

**Me:** Hi, Just got ur emails. I had to spend more time in Brussels than expected. I just arrived home. I understand ur situation but you need to give me some time to see what I can do. I am not promising anything right now as I just arrived and need to sort some things out. I am not sure how soon you need this but I will see what I can do (sic).

**Dem:** Hello Iss I am so much happy to read back from you.. as you can see at the moment I am not even going to school...do you expect me to lie to you... I will never ever lie to you about my schooling..I am not pressuring you or forcing Just see yourself what you can do.....I i can't pay this.. means i will repeat my grade 9. just see yourself ok (sic).

## **2.4 ‘Semester, spy, hacker’: Challenges Encountered in the Field**

Ethnographic research arouses debates about ethical conduct (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 215), particularly with regards to the use of participant observation. Ethnography itself is fraught with methodological and ethical challenges (Lauder, 2003: 185). This section reflects upon and discusses the dilemmas I faced when conducting fieldwork in my own country and in the town where I was born and raised. This is a town where I had extensive social networks, ranging from school mates, family and friends. As such, my connection and history in this town had a bearing on the research process, considering that the study is concerned with the lives of people engaged in sensitive and stigma related activities.

### **2.4.1 ‘We know you as a semester’: The Dilemmas of Conducting Research at Home**

One of the most important contributions of this study to the methodology literature is doing research in your own home country. In relation to this study, doing fieldwork in my own home town came with a lot of problems and prospects that have in one way or another had a methodological impact on this study. Principally, the methodological concern for me in doing qualitative research in my own environment derives from my perception of myself as an “insider” researcher (Rabe, 2003), and my reflection on how my positionality within a shared space with my research participants would impact on our relationship, and the knowledge that would be generated in the research

process. As an ethnographer doing research in my country, I also have to write and publish my findings at the end of the fieldwork period. With the prevailing political climate, what I chose to write and publish will to some extent affect the research process.

Depending on the degree of familiarity with participants prior to beginning the fieldwork, the researcher can be classified along the continuum from 'outsider' to 'insider'. These are consequential for the research process, the findings and its implications. Insider perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is a member of the community being studied and outsider perspectives are those taken by a researcher who is an outsider to the community being studied. As the nature of ethnographic work involves the interpretation of cultures (Geertz, 1973), there is a responsibility on the part of the researcher to the culture being studied because the perspective the researcher takes impacts the knowledge produced about that cultural group.

Although discussion of issues related to research limitations and the prospects and problems of the insider versus outsider status of the researcher have been both popular and contentious in ethnographic studies, Mullings (1999: 340) contends that the insider-outsider dichotomy is "less than real as it freezes personalities in place and assumes that being an 'insider' or 'outsider' is a fixed attribute". Moreover, Twyman, Morrison and Sporton (1999: 319) also argue that "the insider/outsider binary is not clear cut as such positions allow a 'betweenness' that implies that no one is an 'insider' or 'outsider' in any absolute sense". Breen (2007:163) outlined three key advantages of being an insider to the research domain: "a superior understanding of the group's culture; the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members; and a previously established, and therefore greater, relational intimacy with the group".

In relation to this study, my position as both an insider in the society and an outsider to the group studied created dilemmas which needed to be carefully balanced. Being an insider familiar with the languages, culture and political context of the Gambia helped me to know and understand the unstated messages in the hustlers' narratives. It also provided me instant physical and social access, which would have taken a long time for an outsider to gain. I know some of the research interlocutors personally which made it easy to contact them. Mullings (1999: 340) believes that insiders are able to

use their knowledge of the group or area to gain more intimate insights into their opinions. I also had easy access to government officials who accepted requests for interviews. Although I was an insider in the society, I was an outsider within the subgroup of chanters. And due to the nature of some of their activities, access to the group had to be carefully negotiated.

The challenges I encountered as an insider were numerous. Firstly, people recognised me wherever I went, and whilst busy making observations in cafes, they would distract my attention with protracted pleasantries and conversations. Secondly, it was also frustrating as I struggled to balance work and other social commitments. My past interactions with the community as a *semester* also played to my disadvantage. I had always visited the country as a holidaymaker not as a researcher. I would also suggest that local perceptions of *semesters* to be rich and generous holiday makers contributed to the endless financial and material demands from interlocutors. My background as a *semester* also fuelled suspicions about my true motives amongst interlocutors as most of them struggled to comprehend why a *semester* would come and spend all his time in the cybercafés asking questions about their activities. BJ, a youth leader told me this, when I recounted my problems to him:

Some of these boys will find it hard to trust you. They always knew you as a semester and now you come asking them questions about their activities. They have been doing this for years and they wonder why you are now interested in their activities. Why did you choose to write about this and why now? Why has no one done it before? These boys will ask these questions. They are also scared that the government wants to put a stop to this so they have sent you to conduct investigations. And their livelihoods depend on this.

The above instances challenged my ethical positionality to some extent. The manner in which I was perceived and approached inevitably influenced my fieldwork. Researching issues within a home context is an increasingly prominent aspect of contemporary fieldwork and the complexity of “(post)modern identities complicate traditional binaries of insider/ outsider” (Breen, 2007). Whilst in the field, I avoided rigidly considering myself as an insider or outsider. Instead, I was as reflexive as possible and strategically manoeuvred between the dualities depending on the

situation. Managing these ‘multiple selves’ became a daily struggle (Reinharz 1997: 3).

#### **2.4.2 “They think you are a hacker or a spy”: Some Hazards of Conducting Ethnography**

A further challenge I encountered in the field was the apprehensive nature of hustlers about my motives. Some were of the view that I was either spying on them on behalf of the government, or that the *toubabs* had sent me to find out about their activities. Some went to the extent of thinking that I used my cell phone, which was big enough to look like a tablet, as a device to hack into their accounts and steal their ‘*toubab* contacts’ and that I would get in touch with them on my return to Europe. Some said that I have been to Europe and made money and that I do not want them to make money. Perceiving a threat to their livelihoods by my presence, a few hustlers decided to take action.

A few weeks before my planned exit from the field, rumours that I was either a government agent sent to spy on their activities, or a hacker trying to steal their contacts began to spread among the chanters in Brikama. These rumours had their epicentre in GAMTEL but later spread to smaller cafes as some chanters hang out in both of these spaces. My attention was brought to this state of affairs by Dem. He called me on my cell phone one evening, warning me that I should not go to GAMTEL as some boys were planning to attack and beat me up in the dark whilst on my way home from GAMTEL.

Being a small town, word about this had circulated around town and I later understood that there was a great debate on this issue with some saying I was a spy while others saying I was not. Despite Dem’s advice, I went to GAMTEL to monitor the situation myself. Upon entering, I observed how everyone turned to stare at me. I could hear whispers of “he is here” from some chanters sitting close to where I was standing. Immediately, Rahman, the café operator on duty, also one of my interlocutors asked to see me outside. He then told me that some guys came to see him this morning saying that they think I am a spy and that I came to steal their ‘contacts’ by using my device to infiltrate their screens. They said I am an IT expert and that they do not trust me. He

said he tried to convince them that I was only a researcher but they were still distrustful. I thanked him for this information and told him I would take care of the situation.

I went back inside the café and sat down in my usual place. A moment later, one chanter came towards me, called me by my name and said he wanted to see me. I went outside and it turned out to be a guy who knew me very well. He told me the same thing as Rahman. He added that “these guys receive hundreds of thousands of dalasis here from gay men and they are scared of losing all this”. He then told me not to mind them but to be careful. I thanked him and hung around a bit, but as the atmosphere became tense I decided to leave. On my way home, another guy caught up with me and said “Ceesay, I am different from them”, and then vanished.

Although I had prepared myself for how to deal with potential harm to myself and my interlocutors before going to the field, I had underestimated the extent to which this could occur. This was partly due to my conviction that my home is the safest place for me to do my research and that I would always find ways to deal with these situations if and when they arise. Having read about some of the risks and hazards that ethnographic researchers are exposed to while in the field, I started thinking about the worst case scenarios. The case of Ken Pryce, the author of a celebrated ethnography of West Indian life in Bristol (Pryce, 1979) who disappeared while researching criminality in Jamaica and his body was later found washed up on a Caribbean beach or Myrna Mack, the American anthropologist murdered by Guatemalan paramilitaries came to mind (Bloor, Fincham and Sampson, 2010). The fate of Owens (2003), who was accused of being a spy and expelled from Zanzibar whilst doing fieldwork came to mind. Although in the case of Owens it was the government rather than the group he was studying that accused him of being a spy.

I was then reminded by Lee’s (1995) monograph on ‘Dangerous Fieldwork’, which drew a distinction between ‘ambient’ and ‘situational’ dangers. The former concerns dangers in the field for researchers and the researched alike, as in the case of tropical diseases, while the latter concerns dangers ignited by the presence of the researcher in the field such as threats of violence towards researchers of drug use or prostitution, where researchers “run the risk of misidentification as a spy for the police and the security forces”. The latter is reflective of my case. The literature (e.g. Sluka, 1990;

Loftsdottir, 2002) on how researchers can protect themselves against physical harm by skilful fieldwork relations, which I read prior to going to the field proved to be useful.

One of the consequences of the rumours was that owners of smaller cybercafés changed the way they accommodated me as they did not want to be seen as accomplices and lose customers. Some avoided me in the initial days when the rumours were rife. Others gave me their full support, saying that they knew these were mere fabrications. With this support, I spoke to some influential chanters and explained in all sincerity that I am neither a spy nor a hacker and I am only interested in learning and writing about their hustling activities. Although it took a lot of convincing, it worked to some extent as some trust from others was restored while some still had their doubts. However, the insights and data from those willing to talk were quite valuable.

In hindsight I could have avoided this precarious situation had I done things differently. Firstly, I had underestimated the extent to which certain parents are complicit with chanters. My discussion with the local chief about his views on chanting brought me trouble. Before embarking on a visit to the chief, I did not know that his nephew was a chanter and that he shares some of his earnings with the chief. I later learned that immediately after my visit to the chief, he alerted his nephew, telling him that someone is in town to enquire about their activities and that he does not trust that person. His nephew broke the news in GAMTEL in the spirit of alerting his colleagues. Secondly, I could have avoided attracting unnecessary attention from chanters had I not always carried with me a big phone that looked like a hacking device.

## **2.5 Hustlers: Disguised Names and Protected Identities**

Gambian society is characterised by entrenched social norms that tend to stigmatise those who deviate from these norms. As such, the majority of hustlers, chanters in particular, are very discreet about their online activities. The issue of hustlers who make money from their online interactions with gays can cause emotional and psychological harm to participants and stigma if people outside of their professional circle are aware of it (Goffman, 1968). As such, to ensure confidentiality, I never discussed the information I received from interlocutors with other interlocutors or with



anyone else in society. This was to ensure that I did not cause any psychological harm to my interlocutors as exposing certain activities could cause problems for participants in a number of ways, jeopardising their relationships with friends and family and them becoming victims of stigma in society.

Aware of these social dynamics, I have made every effort while writing this study to protect the identity of the hustlers who shared their lives, experiences and activities with me. In doing this, I used the strategies employed by Chernoff (2003) and Venables (2009) in their ethnographic research on bar girls in Ghana and clandestine migrations in southern Senegal respectively. It should be noted that the dynamics of anthropological fieldwork can sometimes make it difficult to conceal the identities of people and places (Crandon-Malamud, 1991). Consequently, my key challenge was to protect the names and identities of hustlers and, to a lesser extent, the spaces they operate. The names used in the ethnographic chapters are pseudonyms (that are representative of the Gambian context) invented to disguise the names and to protect the identities of the participants. I have also avoided giving any of my interlocutors the names of other hustlers that I met during my fieldwork in 2013. For beach hustlers, I have used the names they use in the industry as they did not object to this.

Finally, there is the issue of location and there is a risk of identification through association with a particular location within the TDA and cybercafé in particular. In 2013, Brikama had almost 30 cybercafés. Some of the names of the cybercafés mentioned in this study could not be disguised so I have used the real names of places as they existed during my fieldwork. For instance, I could not disguise the name GAMTEL as this would alter the comparison I will be making between it and the other smaller cafes. Nonetheless, GAMTEL is visited by many people and new people always come and go. It would therefore be hard to connect the names of my key interlocutors with any particular person. Furthermore, to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of my interlocutors, I used systematic data protection techniques as advised by Bryman (2008). While in the field, I made sure the data collected were constantly encrypted on a daily basis and securely stored on password protected pen drives, which were then securely hidden.

## 2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a comprehensive methodological discussion of this study by identifying numerous influences in the field, from research assistants to researcher perceptions and threats of harm. It is important to understand these influences as they shaped the trajectory of the research process and led to particular types of outcomes. I discussed the strategies I employed to gain and maintain access to both the physical and social setting. By doing this, I highlighted the importance of the services of research assistants and discussed how some can be a burden within various social contexts. The rationale for selecting the ethnographic research strategy as opposed to other available strategies was also discussed. These are consistent not only with the purposes of the research but also with the key philosophical underpinnings of the researcher.

The numerous methods used to collect the data, and their complementary nature, was also discussed. For instance, participant observations helped to describe the events, behaviours and activities of hustlers in their social setting. Semi-structured in-depth interviews and informal conversations explored the aspirations of hustlers and how they are shaped. Furthermore, this chapter has also drawn particular attention to my positionality and how my insider role has enabled me to gain access to understand the participants and the environment in which they work, and more generally to aid the generation of meaningful data. Despite obvious advantages, there were inevitably problems with being an insider and these were discussed.

In terms of methodology, this chapter makes a contribution to urban and/or beach ethnography, an emerging sub-field of ethnography that focus on local residents living and working in the periphery of spaces designated for tourists and operating on the margins of the law. Although the methods I have used in this study have been previously applied in similar studies, but in different contexts (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000; Nisbett, 2006; Burrell, 2012; Chernoff, 2003; De Fransico, 2004; Ndjio, 2006; Weiss, 2009 and Janson, 2014), this study's key methodological approach is distinctive in that the research strategy used sought investigate urban hustling across multiple settings. Recent developments in anthropology has seen a shift away from the single site of classical ethnography research in order to examine the

circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time-space (Marcus, 1995: 96).

# CHAPTER THREE

## The 'Hustling' Nation

### 3.1 Introduction

The Gambia is one of the places that are difficult to classify within standard ways of thinking about the world (Lewis and Wigen, 1997) due to its unique cultural and religious attributes. It is thus useful to carry out a brief presentation of a few central aspects of Gambian society so as to provide a foundation for the analysis of aspirations, aspiration formations and hustling in contemporary Gambia. I have chosen the Gambia as the setting and case in the analysis of how young Africans experience 'involuntary immobility'. The country is a suitable case because its experience of 'involuntary immobility' is at the same time typical and extreme. It is typical in the sense that the constellation of a history of emigration, pervasive aspirations to emigrate, but few opportunities to do so, resembles the situation in many developing countries.

The Gambia's situation is extreme in the sense that emigration has been more extensive than in most other countries in the West African sub-region relative to population size, and affects virtually every family in the country. A study by Kebbeh (2013) indicated a dramatic increase of the number of Gambians that had emigrated from approximately 35,000 in 2000 to approximately 90,000 in 2010. Although small when compared to migrant stocks from other Sub-Saharan African countries, the Gambia's net migration rate in 2013 (-2.34 migrants/1,000 population) is the tenth highest in Africa (ibid). As a result, phenomena that could also have been studied elsewhere stand out particularly evident in the Gambia.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section introduces the Gambia as the setting for my research. Its aim is to provide the reader with the social, economic and political context within which urban youth hustling takes place. I start by giving a brief background of the Gambia in terms of geography, demography and society. I proceed with a detailed description of the economic and political conditions that influence the ability of young Gambians to fulfil their social and economic aspirations. In particular, I examine the political and economic developments from the early years of Independence under the Jawara government, and proceed to discuss the onset of the

economic crisis and the ensuing political uncertainty from the 1990s onwards when a group of junior military officers took over power.

In the second section, I contextualise my research interest and setting by providing background information on both the tourism sector and the status, access and use of ICT in the Gambia, the Internet in particular. I illustrate the importance of these resources to the hustling patterns of my study participants. I show how a group of people, in the midst of limited economic opportunities, make use of the resources available to them in an attempt to fulfil their aspirations. I argue that the expansion of the tourism sector and the availability of public access to ICT has provided opportunities for many young Gambians, particularly those who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’, to generate the income they need to achieve both social and economic advancement.

## **Section 1**

### **The Smiling Coast**

#### **3.2. Geography, Demography and Society: A Brief Background**

The Republic of the Gambia is situated along the banks of the River Gambia in the West African Sahel zone. Nestled inside Senegal like a “hotdog in a roll” (Sallah, 1990), the Gambia is Africa’s smallest country. With a land area that spans only 4,361 square miles (11,295 sq. km), the country represents the classic case of a micro state. The country’s current population is estimated at 1.9 million (GBOS, 2014), a six fold increase since independence in 1965, when the population was just over 300,000 (Rice, 1968). According to the most recent demographic report, more than half (about 63.55%) of the country’s population are young people, below 25 years of age. In terms of gender distribution, the female population is marginally greater, representing 50.53% of the total population (GBOS, 2014).

The Gambia is divided into seven administrative regions: Banjul City Council, Kanifing Municipal Council, West Coast Region, North Bank Region, Lower River Region, Central River Region and Upper River Region. Banjul is the official capital

of the Gambia as well as the administrative centre of the country and the seat of the government. Other towns of significance are the bustling town of Serekunda, which has the country's largest market and the serene coastal town of Bakau, famous for its many tourist attraction sites. The peri urban town of Brikama is the Gambia's largest town and is located in the Kombo Central District. It is the regional capital of the West Coast Region and it is the most populated Local Government Area in the country, with an estimated population of 700,000 people (GBOS, 2014). Located inland, in the South Bank, the main urban settlement is about 35km southwest of the capital Banjul. The town is a popular tourist destination owing to its status as the home of the biggest craft market in the country.

The Gambia is ethnically, linguistically and religiously diverse. This is demonstrated in the way several ethnic groups live together in harmony. The Mandinkas make up 42 percent of the population, the Fulas (18 percent), the Wolofs (16 percent), the Jolas (10 percent), the Serahules (9 percent) and the rest (4 percent) (GBOS, 2014). Intermarriage among the different ethnic groups is very common, making the Gambia a melting pot of different ethnic and cultural groups. The great majority of Gambians are Muslim, with over 90 percent following the Sunni branch of Islam. Christians, most of whom are Roman Catholic, make up 9 percent of the population and the remaining 1 percent do not adhere to any particular religion (ibid).

### **3.3 Socio-Cultural and Family Dynamics in the Gambia**

As a focal socialising agency (Macleod, 1987), the family plays a crucial role in shaping the aspirations of many of the hustlers in this study. Hence, this section provides a brief discussion of family dynamics in the Gambia. It further explores the importance of intergenerational relations and reciprocal social exchange and how they determine family relations, roles and interactions in the Gambia. This is relevant in so far as it avails us the opportunity to understand the societal context in which hustling takes place and recognise how the hustling patterns of young urban Gambians are shaped.

## **Family**

Family in the Gambia, as in many other contexts (Bongaarts, 2001), plays an important social function. This not only includes social reproduction, care and support (Alber, van der Geest and Whyte, 2008) for dependents, but is also an agent for transferring resources across generations. The typical Gambian family unit is intrinsically complex in both size and composition due to the extended family system. Generally, it constitutes both core and extended members living together in one compound. Core family members include a husband (normally head of the house), a wife (or wives) and children. Extended family members include multiple generations and other relatives such as grandparents, grandchildren, paternal and maternal uncles and aunts and cousins.

The close-knit extended family system is the most common type of family unit structure in the Gambia. The traditional family is usually large, sometimes with three generations living together in one household. The average household size is 8.5 members per household (GBOS, 2014) and is estimated at 6 people in urban areas and 15 people in rural areas. The social fabric of the Gambia is based on family networks often stretching into neighbouring countries like Senegal and Guinea Bissau. These networks provide support systems that mitigate critical poverty in the absence of institutional social welfare schemes. This provides support for many families during key lifecycle events and helps vulnerable families deal with economic shocks and stresses (UNICEF n.d).

Consequently, most Gambian families rely on support systems based on family and kinship ties, or what Ben-Porath (1980) refers to as the 'F-Connection'. This support system acts as a safety net that helps to mitigate critical poverty, which has increased to substantial proportions in the past two decades. More recently, with many Gambians living and working in the diaspora, remittance transfers represent an increasing and important avenue of kin-based welfare support that has prevented many families from falling into poverty. The extended family system involves a socio-cultural obligation for relatives to provide financial and material assistance to less fortunate family members.

Remittances play an important role in facilitating these forms of economic assistance. For example, Gambians living in the diaspora send money back home in the form of remittances to support the livelihoods of the families they have left behind. It is estimated that over 70 percent of Gambian families depend on this form of money transfer for survival (IFAD, 2007). During the past few years, incoming remittances as a share of gross domestic product (GDP) in the Gambia have been among the highest in Africa (World Bank, 2014) and the country ranks number nine of the top 10 countries that receive remittances from abroad and remittance inflows to the country account for 19.8 percent of GDP (Ibid). These figures do not include the very large amounts of money transferred through unofficial channels.

Gambians living abroad do not only support their families back home through remittances. They also create small businesses for them that can ensure a constant income for daily subsistence. These businesses include opening cybercafés, shipping used cars and vans to be used in transportation businesses and sending second hand clothing, computers, mobile phones, refrigerators, furniture, spare parts and other materials that are sold in the second hand market. Today, the Gambia's transport sector is controlled by these types of activity as the public transport system has collapsed since the early 1990s. In addition, the Serekunda highway has become the home of many second hand shops where one can seemingly find anything.

Touray (2006) described the Gambia's social system as 'patriarchal and gerontocratic'. Hence, gender dynamics have always played a crucial role in how power and wealth is distributed within the typical Gambian family as distinct roles exist for males and females, particularly between the husband and wife. Men maintain the authority in the house, and they are responsible for providing financial, material and moral support for their families. In return, the women take care of the daily chores and duties of the household. However, these types of gender roles are in flux. Although the notional norm of 'male provider' (Ibid), in line with Islamic values, weighs heavily in Gambian society, financial difficulties such as unemployment and high living costs has in the past 20 to 30 years put increasing economic pressure on male family heads. Hence, there have been shifts in economic responsibilities and social roles.



During my fieldwork in the Gambia in 2013, I observed that the male family heads are no longer the main providers for children's education and other needs and daily household living costs. Some women, mostly wives, and young adults who earn money through various means tend to use it to provide for their own needs and to support other family members. For instance, whereas before the male family head was expected to provide *deppaas* or the daily food expenditure for the family meals, it is now often the case in some families that other family members help out with this provision and the payment of other bills like water and electricity. In some cases, the responsibility of providing financial and material support for family members is now mostly carried out by anyone with the economic capacity to do so, including wives, sons or daughters.

The majority of the family heads I interviewed maintained that they rely on the support of their adult children for their subsistence. Some of these children live and work in the West and provide this support by sending monthly remittances. For instance, Aunty Khaddy is a 65 year old retired teacher whose six children live and work in both the UK and the USA. She told me that each of her children send her 'monthly allowances' to enable her to pay for her food, medical bills, electricity and water bills and to cover other social costs. The children of parents who are working in the Gambia, either in the public sector or private sector, such as banks apportion a certain percentage of their salaries to support their parents and other family members. The young Gambians, who have neither the means to travel nor the education or skills to get a proper paying job, such as my study participants, resort to diverse informal economic activities or hustle to provide this support.

Not all parents or family members in the Gambia have the privilege of such forms of support. A few of my interlocutors, who happen to be parents, have complained to me that they do not get any support because they either lack a child who is old enough to get a job or to travel or that the adult child they depend on has become a failure by doing nothing useful to earn the income needed to support them. Basiru is a 50 year old civil service driver whose situation exemplifies the former case. Unlike his contemporaries, Basiru got married quite late and so has no adult children who are either in employment or old enough to earn money. This puts him in a delicate situation

as he has to provide for his young family without getting any help. Although he gets occasional help from his younger sister's children who work in the Gambia, this help is not normally enough and only happens once, maybe twice every year. In one of our interviews, he aptly described his situation:

I am suffering today because I have no child big enough who can help me. I am on a grade one salary which cannot even buy a bag of rice. I have six children. When two of them get sick together, I am faced with a dilemma of who to cure. More so, who is going to pay for my medication when I fall sick?

### **Generational Relations and Reciprocity**

The expectation from young Gambian adults to provide livelihood support for their parents, other family members and others within the community is underpinned by social obligations born out of generational relations and reciprocal social exchange. Intergenerational relations take the form of what Bourdieu (1990: 167) refers to as the "economy of material and symbolic exchanges". In the Gambia, and elsewhere (Alber et al., 2008), they form the implicit expectation that parents care for their children until they can care for themselves, and that children support their parents when they can no longer support themselves. Reciprocity, or reciprocal social exchange, constitutes the most important quality of intergenerational relations (Ibid). This means the sense of 'mutual dependence expressed in give and take over time' (Alber et al., 2008: 6). The concept captures the performance of sharing and the transmission of material resources and also mutual expressions of care within families and communities.

In his theoretical formulation, Finch (1989) used the concept of 'normative obligation' to explain obligations of kinship in contemporary Britain about the 'proper thing to do' for relatives in terms of support for personal care, financial support and accommodation. These normative obligations vary greatly according to time and place. Yet, the notions of duty and responsibility form the core of intergenerational relations and reciprocal social exchange within families in the Gambia. Duties and responsibilities within the family in the Gambia are sanctioned by inter-generational relations of reciprocity between the adult members of the family, parents in particular,

and young people (sons and daughters). They are based on transmissions that stem from a logic of social indebtedness where it becomes the obligation of parents to be responsible for providing care, food and shelter as well as moral guidance through education (both secular and Islamic) for their children. In return, children are expected to repay these efforts through financial support and care once they grow old enough to earn an income.

This is not always the case as research has indicated. For instance, in her study on the city of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso, Claudia Roth (2014) described a situation where children fail to find gainful occupations and establish themselves independently and continue to depend on their parents at a stage in their lives when they should be developing the resources with which to support their parents in their old age. Similarly, in Dogondoutchi, Niger, Masquelier (2005: 59) found disillusioned Mawri parents perceived their children, mostly young men, as ‘good-for-nothing, ungrateful sons, eager to make claims upon their fathers’ land, yet reluctant to fulfil social obligations’. Although cases of such forms of ‘inversion of intergenerational relations’ (Alber et al., 2008) can be found in the Gambia, it was not a pattern I found among my key interlocutors.

Moreover, reciprocal social exchanges in the Gambia are not confined to biological or physical bonds. They are also constituted in much broader terms, including neighbours and friends. In some cases, neighbours and other extended relatives do help to support a child when the parents are unable to. In most cases, orphans benefit from these types of support. It therefore sometimes happens that young people turn to distant relatives or neighbours and friends to solicit assistance to pay for education, to buy uniforms or other school materials. The provider of such support usually has the implicit expectation that the child will reciprocate the support once he or she is old enough and financially strong enough to do so.

For instance, David feels indebted to his uncle who took care of him when his mother left. Although his uncle did not do much in terms of paying for his education, David still feels that the little his uncle did for him in terms of feeding and sheltering him must be reciprocated. David finds this to be problematic for many young people, including himself:

The difficulty here is that when you have money, not only do you have to help family members, but also your friends and neighbours who were there for you when times were hard. So when you start making money, you realise that you are socially indebted to so many people and not paying it back incurs accusations of ungratefulness.

Other hustlers have also told me that not only do their families have a pervasive influence on their aspirations, but also so does the wider community. Indeed, I noticed during my fieldwork that financial help in the form of remittances and local contributions usually goes to members of the extended family and others in the community.

Intergenerational relations and reciprocal social exchanges within the family and the community in the Gambia, as elsewhere in Africa (Mazzucato, 2008), are not free of friction or conflicts. Although the majority of Gambian parents and other members of the extended family and community welcome the contributions made and the support they receive from their children and other young adults, this puts the young adults in a stronger negotiating position as they have become independent from the authority of their elders. A few elders I spoke to expressed their concern and frustration about the declining authority of many family heads and the ways 'today's younger generation abuse their independence'.

Alhaji Dambele is almost 80 years old and is a known conservative among his neighbours in Brikama. Despite all his children living in the UK, he still tries to maintain strict moral codes in his compound. I was told by one of my interlocutors that when his sons come home for holidays, they prefer to stay at one of the hotels to escape his control over their activities. Alhaji complained about what he perceives to be the lack of morality among today's younger generation in the Gambia. He attributed this to their ability to earn their own money. He went even further to make a contrast between his generation and today's young people:

During our time, whether we travelled or farmed, we were under the authority of our elders. We give everything we earn to our elders without asking them how they spend it or question their authority. But today's young people, they will start to challenge their elders once they start making money.

Just like Alhaji, other elders I spoke to in Brikama expressed their misgivings about the comportment of the younger generation, the chanters in particular. These elders often complained to me about the 'immoral' behaviour of the young generation of Gambians. Such pronouncements moral degeneration are more than nostalgic reminiscences about an ever more distant past when youth respected gerontocracy and behaved according to prescribed social norms. The elders' concerns about these troubling social transformations in generational dynamics can be connected with a much more general trend involving unemployed youths throughout Africa. For instance, in Niger (de Latour, 1992:73) reports that Mawri elders complained that 'before youths obeyed their fathers, they were afraid of them. Today, they have become women'.

### **3.4 Political Economy of the Gambia**

#### *Politics*

The Republic of the Gambia is a former British colony and protectorate that gained independence from the United Kingdom in February 1965 and became a constitutional monarchy within the Commonwealth. However, after a subsequent referendum, the country became a republic within the commonwealth in April 1970. Prime Minister Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara later became President, combining the offices of Head of State and Head of Government (Hughes & Perfect, 2006).

Except for a brief period in July 1981 when a group of leftist rebels made a failed attempt to overthrow the government of President Dawda Jawara and replace it with what they proclaimed to be a "dictatorship of the proletariat" under the leadership of a 12-man National Revolutionary Council (Wiseman, 1981: 373), the Gambia has enjoyed relative peace and stability since its independence. In addition, the country was distinguished as one of Sub-Saharan Africa's longest standing multi-party democracies, along with Mauritius and Botswana, at a time when authoritarianism and military regimes held sway in the continent (Edie, 2000).

Moreover, since independence up until 1994 when Jawara's government was overthrown, the Gambia had maintained what seemed on the surface to be a competitive multi-party system with regular free and (relatively) fair elections

contested by a range of political parties (Saine, 2009). However, close scrutiny of this system reveals that Jawara actually presided over a de facto single party system under the guise of a multi-party democracy by holding elections every five years. Winning these elections with his People's Progressive Party (PPP), Jawara continuously dominated the political landscape (Edie, 2000; Hughes, 1992; Perfect, 2008). The term "*sembocracy*" (sembo being a Mandika word meaning power or force) was coined to describe the Gambia's political experience under Jawara (Saine, 2009). The term has been used to describe the otherwise covert authoritarian practices of Jawara's government under the guise of democracy. Jawara resorted to a variety of tactics to consolidate his rule. Prominent among these were his strategic use of state patronage and building tactical alliances (Hughes, 1992).

A second successful, albeit peaceful, military coup in July 1994 toppled the government of Jawara and his PPP's 30 year rule. This event halted the country's long façade of a multi-party and democratic regime. The putschists were four young junior officers of the Gambia National Army (GNA) who established the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC). Led by a 27 year old lieutenant, Yaya Jammeh, the officers justified their actions by claiming grievances over the late payment of salaries and poor living conditions in the barracks. In their first speech after taking over, the coup leaders expressed their displeasure over rampant corruption, denounced the tyranny of the PPP and their failure to develop the country over the thirty years it had been in power (Perfect, 2008: 431).

The new military government announced a four-year transitional timetable to return the country to civilian rule. However, a combination of international economic sanctions and domestic pressures forced the AFPRC military government to revise its four-year timetable to two years. Resigning from the army and transforming the AFPRC into a populist political party to become the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC), Jammeh contested the 1996 elections and won with an outright majority. There were widespread claims from both international observers and opposition party leaders that the presidential elections were neither free nor fair because the electoral process was engineered from the outset to enable Jammeh to stay in power (Saine, 2009). Becoming a "soldier turned civilian president" (Saine, 2009:29), Jammeh now presides over a quasi-democratic regime. He has won three

successive elections in 2001, 2006 and 2011. Despite allegations of electoral fraud and political intimidation from local critics and international observers (Ibid), Jammeh's electoral successes were more to do with the disorganised and fragmented nature of the opposition parties.

To maintain his grip on power, Jammeh established a special security and intelligence apparatus known as the National Intelligence Agency (NIA). Established in 1995, it reports directly to the president (Amnesty International, 2008). The NIA has since metamorphosed into a complex intelligence network that includes anybody who can provide information about real and perceived critics of the state. Today, the name instils fear and suspicion among Gambians as everybody suspects everybody of being an NIA and nobody wants to discuss anything related to government issues in the Gambia for fear that they might be talking to an agent of the NIA. President Jammeh recently declared that nobody can remove him from power and that he intends to rule for "a billion years" (Coughlin, 2013). However, a failed coup attempt in December 2014 led by some Gambian dissidents living in the US sent a clear message that potential adversaries are willing to test his resolve and grip on power.

### ***Economy***

Throughout the colonial period, the Gambia's economy, like other West African colonies, depended on the proceeds of international trade (Hughes and Perfect, 2006: 31). Until the Second World War, a significant part of government revenue was provided by customs receipts, generated by duties imposed on manufactured goods and other food and clothing products imported from Europe by trading companies (ibid). Other sources of government revenue were provided by duties on the sale of groundnuts, the principal export crop, and fines and licences. The period following the Second World War, the Gambia's development expenditure was largely financed by grants or loans from the British government. At independence, a significant amount (60-70 percent) of domestic revenue was derived from taxes on international trade (ibid: 32).

Post-colonial Gambia's national economy is based on agriculture, the tourist industry (mainly along the Atlantic Coast) and the re-export trade (Sallah, 1990; IMF, 2015). With no important minerals or other natural resources and despite commercial

agriculture suffering from climate and market constraints over the past decades, the country continues with peanuts and peanut products, fish, cotton lint and palm kernels as its main export products (Wane, 2009). The country's relatively low trade taxes has promoted its role as an 'entrepot' in the sub-region (Golub and Mbaye, 2008). This entrepot role has contributed substantially to government revenues, as imported goods destined for re-export generally pay full duties when entering the country (Ibid).

Saine (2009) notes that post-independent Gambia's economic trajectory can be divided into four key periods. These include: the period just after independence and its concomitant economic challenges, the economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s (partly triggered by the oil crisis) and the implementation of structural adjustment policies, and the period covering 1995-2008 that ushered in military rule and its APRC government offshoot. I extend this economic trajectory to reflect the passage of time since his book was published in 2009 and include the period covering the last 7-8 years during which the Gambia's economy entered a period of worsening economic performance, and reached crisis proportions in 2015.

Upon gaining independence, the Gambia inherited one of the poorest and least diversified economies in the global economy (Rice, 1967; Beddies, 1999). Successive governments (two in total since independence) have, therefore, relied on bilateral and multilateral donor aid from mostly EU, the US, China and then Taiwan, and budgetary support from international financial institutions (Saine, 2009). This support propped up the economy, which did relatively well in maintaining favourable growth rates and an overall narrow budget deficit (Sallah, 1990; Hughes and Cooke, 1997; Saine, 2009). However, external shocks such as the oil crisis of the 1970s (which led to an increase in import prices for petrol in particular), a long drought in the Sahel, a drop in world market prices for groundnuts and decreasing donor aid saw a sharp decline in economic performance (Beddies, 1999; Saine, 2009). The situation was also compounded by a decline in tourist numbers in the immediate aftermath of the 1981 aborted coup, and inappropriate fiscal and monetary policies by the Jawara government.

To reverse the protracted economic deterioration and lay the foundations for sustained economic growth, the government of the Gambia, in the mid-1980s, implemented the



Economic Recovery Program (ERP) with assistance from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international donors (Sallah, 1990). The official view provided by the IMF/World Bank and the Government of the Gambia suggested that by eliminating government subsidies, disposing of state-owned enterprises, and increasing tax revenues, the ERP helped the Gambian government's finances, having a positive effect on the Gambian economy. This view was supported by Saine (2009) who claimed that from the period when the ERP was implemented in the mid-1980s to 1994, when the military took over power, the Gambia made significant progress in reducing financial imbalances and strengthened the basis for sustainable economic growth.

However, the above views were incongruent with that held by some observers. For instance, according to *Foroyaa*, the opposition newspaper published by the People's Democratic Organisation for Independence and Socialism (P.D.O.I.S.), the E.R.P. was a political ploy designed to enhance the survival of the ruling People's Progressive Party (PPP) (Sallah, 1992). *Foroyaa* emphasised the continuing defects of the political economy, and claims that as far as the majority of Gambians are concerned, 'the ERP of the international money lenders' has not yet been successful as it resulted in social costs such as job losses and the removal of seed and fertilizer subsidies for farmers.

Be that as it may, Hughes and Cooke (1997) assert that the Gambian government's reserves in 1994 were healthy enough to support imports for about six months. However, this trend of strong economic performance was once again to be reversed when the military took power in July 1994. The aftermath of the 1994 military coup (1994-1996, to be precise) saw the Gambian economy suffering from a series of external shocks. These include poor rains which had a setback for agricultural output, economic sanctions imposed by major donor partners and a decline in private investment due to the loss of investor confidence (Beddies, 1999). As a result, the currency weakened, productivity declined and government revenues plummeted (Ibid). Despite these economic realities, the new military government embarked on ambitious and expensive infrastructural development programmes, building a new airport, a new TV station, new schools and hospital structures and the controversially

expensive ‘Arch 22’<sup>18</sup> monument. Although these projects, sponsored through excessive domestic and external borrowing, were politically appealing, they made very little economic sense as they further plunged the economy into a downward spiral (Saine, 2009).

The return to civilian rule in 1997, however, and the subsequent resumption of economic and budgetary assistance from major donor partners such as the European Union led to improved macro-economic conditions and strong growth. This period coincided with a boom in construction (Gambians living in the diaspora were building homes), tourism and telecom sectors facilitated by steady inflows of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and remittances (Ibid). In spite of these macro-economic achievements, poverty increased from the period 1994 to 2008 as many Gambians fell below the poverty line (Heintz, Oya and Zepeda, 2008).

After a brief honeymoon of relatively strong economic performance, the period spanning 2009 to 2015 witnessed worsening economic conditions to crisis proportions. This state of economic affairs is caused by a combination of factors. Firstly, the country is witnessing a decline of its agricultural base due to unfavourable weather patterns in the Sahel. In particular, delayed rains in 2014 caused distress to the economy, leading to a significant decline in crop production (IMF, 2015). This is aggravated by the poor performance of tourism, which accounts for about 20 per cent of the country’s GDP. Although the country has been spared from the latest Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the crisis negatively affected the Gambian economy by discouraging tourists from visiting the country. It is reported that the tourism sector has experienced a 60 percent decline in tourist visitors, leading to a 12 percent depreciation of the dalasi, the country’s local currency (IMF, 2015). Hotels have had to close and staff have been laid off as a result of tourists’ cancellations and tour operators reducing scheduled flights.

This state of economic affairs, in combination with the government’s fiscal indiscipline has seen the value of the dalasi plummet against both the CFA (used by most of its neighbours including Senegal) and major international currencies such as

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<sup>18</sup> It is a commemorative structure on the road into Banjul that was built in 1996 to mark the military coup.

the dollar and the euro. In an attempt to reverse this trend and to stabilise the depreciating dalasi, the Government of the Gambia decided to depreciate and peg the value of the dalasi, in 2014, to the major currencies. The loss incurred from this financial interference mostly affects the majority of the population who for their livelihood, depend on remittances sent from abroad. Shortly afterwards, the Resident Representative of the IMF in the country went public, saying that this policy move will make matters worse for the economy.

The decision to tamper with and manage the foreign currency exchange has caused a dramatic increase in food prices and other consumer goods, while salaries remain stagnant. This has had a negative effect on the standard of living of the majority of Gambians by weakening purchasing power. Making matters worse is the very high rate of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among youths, for which there are no reliable estimates. Nyanzi summed this situation up when she claimed that: “In the Gambia, successful livelihoods among youths are challenged by unemployment, underemployment, low employability due to limited skills and early school dropout” (Nyanzi, 2010:207). The country’s education system is partly to blame for the situation as it fails to provide the types of skills training that can assure employability. A study in 2014 conducted by the Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa (ERNWACA) to examine the extent to which the Gambian Curriculum for Upper Basic School Leavers is relevant to social demand for their employability concludes that many educational institutions in the country are becoming more of a liability than an asset. It is estimated that over 60 percent of graduates could not find employment, and the few who do make up the 40 percent of employees living on less than 1.25 dollar a day (Ibid).

With these developments, the economy is plummeting into a recession and the budget deficit is widening. The country has registered a record rate of inflation in the first quarter of 2015 (IMF, 2015). For example, recently released official figures for May 2015 show that the fiscal period running from March 2014 to March 2015, the country’s National Consumer Price Index (NCPI) increased from 5.6 percent to 6.5 percent, while food inflation skyrocketed to 8.4 percent from 6.4 percent (Ibid). The latest figures according to government communication to the IMF in April 2015 states

that the country experienced a decline in GDP and an increase in the level of public debt in 2014.

The Gambia's economic downturn cannot be wholly blamed on external factors such as the Ebola outbreak and poor rains. In addition to the government's interference in the exchange rate, some of President Jammeh's actions and policies have also contributed significantly to the current economic situation. For instance, worsening human and civil rights conditions under the APRC regime and attacks on freedom of expression and perceived members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI)<sup>19</sup> community (Amnesty International, 2015) has forced the European Union to block some €13 million euros in aid to the Gambia last year. Also, citing general concerns over continued human rights abuses, the United States has slashed aid to the country in the last year (Reuters, 2015). Bearing in mind that the Gambian economy to a large extent depends on foreign aid, the move by the EU has meant further significant strain on the already collapsed economy, having serious implications for the livelihoods of Gambians.

Jammeh's hard stance against gays has not only made the Gambia one of the world's most hostile gay destinations (Spartacus International Gay Guide, 2015)<sup>20</sup>, but has also had serious implications for the Gambian economy and by extension for the livelihoods of many Gambians. Being a country whose economy depends heavily on tourism, Jammeh's gay policy can have the effect of tarnishing the friendly image of the country, thereby affecting the growth of tourism in the Gambia. The withdrawal of the Gambia from the Commonwealth in 2013 (Perfect, 2014) by the government is also predicted to have implications for people who depend on tourism for their livelihoods as the decision may result in fewer British tourists visiting the country (ibid). Moreover, President Jammeh's declaration at a political rally, in December 2015, that the Gambia will henceforth be transformed into an Islamic Republic has the potential of scaring Western tourists away. This can negatively affect the economy and the lives of those whose livelihoods depend on tourism and tourism related activities.

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<sup>19</sup> In February 2014 Jammeh said that LGBT stood for "Leprosy, Gonorrhoea, Bacteria and Tuberculosis".

<sup>20</sup> Country ranks 146 out of 194 in the Spartacus Gay Travel Index (Spartacus International Gay Guide, 2015).

The above exogenous and endogenous factors have seen the country performing badly in recent macroeconomic indicators. For instance, the country ranks 172nd out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index according to the 2014 Human Development Report (UNDP, 2014) which is in the low human development category. This position has declined, taking into account that in the 2011 HDR, Gambia was ranked 168 out of 187 countries (Ibid). The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) indicates that 60.8 percent of the population are poor (Ibid), faring just better than the Central African Republic in this index. Not likely to meet the Millennium Development Goal of halving income poverty by 2015,<sup>21</sup> the country's population is experiencing low national economic growth and urban livelihoods are becoming increasingly precarious and many young Gambians facing the prospect of not being able to fulfil their social and economic aspirations.

Moreover, hustling in the Gambia must be understood by looking at the interplay between the above factors and global political and economic forces. For instance, structural adjustment programs (SAP) of the 1980s and neoliberal market policies, (the ERP in particular) have reduced the proportion of Gambia's wage employed population. The ERP imposed on the Gambian economy in 1985 as conditions for loans saw the emergence of two 'Gambias' (Moseley, Carney and Becker, 2010). One exists along the urban seaboard, where the majority of citizens engage in informal economic activities as a livelihood strategy. The other Gambia is found in the country's interior, where subsistence agriculture remains significant yet fails to meet the subsistence needs of those who engage in it. These have to depend on remittances either from the urban areas or abroad. This situation enticed young men from farming households in rural Gambia to migrate to coastal towns in search of improved economic circumstances. Most ended up on the beaches working as tourist guides or engaging in other petty jobs on the fringes of the tourism industry.

The failed socio-economic policies of the Gambian government compounded by neo liberal policies have affected the availability of economic opportunities. A school-leaving certificate is of little use unless you know someone influential as the

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<sup>21</sup> The Millennium Development Goals Status Report (Republic of the Gambia, 2014) suggests that only two goals (universal primary education and environmental sustainability) are likely to be met by 2015.

government is unable to provide enough jobs. In highlighting the temporal dimensions of neoliberalism for young people in other African contexts, scholars have rightly emphasized the role of neoliberal economic policies, particularly structural adjustment, in creating a gap between the aspirations of youth and economic realities (Cole 2004; Hansen 2005; Howanda and De Boeck 2005; Jua 2003; Masquelier 2005; Silberschmidt 2004; Weiss 2004). James Ferguson (2006) has explained that economic shifts associated with neoliberal capitalism have derailed Africa from what he calls a “temporal developmental trajectory” (2006:190). Ferguson and other anthropologists have argued that, although theories of neoliberal capitalism are useful for understanding economic decline and unemployment, they must also take into account local cultural and economic dynamics (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Weiss 2004).

For the Gambia, failed economic policies by the two governments, spiralling insecurity heralded by neoliberal policies and the country’s marginalization in the world market, have profoundly shaped young urban livelihoods. One might summarise by saying that the Gambia’s economy, in both its historical and contemporary form, classically represents what Bayart calls the ‘economy of extraversion’<sup>22</sup> (2000:227). This took the form of the export of crops (groundnuts in particular), the re-export trade, tourism, remittances sent by migrants and direct bilateral and multilateral financial aid. I suggest that, by pursuing local livelihoods through their interactions with *toubabs*, beach hustlers and chanters employ some classic methods of ‘extraversion’ to achieve their aspirations.

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<sup>22</sup> Extraversion, according to Bayart (2000: 218), entails the ‘gratification from what is outside of the self’, specifically the practices and motivation to acquire material resources. The impulse to be able to benefit from resources derived from unequal relationships with the external environment.

## **Section 2**

### **3.5 The Tourism Sector: An Overview**

The first part of this section aims to provide a brief overview of the Gambia's tourism sector. I demonstrate how the introduction of tourism in the Gambia has provided opportunities for some young Gambians who find themselves in a condition of 'involuntary immobility' to generate the income they need to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement. I begin by exploring relevant studies on tourism in general and tourism in the Gambia in particular.

#### **3.5.1 Tourism: A Brief Definition.**

As a complex activity, attempts to establish a universal and interdisciplinary definition of tourism have proved to be quite problematic (van Hassel, 1994; Burns, 2004). However, central to understanding tourism is the idea that it "involves travelling to and staying in places outside ones usual environment or home on a temporary and voluntary basis, either for leisure or business" (Franklin, 2003: 25). The growth of tourism in developing countries has attracted a lot of research aimed at understanding its economic impacts on host countries (for example Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Rahman, 2010; Mathieson and Wall, 2006:70; Risso and Brida, 2008). The majority of these studies focus on the economic impacts of tourism in terms of its financial (both macro and micro) and employment benefits to the destination country. For instance, Mathieson & Wall, (2006:70) bring into attention the wider economic impacts of tourism in terms of linkages and leakages within the local economy of many developing countries. Others (Risso and Brida, 2008; Smith and Warburton, 2012) have found tourism to strengthen the host nation's foreign exchange earnings, directly and indirectly contributing to government revenues (Hsu & Gartner, 2012) through taxes and levies thereby promoting overall economic growth. Tourism also has provided opportunities of both formal and informal employment opportunities for host populations. It is argued that the rapid expansion of international tourism has led to significant job creations for host countries (Gladstone, 2005).

For instance, the Gambia's tourism industry is a crucial component of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (second only to Agriculture) and a major source of foreign exchange. Estimates show that it contributes to somewhere between 19-20 percent of the country's GDP and provides employment for more than 100,000 people both directly and indirectly and accounts for 20% of formal employment (Mitchell & Faal, 2007). To these estimates should be added people engaged in the informal tourism sector. This includes all those individuals and micro enterprises which engage with tourists and the tourism industry. It is estimated that as many as 3-4,000 people are engaged – some on a seasonal basis – either full-time or part-time in the tourism-related informal sector, giving a total of around 10,000 people that directly depend on tourism for their livelihood and that of their dependants (Ibid).

While the overall contribution of tourism to the Gambian economy is undisputed, the tourism industry's real contribution to poverty alleviation is less obvious. In a study to examine the share of tourism expenditure reaching the local economy, Mitchell and Faal (2007) indicate that mainstream holiday package tourism in the Gambia has important 'pro-poor'<sup>23</sup> benefit flows and that in total, about 14 percent of the Gambian part of the tourism value chain flows to poor people through retail markets, the agricultural supply chain, non-managerial hotel workers, guides and taxi drivers, amongst others.

Although tourism in developing countries has been considered to provide job opportunities for the local people and increases their income, a few tourism scholars (for example Nimmonratana, 2000; Goodwin, 2002) have identified the economic dependence of the local community on tourism as a negative economic effect. They argue that the dependence on one sector for economic survival can put major stress on the industry as well as the people who operate within it. For instance, Harrell-Bond (1979:88) argues that the development of tourism in the Gambia increased "the Gambia's dependency on and its sensitivity to economic fluctuations in the tourist-generating markets outside the country". This became apparent last year when the Ebola outbreak in West Africa had serious economic implications for the Gambia's economy.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Pro poor tourism' is defined as 'tourism that generates net benefits for the poor' (Hall, 2007: 3).



### **3.5.2 The Evolution of Tourism in the Gambia**

The Gambia is renowned as an attractive tourist destination due to its fine beaches and pleasant temperatures. The country has a hot subtropical climate and experiences a humid rainy season from June to November and a cooler and more pleasant dry season from November to May (average temperatures range from 23 degrees Celsius in the winter to 42 degrees in the summer). The first tourists arrived in the Gambia in the 1930s by steam cruiser. With the onset of the Second World War the cruise liners ceased operation and it was not until the birth of charter tourism in the Gambia that tourists visited the country in great numbers (Brown, 1992: 362). Charter tourism started in earnest in the Gambia around 1965 when a party of about 300 Swedish tourists arrived in the country (Harrell-Bond, 1979).

The advent of charter tourism coincided with the government's bid to diversify the Gambian economy and offset its continuing dependence on a single cash crop of peanuts, which made it very vulnerable to the risks of bad weather, pests and price fluctuations (Sallah, 1990). Tourism was considered to be the cornerstone of this policy of diversification, and the former president, Jawara, worked with international development agencies, like the World Bank to promote this agenda (Nyang, 1974). Charter companies, mostly from Scandinavia, began marketing the Gambia as an ideal winter holiday destinations for Europeans (Janson, 2014). This led to a steady influx of tourists, particularly from Scandinavia (Rice, 1968), putting pressure on the Atlantic Hotel (then the country's only hotel), situated in the capital, Banjul, as it struggled to meet the upsurge in demand for rooms (Harrel-Bond, 1979). Subsequently, five star international hotels were built along the coast in Bakau and Fajara in the late 1960s. As tourism developed throughout the 1970s and more tourists started arriving, more hotels were built.

In the mid-1970s, the creation and development of the Tourism Development Area (TDA) further along the Atlantic Coast led to the construction of more hotels to meet the rising demands of tourists (ibid). The new hub of this development was along the Senegambia area in Kololi. The TDA was later extended to include satellite villages along the coast, more recently (early 2000) leading to the building of luxury spa hotels

(the Coral Beach Hotel & Spa<sup>24</sup> and Coco Ocean Resort and Spa) in Brufut and Bijilo villages respectively.

Today the TDA is geographically concentrated along a 10 km strip on the Atlantic Coast, encompassing an area that is 800 metres from the coastline. The TDA is further divided into sections. These include Bakau, Palma Rima, Bungalow Beach (BB), Senegambia, Bijilo and Brufut. Palma Rima, BB and Senegambia are all located within the village of Kololi. All these sections are linked by a main road (the Bertil Harding Highway, also known as the “The Strip”) where most of the tourism activities take place. “The Strip” is populated by hotels, restaurants and supermarkets and prices are more expensive within this area and the TDA in general. This is not surprising as studies (Wamwara-Mbugua and Cornwell, 2008) have found that tourism leads to increase in prices for basic services and goods in destination countries.

At the moment, the TDA consists of 40 hotels, 127 guest houses, 132 bars and restaurants and 21 beach bars (Gambia Tourism Board, 2014). The hotel stock is of variable and quite modest quality, with the majority being three or four stars, although Coral Beach Hotel and Cocoa Ocean Resort and Spa are five star rated. The TDA has, in the past ten years, seen a sharp increase in the establishment of relatively low quality accommodation in the form of guest houses or motels that cater for a broader market. The majority of these businesses are owned by foreigners, particularly the Lebanese and some Europeans, although a few are Gambian owned. A plethora of nightclubs and two casinos can also be found within the TDA. In addition, a number of craft markets have been created in the TDA close to the hotels where tourists may purchase batiks, wood carvings and other traditional crafts.

The aims and objectives of tourism for the Gambia are encapsulated in the Gambia’s Vision 2020 for the tourism sector. This vision pledges to:

Make the Gambia a tourist paradise and a major tourist destination through product innovation, quality improvement, improvement of investment returns and diversification of The Gambia's tourism product. And a distinctive tourism destination that offers a high quality experience for our visitors

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<sup>24</sup> Formerly the Sheraton Gambia Hotel

that is sustainable and where strong economic and social benefits are provided for Gambians (Vision 2020).

The Government of the Gambia (GoG) illustrated its commitment to the sector in achieving this vision by establishing The Gambia Tourism Board (GTB), formerly the Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA).

Through an act of parliament in July 2001, the Gambia Tourism Authority became a public enterprise with the task of developing and regulating the tourism industry in the Gambia. It became operational in November 2001, to be replaced in 2011 with a new entity called the Gambia Tourism Board (GTB). The main reason for this change, according to GTB officials, was to put more focus on marketing rather than regulation. Although this change did not lead to any significant budgetary changes (in terms of government subsidies), some restructuring and personnel redundancies were carried out to reflect the roles and mandate of the GTB. The GTB was given a slightly enhanced role and in addition to those it inherited from the GTA, its principal functions are to vigorously promote ‘destination Gambia’ as an attractive tourist destination, ensure tourist facilities meet high international standards, establish and maintain the quality standards of the industry, develop the human resource base of the industry’s products and services and collect and conduct surveys on tourism activities in the industry, amongst other things (GTB Act, 2011).

### **3.5.3 Informal Service Providers**

The increase in informal economic activities, such as guiding, and the escalation of tourist harassment and hassling, led to in 2003, a Government policy to regulate the hitherto unregulated activities of informal economic operators within the tourism industry. The strategy was to make informal service providers and vendors, also known as beach hustlers, useful partners within the tourism industry. In 2004 the strategy led to the registration of a class of informal service providers within the margins of the tourism industry. These include, but are not limited to, bird watchers, juice pressers, fruit sellers, fishermen, craft sellers, taxi drivers and horse riders. Each of these operators was helped by GTA to create their own associations which serve as a link between them, the GTA (now GTB) and the government.

Beach hustlers who wish to be registered have to fill in an application form and pay an annual licence fee of 525 Dalasis (approx. 8 GBP). GTB then carries out a screening check to see whether applicants have any previous criminal convictions. Those selling food items like fruit sellers and juice pressers are required to do a food hygiene course at Gambia National Tourism Training Institute before they are licensed. Also, bird watchers must have certification from the Bird Watchers Association. Apart from the registration costs, registered beach hustlers do not pay any other taxes, hence their classification as operators within the informal economy.

Successful applicants are then issued with a registration card bearing their name, serial number, type of business and specific area of operation. The card became the only form of identification within the TDA and must be renewed every year by paying the licence fee. According to GTB, the card will help security officers to identify the beach hustlers who are allowed to operate within the TDA. It will also make it easier for tourists to know who they are dealing with. Beach hustlers who failed to abide by these regulations were not allowed to operate within the TDA.

Registered beach hustlers were urged to adhere to a sense of decorum. They were required to be 'correctly dressed', must always be 'sober' and must not 'hassle or behave inappropriately' towards tourists. They are also not allowed to operate outside of the designated area stated on their cards. For example, if you are a bird watcher designated to Bungalow Beach (BB), you are only allowed within the premises of the bird watchers in BB. You are not allowed to tout for customers on the beach or other areas within the TDA. Transgressors are arrested and severely dealt with by the Tourism Security Unit (TSU). The TSU consist of personnel from the Gambian National Army and are stationed at various security checkpoints along the TDA.

Although the primary goal of registration is regulation, it does come with other benefits for Gambian beach hustlers as well. Training and workshops are occasionally organised for them and guidelines are issued to meet the basic standards as service providers within the industry. For example, annual health checks are carried out on juice pressers and fruit sellers to make sure hygiene rules are adhered to. GTB also constructs and provides stalls for fruit sellers. These stalls are free and are available

for registered fruit sellers to use. On the benefits of registration and regulation, Mamadou Bah, Quality Control Officer for GTB told me:

The license is not just paying your money and having a card. It has benefits, particularly by encouraging and helping them to form associations which we have been given bargain powers to speak on their behalf. Our department helps them improve their services to acceptable standards. We bring in partners to train them. One association that benefited from this was the horse riders. The horse riders were helped to train in horse maintenance in terms of health and weight. They have a health passport and we provide someone to come and check the horses physically and medically and those that need treatment are treated free of charge.

Despite this, some beach hustlers refuse to register and prefer to operate at the fringes of the industry as unofficial local guides, offering services to tourists ranging from guiding, interpreting and negotiating during their visit in the Gambia. Consequently, the authorities drew a line between beach hustlers considered as 'legal operators providing genuine services' and beach hustlers considered to be 'illegal intruders' (Bah, A GTB official).



Figure 6: A photo of the TDA ID card issued by the GTB to registered beach hustlers.

### **3.5.4 Tourists and Tourism Activities**

Tourism in the Gambia is distinguished by its seasonality. As a winter sun destination, the peak season for tourist activities is from November to April, and this period is locally known as the ‘season’. With humid and almost unpleasant temperatures during the summer when the rains fall, tourism activity almost comes to a standstill between the months of May and October. With very few tourists, most hotels and tourist related businesses are closed. Seasonality also affects those whose livelihoods depend on tourism. For example, only half of the total labour force is retained during the low season and most hotel staff such as recreation and restaurant workers are laid off.

Tourism in the Gambia is also based predominantly on charter tourism. Also known as ‘all-inclusive tourism’ or ‘package tourism’, it involves tourists purchasing everything in advance including plane tickets, airport taxes, fuel surcharges, insurance, accommodation, all meals, all entrance fees and tips for drivers and guides (The

Gambia Experience brochure, 2013). To cater for this, hotel complexes are equipped with bars, restaurants, shops, hair salons and any other services that the tourists might need. This encourages tourists to spend the majority of their time and money within the hotel complex, hence the establishment of an enclave resort within the tourism sector in the Gambia (Carlisle & Jones, 2012).

The creation of 'enclave tourism' through all-inclusive tourist packages is considered to have a negative effect on the earning capacities of informal economic operators such as service providers and vendors within the tourism industry. This negatively affects the local people's ability to profit from tourism (Freitag, 1994; Pattullo, 1996). It has been estimated that all-inclusive hotels generate the largest amount of revenue but their impact on the economy is smaller as compared to other holiday types (Ibid). In the Gambia in particular, 'all-inclusive tourism' is found to have a negative effect on 'pro-poor tourism'. The all-inclusive policy restricts the income earning opportunities for those at the lower end of the tourism value chain, beach hustlers in particular and others benefiting from tourism. Broham's (1996: 56) assertion that there is minimal "potential benefits of tourism to 'leak' out into the local economy because large foreign tourist companies control the sector and are offered incentives by governments to the detriment of their tax base and the welfare of tourism workers" aptly captures the situation.

In 1999, the government banned 'all-inclusive' holidays, citing limited positive impact upon the local economy and lack of support for local businesses.<sup>25</sup> As the Ministry of Tourism stated then, "we want visitors to interact with our people and culture...if the tourists are restricted to one place because they have paid in advance for drinks and meals there is no benefit to our country. The local restaurants, bars, taxis and arts and crafts sellers all suffer" (Carlisle & Jones, 2012: 12). However, the government's policy position changed due to pressure from European International Tourism Organisations (ITOs) and the significant loss in tourist arrivals as a result of the ban, and 'all-inclusive' package tourism was re-instated.

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<sup>25</sup> A study by Freitag (1994) and Pattullo (1996) demonstrated similar concerns about the negative impacts of all-inclusive holidays in the Caribbean.

With the exception of the 2014-2015 tourist season, when the number of tourist arrivals plummeted to very low figures due to the Ebola crisis elsewhere in West Africa, the Gambia has enjoyed a steady increase in tourist arrivals in the last decade. This was partly due to terrorism concerns, mostly from tourists, in Egypt, Kenya and Tanzania, the Gambia's traditional competitors. In fact, tourist numbers almost doubled from roughly 90,000 in 2004 to 172,000 in 2013 (GTB, 2014). Tourists that visit the Gambia are classified into "traditional" and "non-traditional" market labels by GTB (Ibid). Traditional markets are those countries from where the Gambia has long attracted its tourists and these include Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway. 'Non-Traditional' markets are those countries where interest in the destination is gradually on the increase. These countries include France, the USA, Italy, Australia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Ireland and Nigeria. In particular, the last few years has seen a significant increase in Polish tourists, with a growth rate of 627 per cent in 2013 compared to 2012 (Ibid).

The last five years has seen a drop in tourist arrivals from traditional markets with a corresponding increase in arrivals from non-traditional markets. Beach hustlers are not happy with this development as they claim they make less money from non-traditional partners who spend less in comparison with tourists from Scandinavia. For example, my interlocutors told me that tourists from Poland are "stingy and would even share a drink among themselves". In addition to earning less money from non-traditional partners, beach hustlers also find "repeat visitors" spend less compared to "first time visitors". These classifications have implications for the activities the tourists engage in and how much they are willing to spend. In a study on the Gambia's tourism sector, Bah and Goodwin (2003: 20) gathered that repeat visitors were less likely to engage in activities for which they would pay and that there exists "a strong negative relationship between frequency of visit to the Gambia and the number of activities undertaken away from the hotel and beach". Essentially, those visitors who were on repeat visits to the Gambia did fewer activities. The study further found that first time visitors engaged in more paid activities. This is partly because repeat visitors tend to do less sightseeing and when they do they tend to be more independent, but it also 'reflects the lack of new day excursions and other activities' (Ibid), thus exposing the



failure of the informal sector to diversify and enrich their day excursion and activity offers.

As a destination for mass tourism, the Gambia has numerous attractions and offers quite a few activities. Although it lacks the big game parks that are found in East Africa and the beauty of the Nile Valley and the Pyramids found in Egypt, the Gambia makes up for this through its reputation as one of the best bird watching destinations in the world. The country has 500 recorded bird species, both migrant and resident (The bird watchers association). As such, many tourists visit the country for bird watching, spending their time within the tropical gardens of the major hotels, in wildlife and bird reserves such as Tanji and Abuko Nature Reserves. In addition, the Atlantic Ocean and the River Gambia provide the country with the perfect resources for game or recreational fishing, which attracts a lot of tourists. Furthermore, Alex Haley's novel, *Roots*, traced the story of Kunta Kinteh (a Gambian captured during the slave trade and taken to America) to the River Gambia and the town of Jufureh. This has attracted many African-American tourists going on the "Roots Heritage Trail" and the incipient celebration of the International Roots festival organised every year by the Ministry of Tourism & Culture.

In addition to these products, tourists visiting the Gambia visit many local attractions. These include the Katchikally crocodile pool in Bakau where they get the chance to see and touch a white crocodile believed to be sacred by the town people, Serrekunda town with its dazzling and hectic market, the Albert market in Banjul, Sunday wrestling in Bufazone, the tie-and-dye factory in Latrikunda, Bijilo Forest Park famous for its different species of monkeys, birds and other flora, Abuko Nature Reserve, a popular tourist attraction for seeing wildlife and the Tanbi Wetland Complex, located just on the mouth of the River Gambia which is famous for oysters and mangroves. Going further inland, tourists visit Brikama and its craft market and the Makasutu Culture Forest which lies next to the River Gambia. With respect to the above, a 2013 survey by GTB showed that "climate, sun, beach, people and culture, eco-tourism, nature and coastal hotel facilities" are what mostly attract tourists to the Gambia (GTB, 2014)

### **3.6 ICT access and use in the Gambia**

This section aims to provide a brief overview to the access and use of ICTs in the Gambia. Access to and use of the internet in cybercafés have provided opportunities for the protagonists of this study to generate the income they need to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement. The literature on ICT use in developing countries distinguishes two primary research foci (Brown & Grant, 2010; Avgerou, 2010). These include studies that focus on understanding technology “for development,” and those that focus on understanding technology “in developing” countries (Qureshi, 2010; Donner, 2008). While the former explores the generally assumed causal relationship between technology and socio-economic development arising from the consensus that ICTs can have a prescriptive effect on development (Walsham & Sahay, 2006; Walsham, Robey, & Sahay, 2007), the latter is concerned with the ways in which individuals and their societies adapt western-inscribed technologies to fit with their cultural, political and social environments. This discussion will adopt the latter approach due to the nature of this study.

#### **3.6.1 General Background to ICT in the Gambia**

Together with other developing countries, new Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is considered to be a key driving force for the socio-economic development of the Gambia. The underlying logic in support of this position converges on the notion that access to and strategic use of information and communication technology (ICT) has the potential to transform developing countries into knowledge information and network societies (Castells, 1996). It is in this spirit that the Gambian government has made efforts to develop its ICT sector through policy instruments, ICT projects and investing in infrastructure. However, the great majority of the country’s population still lacks private access to computers and the Internet due to a plethora of factors such as resource constraints, illiteracy and poor infrastructure.

The Internet was first launched in the Gambia in 1998 and the country was the first to participate in the UNDP’s Internet Initiative for Africa programme to help establish a low-cost Internet backbone running at 512Kbps via Teleglobe in Canada, with local high speed Post Office Protocols (POPs) to provide national coverage (DOSCIIT,

2003). The first Internet Service Provider (ISP) was the Gambia Telecommunications Company (GAMTEL), which is also the regulator and sole fixed-line provider. Although it had a relatively well-developed national fibre backbone network, fixed-line penetration has remained low, which has also hindered Internet usage (Ibid). The deregulation of the telecommunications sector in 1996 led to the establishment of private mobile networks such as Africell and Comium, both with Lebanese backing, and the Gambian owned QCell. These compete with GAMTEL through its mobile subsidiary, GAMCEL. This significantly increased mobile subscriptions from 221,319 in 2005 to 1,986,490 in 2014, making mobile market penetration above the African average (PURA, 2014).

Although the number of mobile subscriptions exceeds the population (estimated at 1.7 million in 2013), the discrepancy is due to the fact that the great majority of Gambians possess two, three and sometimes four mobile phones. Each mobile is registered to a particular network as cross network calls can be expensive. For instance, a person with two phones will subscribe to either GAMCEL or QCell and would use GAMCEL to call only GAMCEL lines and QCell to call QCell lines. Secondly, cheap Chinese-made mobile phones and flourishing second hand outlets and free SIM cards have contributed to the discrepancy. In the Gambia a higher proportion of households own mobile telephones (65.1%) than fixed telephones (20.6%). In urban areas, 76.5% of households own a mobile against 54.8% of households that own a mobile in rural areas (PURA, 2014).

The country holds the headquarters of the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable which is one of the most ambitious telecommunication projects in the sub-region (Touray, et al., 2015). The submarine cable connects the country to the 14,000 kilometre fibre-optic cable and is controlled by GAMTEL. The project was launched in December 2012 and the total design capacity of the submarine cable is 5.12 terabytes. The 17,000 kilometres submarine cable will provide direct cable connectivity to Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Mauritania, Guinea, Sao Tome & Principe, Sierra Leone and the Gambia (ibid).

The installation of ACE saw an increase in Internet bandwidth in the Gambia. The ACE cable was expected to boost bandwidth and drive new services at more affordable

rates, but as of mid-2014, such improvements had yet to be realized (Freedom House, 2014). Yet, connection speeds are still slow, averaging 1.2 Mbps (compared to a global average of 3.9 Mbps), according to May 2014 data from Akamai's "State of the Internet" report (Belson, 2014). Mobile Internet is becoming increasingly available, especially among urban elites. Gambians who can afford smart phones or whose relatives send them smart phones from the diaspora and can afford to buy expensive data from any of the mobile service providers normally access the Internet through their phones. With the exception of those who can afford to access data through their mobile phones, the number of people with private access to the Internet in the Gambia is very minimal and is exclusively an urban phenomenon. Internet access in the Gambia is costly and quite a luxury.

The country currently has six Internet Service Providers (ISPs). These include GAMTEL, LANIX, Unique Solutions, Netpage, QCell and Connexion Solutions. Private mobile companies also provide Internet service for their customers. The number of private Internet subscribers using either one of the above increased from 36 in 2004 to 3,112 in 2013 (PURA, 2014) and the type of Internet access ranges from ADSL, leased line, Wireless CDMA, 3G and Broadband. In total, the number of Internet users in the Gambia has increased from 195,433 in 2011 to 373,865 in 2014, roughly 19 per cent of the population (ibid). These include those who access the Internet through their phones, those with private Internet access and those who access the Internet through public access points such as cybercafés. In particular, the widespread use of the Internet in public access venues explains the rapid growth of Internet users compared to subscribers.

These developments are more the result of private sector investments than government commitment. Despite launching an elaborate ICT policy within the framework of the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) in 2004, the volatile political situation is inhibiting its realisation. The objective of the NICI is to lay plans for the technological framework necessary to enable the Gambia:

To leapfrog several stages of development by establishing a participatory approach in building human resources and a conducive environment that utilises ICT as a platform to disseminate and exchange data, information, and knowledge

and as a tool to implement applications and provide services in order to achieve higher growth rates in all spheres of socio-economic activities (NICI Policy, 2004).

Remarkably, the NICI, as with most developing country ICT policies, is informed by and driven within the framework of the donor aid complex. Hence, the policies bear all the hallmarks of a top-down approach to ICT initiatives that fail to consider local realities and the context of implementation. Encapsulated in the ICT policy is a broad vision of a modern Gambia based on harnessing ICTs and emphasising the invaluable role of ICTs in enabling Gambians to achieve “high quality livelihoods with peace, stability and unity; good governance; a well-educated and learning society and a strong competitive economy capable of producing sustainable growth and shared benefits” (Ibid).

Despite these policy dreams, the number of people with access to the Internet is still very minimal. General IT knowledge in the Gambia is quite poor as this has not been integrated into the primary and secondary education system. The computer to student ratio in middle/upper basic school is 1:110, 1:29 in senior secondary schools and 1:10 in tertiary and higher education. The percentage of ICT qualified teachers is 2.4 percent in lower basic schools, 4.2 percent in middle/upper basic schools, 15.8 percent in senior secondary schools, 38.5 percent in vocational/technical institutions and 13.9 percent in tertiary education. There are also a few ICT training institutions offering short-term courses in basic ICT proficiency (DOSCIIT, 2003). Very few people own PCs and IT artefacts are regarded as luxury tools.

Enhanced telecommunications infrastructure and increased bandwidth has not translated into price reductions in voice and data or improved quality of and access to ICT services for Gambian consumers. Today, access to the Internet is mostly provided by public access points which have become popular, especially among youths who can neither afford personal computers nor the expensive mobile Internet charges. At a cost of about £20 per month, fixed-line subscriptions are expensive for individual users in the Gambia, where average monthly household incomes are less than £30. Consequently, most Internet access in the Gambia is via public cybercafés, which charge an average of 30p per hour of access.

### **3.6.2 Access to the Internet and the Role of Cybercafés in the Gambia**

Generally, access to the Internet in the Gambia, as in many other developing countries, is facilitated by arrangements for public use (Mwesige, 2004, Gomez, 2012). This is specifically the situation in the Gambia where the majority of Internet users gain access through public access venues. The cybercafés in particular provide opportunities for ordinary Gambians in economically deprived conditions to access the Internet at various rates and connection speeds. Although other public access venue such as public libraries and telecentres do not exist, alternative models of public access to internet, though of restricted nature, can be found. These are the café-restaurant and bars that provide internet facilities to their mostly affluent customers through WiFi networks. In addition, mobile phones also have increasingly become key providers of public access to the internet.

Cybercafés, also known as internet cafes, are mostly found in urban and peri-urban areas (Gomez, 2012) and are increasingly becoming important spaces of communication and interaction for many people in developing countries. They are for-profit venues that are open to the public and offer computer access and related services by generally charging a fee. Haseloff (2005: 4) defines cybercafés as “for-profit facilities, open to the general public to access the Internet, other network facilities and/or a variety of information technology tools on a temporary contract basis (pay per use) without the necessity for the users to own hardware or software themselves.” Burrell (2012) and Smith (2008) argue that the term ‘café’ is a misnomer as few of these facilities served food or drinks of any kind. Be that as it may, countries such as the Gambia, where few people can afford private access to the internet, cybercafés “readily become high-tech access nodes” (Haseloff, 2005: 16). They have become useful spaces that people frequent to get access to the internet for communications and to get access to other ICT products such as printing and scanning.

In addition to providing ordinary Gambians with their online communication needs, cybercafés also offer spaces for sociability and socializing with other café users as is the case in many developing countries (Venables, 2009: 100; Nisbett, 2006: 245).

Thus, Musatov (2001) considers the cybercafé to satisfy a combination of physiological and information needs of the individuals and Laegren and Stewart (2003:370) argue that “the technical, social and spatial spaces are deeply intertwined in cybercafés”. Relatedly, Nisbett (2006) and Venables (2009) bring our attention to the dual nature that exist in cybercafés in terms of space; the social space of the cybercafé itself and the online social spaces provided by the internet. This resonates with Liff & Stewart’s (2003) contention that the cybercafé implies a “heterotopian juxtaposition” of the virtual world of ‘cyber’ space and the real place of the ‘café’.

Nonetheless, there exists a discrepancy in the literature over the role played by cybercafés and other spaces of media consumption for sociability. Whereas studies highlight the cybercafés and other spaces of media consumption as nodes of sociability (e.g., Miller and Slater 2000; Laegren and Stewart, 2003; Weis, 2002), Burrell (2012) found very limited amount of sociability occurring in Accra’s cybercafés, noting that cybercafés in Accra are spaces where networks of youths “travel through”. The cafés she observed in Accra serve as places of escape, transporting customers to distinct places outside of Ghana. This displacement fed into the fascination with abroad and as she put it: “walking into the cybercafé, customers were suddenly transported from a hot, tropical climate to the air-conditioned environment required by these machines from the cool North” (Burrell, 2012: 92). This fascination with abroad was indicative through the names of Accra’s cybercafés (normally adopting non-local names such as ‘Sky Harbour’).

The physical spaces of the cybercafés in the Gambia are distinguished by their basic furnishing. This is the case in many developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, studies of cybercafés in Accra (Burrell 2012), Bamako (Steiner, 2011) and Umuahia (Smith, 2007) found that the interiors of many cybercafés they visited had a homogeneous quality. In other words, they all look similar to one another. Burrell describes cybercafés in Accra as ‘strikingly place-less’ as they were typically located in bland, often windowless rooms and sparsely decorated. She observes that the arrangement of the computers were done in a way that fails to promote interaction between customers. The arrangement of equipment and furniture, however, was designed to provide customers with some privacy thereby minimising unwanted interactions.

The Gambia has experienced an exponential growth of cybercafés in urban settings in the past 10 to 15 years. The great majority of cybercafés are established as family businesses, mostly by Gambians living in the diaspora who ship second hand PCs from Europe and the US to equip cybercafés which are run to provide subsistence for their families back home. Some are investments by civil servants or other public sector workers as a side business to supplement their low incomes. There are no statistics on the number of cybercafés in operation in the country. This statistical void is partly due to a lack of research and regulations for registration on the one hand and limited institutional oversight mechanisms on the other hand. However, a survey I carried out on the number of cybercafés in Brikama while conducting my fieldwork showed that the town has approximately 30 cybercafés concentrated in densely populated neighbourhoods.

Although a few scholars have begun to question the future relevance of cybercafés in the age of the mobile internet (Ajao, 2012; Samii, 2009), others are of the view that these assertions are largely “untested and worthy of further scrutiny” (Walton & Donner, 2012). In their article ‘*Your phone has internet - why are you at a library PC? Re-imagining public access in the mobile internet era*’, Walton and Donner (2012: 1) argue that while the mobile internet is opening up opportunities for young people, “its current form still conflicts with the easy (global) rhetoric of a closing digital divide and the end of public access venues”. The authors conclude that no evidence exists that the demand for public access venues among resource-constrained, mobile Internet-using communities will decline in the near term as the desire for big screens, faster and cheaper bandwidth will remain. In the Gambian context, mobile internet complements rather than competes with cybercafés. Most young internet users who can afford to possess smart phones are faced with the challenge of affording the high fee of mobile data provided by one of the six mobile ISPs in the country. Cybercafés offer cheaper alternatives for young people to access the Internet.



### **3.6.3 Cybercafés in the Gambia: Users and Patterns of Use**

Cybercafés in the Gambia in terms of users and patterns of use are somewhat similar (except for the gender dimensions) to those found elsewhere in developing countries. Studies have used demographic variables such as age, gender, education, occupational status, income differences and ICT access (Gomez and Camacho, 2009; Sciadas et al., 2012) to characterise cybercafé users in developing countries. For example, in their study to profile public access to internet users in 25 developing countries, Gomez and Camacho (2009) observed that the typical profile of Internet users in cybercafés, are likely to be young (15-35 years), male, low to middle income, high school or college educated in an urban location. These findings are consistent with the findings of similar studies in Nigeria (Abdulkareem, 2010), Botswana (Sairosse & Mutula, 2004), Uganda (Mwesige, 2004), Indonesia (Wahid et al (2004) and Manila (Bringula et al., 2012). Internet use in cybercafés in the Gambia is not characterised by significant gender gaps when compared to other contexts where cultural barriers inhibit women from using public access to ICTs (see for example Gomez and Camacho, 2009 ;Terry and Gomez, 2012; Nisbett, 2006; Huyer, 2005; Burrell 2012). Although internet users in cybercafés in the Gambia are predominantly male, gender biases and cultural norms do not restrict women from using cybercafés as both men and women find the cybercafés to be conducive spaces of social interaction.

In the introduction to the study, I have argued that the majority of young Gambians I encountered during fieldwork in the Gambia appropriate the Internet in ways that support their livelihoods. However, it must be noted that this is not the only pattern of use among cybercafé internet users in the Gambia. As in other developing countries where the majority of the population rely on public access points like cybercafés to have access to the internet, ‘consolidated use’ (Wyche et al., 2013) of the Internet in cybercafés can be found among Gambians. This involves instrumental use (job searching, business and bureaucratic activities, general educational activities and seeking information), recreational use (chatting and playing online games) and social use (interacting with friends and family online) (Hong and Huang, 2005; Wahid et al, 2004; Boase et al, 2002).

### **3.6.4 Regulation of Cybercafés in the Gambia**

Although the establishment and operation of cybercafés in the Gambia should be regulated by the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) in accordance with section 14 (1) (g) of the PURA Act 2001, the body has had a lax approach towards cybercafés due to lack of enforcing capability. As such, cybercafés were (and some still are) established and operated without being registered or following procedures. However, cybercafé registration and regulations were tightened in September 2013, which required operators to provide thorough details for a license, as well as mandating the physical layout of cafes and the signs that must be displayed. Many interpreted this as part of the government's efforts to control the flow of information, particularly to government dissidents living in the diaspora who use online radios to criticise the government.

In April 2013, PURA further issued a press release banning cybercafés from offering Voice over IP (VoIP) calling services such as Skype, citing the need to protect the country's "national interest" (PURA, 2013). Cybercafés were also banned from offering Internet dating services, with the government providing no justification. In response to a public outcry over the ban, the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure issued another press release two days later clarifying that the use of VoIP services was not in fact prohibited. Rather, the government restricted Internet cafes from commercialising VoIP services, or charging additional rates for VoIP calls on top of the standard Internet access rates (Daily Observer Online, April 23, 2013).

These developments led to arduous regulatory requirements for the operation of cybercafés. For instance, cybercafé owners are now required to register with PURA for an operating license (in addition to a requisite business license) through an application that requires details of existing bandwidth, the ISP, the number of computers installed, and services provided and a fee of 100 dalasis (about £1.50) (PURA, 2013). Existing cybercafés were given a deadline in May 2013 to submit their applications and registration fees to PURA or face closure. In September 2013, PURA issued further guidelines that dictated specific requirements for the physical layout of cybercafés and the signs that must be displayed. Prominent among these are that:

“cafes must not have fully enclosed cubicles which will isolate a computer user from other computer users; that café operators display a signboard communicating that "Cyber Crimes and Pornography are prohibited" and the service provider shall also not publicly advertise or provide dating services or solicit or host dating services” (Ibid).

Despite these regulations, many cybercafés are still unregistered and are still maintaining the status quo in terms of operations. Although a few cybercafé owners rushed to register in the aftermath of the announcements, this however subsided with time, as is the case with the public’s reaction to the government’s many declarations. As a result, PURA lacks definite figures as to the number of cybercafés that are in operation today in the country. What is evident is that they are mushrooming on street corners, on main roads and in many other spaces, providing livelihoods and opportunities for the fulfilling of aspirations for many of the country’s youths and their families.

### **3.7 Summary**

I started this chapter by providing the reader with a brief background of the setting for this research. I have shown how Gambian society is based on family and kinship support systems. This system to a great extent shapes young Gambians aspirations for social and economic advancement. Despite this, young Gambians are finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil their aspirations due to the current political and economic situation. I argued that previous generations of young Gambians responded to this situation by migration to either Europe or the USA. However, the current political situation and strict immigration measures have made migration almost impossible for the majority of young Gambians. Finding themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ they pursue local livelihoods by making use of the resources available to them.

In particular, I argue that the introduction of tourism in the Gambia and the role it is playing in creating informal employment and unofficial ways of making money for many of the country’s youths within the industry by benefiting from the presence of tourists. I discuss the Gambia’s tourism sector in terms of its evolution, activities, attractive sites and the relevant government policies. These have bearing on the hustling patterns of the beach hustlers in this study. The chapter further examines the

adoption and appropriation of the internet in cybercafés to support the livelihood strategies of young Gambians. Hence, I provide a detailed overview of the tourism and the status, access and use of ICT in the Gambia, the Internet in particular, in order to contextualise my research interest and setting. I show that the patterns of Internet use in cybercafés by young urban Gambians are not specific to the country. This, in some way, suggests that this study provides new ways of approaching and understanding novel forms of Internet use in cybercafés.

In addition, this chapter provides the context that will help the reader to understand the nuances of the chapters that follow. More specifically, the social, economic and political context provided above should help the reader to put the methodological and ethnographical discussions of the study into its proper perspective. The detailed descriptions of the everyday lives and activities of hustlers are presented in the ethnographic chapters that follow. They are presented as a set of stories in an attempt to provide a direct portrait of their hustling culture (Van maanen, 1988).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **‘We align and rhythm the *toubabs*’: The Strategies of Beach Hustlers**

*From October to May, when the summer rains along the West African coast take a hiatus, evening temperatures are cool and pleasant. A walk along the coast of the Gambia offers a picturesque view of the beautiful tropical sunset over the Atlantic Ocean. This is the period that many Gambians wait for in anticipation. It is the time when tourists visit the country, bringing with them the wealth of the West. It is called the “season”.*<sup>26</sup>

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The Gambia is experiencing a boom in its tourism industry with an exponential increase in the amount of Western tourists that visit the country each year. Cheap chartered flights and pleasant tropical weather compounded by the growth of terrorism activities in countries such as Tanzania, Kenya and Egypt have made the country an ideal destination for tourists wishing to enjoy some sunshine in the winter. This has created both formal and informal employment opportunities for many of the country’s youths, particularly the beach hustlers whose life stories constitute this ethnography. Finding themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’, they take advantage of the opportunities provided by the tourism sector to generate the income they need to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement.

My encounters with beach hustlers took place on the beaches, the main junctions around the Tourism Development Area (TDA), beach bars, taxi stands, craft markets and the airport. These encounters revealed to me the hustling strategies they employ to generate the income they need to fulfil their aspirations. Consisting of small entrepreneurs, principally peddlers, vendors and others who provide informal services, they make a livelihood through their interactions with *toubab* tourists.

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<sup>26</sup> This is not only used by Gambians to refer to the period between October and May when tourists visit, but also to describe a financial period.

This chapter will start by describing the physical and social setting of the environment within which beach hustlers operate. Following this, I will show that by adopting a particular appearance and lifestyle, beach hustlers construct an image of themselves that is advantageous for their work. I then go on to explain the various tactics and strategies that beach hustlers employ to make money from tourists. The final section discusses some of the challenges they face within the industry.

## **4.2 Beach hustlers, Chanters and *Bumsters*.**

Beach hustlers in the Gambia are both male and female. Usually between the ages of 18 and 40 from low socio-economic backgrounds, the majority of them are not educated beyond secondary level and have few qualifications or skills that can get them formal jobs. Engaging in the informal sector is their only means of earning a living. These observations are consistent with the demographic profiles of beach hustlers in Kenya, Zanzibar and Senegal (see Eid Bergan, 2011; De Fransisco, 2004 and Venables, 2009). As reflected in title of this section, beach hustlers a range of identity positions.

Generally, beach hustlers in the Gambia are referred to as *bumsters* by the wider society. The term is, however, contentious and considered derogatory. The Government of the Gambia describes them as ‘aimless youths who loiter around *toubabs* hassling and hustling them for money and other material benefits’ (Gambia Information Site). The introduction of sex tourism in the Gambia saw the term being used narrowly to refer to young males who sell sexual services to *toubabs*. For instance, Ebron (2002) describes *bumsters* as young Gambian men who seek out romantic affairs with Northern European female tourists who could potentially help them to travel abroad. A broader definition that encompasses the complex activities of *bumsters* and which fits into the category of beach hustlers whose accounts are narrated in this study is provided by Nyanzi et al (2005). They describe *bumsters* as:

Young men involved in diverse activities that include the process of misrepresentation of facts, usually a concoction of plight stories and ineffective struggles to meet the needs of large extended families, which are convincingly fed to sympathetic wealthy-looking foreigners with the motive of moving them to pity and compassion (Nyanzi et al., 2005:561).

Existing anthropological definitions of *bumsters*, like the ones provided above tend to be androcentric, discounting the activities of females who engage in similar activities. Nonetheless, the majority of beach hustlers I encountered in the Gambia avoid using the *bumster* label self-referentially when talking to *toubabs* or other outsiders and can feel offended when referred to as *bumsters* by those outside their professional circles. Instead, they refer to themselves as local tour guides, informal service providers or petty traders. For instance, Andy, one of my principal interlocutors told me that “I am not proud to call myself a *bumster* but a local tour guide who shows Gambia to tourists”. Similar observations were recorded among the *papasi* in Zanzibar (DeFrancisco, 2004) and the *coteman* in Southern Senegal (Venables, 2009). To avoid disregarding the gendered and sometimes stigmatised nature of beach hustling, as previous studies have done, I will use the generic term ‘beach hustlers’ to refer to the hustlers in this study. The term *bumster* may appear in some direct quotations as used by beach hustlers themselves.

Attempts by the government, in 2003, to regulate the activities of Gambian beach hustlers further problematized the *bumster* label. Beach hustlers were encouraged to register their informal economic activities with the Gambia Tourism Board (GTB) so they can become recognised economic operators and service providers within the tourism industry. This subsequently categorised beach hustlers into two main groups; registered and unregistered beach hustlers as not all beach hustlers were willing to register with the GTB. The beach hustlers that registered with the GTB argued that they no longer deserve the *bumster* label as they are legitimate economic operators within the industry. Although they admit that they sometimes use their legitimate status to ‘bums’, in a ‘civilised way’.

Registered beach hustlers who engage in this form of ‘civilised *bumsing*’ call themselves ‘chanters’. Buju, a key interlocutor, told me: “*bumsters* have a bad reputation, so we call ourselves chanters. We have a job here but we chant. A chanter is someone who has something to do in the industry but has the chance to bums”. The unregistered beach hustlers I spoke to did not share Buju’s view. They consider anybody operating within the industry and making a living from tourists as a *bumster*. Andy, who did not register his local tour guide business, told me: “Everybody in the

industry is a *bumster*, including the minister”, referring to the tourism minister. It should be noted that the registered-unregistered beach hustler dichotomy is not rigid as we shall see later, as some beach hustlers’ circumstances change from the former to the latter.

Despite this, registered and unregistered beach hustlers can be antagonistic to each other’s interests, sometimes leading to acrimonious competition between them. This is due to the fact that, as hinted above, registered hustlers consider the unregistered hustlers to be ‘illegal intruders’ that come to spoil business for them. The actions of unregistered hustlers irritate the registered hustlers in their attempts to lure tourists away from the industry to the local markets where they can buy goods and commodities and pay for services like transport at a comparatively cheaper rate. As such, registered hustlers accuse their unregistered colleagues of taking away their customers. For example Mariama, a middle-aged widow who sells fruits at a stall in Palma Rima told me that “unregistered beach hustlers take the *toubabs* to Serekunda market to buy fruit as it is cheaper there”. This, she said, is not good for her business. Stanley Man was also explicit in his views on the actions of unregistered beach hustlers:

The so-called local tour guides are bad for our business. They hassle tourists and do not bring business to the tourist taxi drivers. They instead walk them to the main road and take the yellow taxis. They are bad for our business.

### **4.3 “Fridays at the airport and Sundays at the beach”: Knowing the Schedule**

Beach hustlers operate in multiple locations. Some are static while others are mobile. Registered beach hustlers are mostly static as their cards only allow them to operate in specific locations. Un-registered beach hustlers wait for tourists along the beach, but they also hang around at the airport, outside hotel entrances and supermarkets and street corners where tourists are most likely to frequent. Hotels do not allow beach hustlers within their premises.



Popular bars and restaurants along the Kololi main road and beach bars along the coast also attract un-registered beach hustlers. During the tourist season, some beach hustlers offer to work without a salary in bars or restaurants just to get access to *toubabs*. Andy, one of my principal interlocutors who I will introduce in more detail later, told me that he offers to work for free at his friend's bar just to get access to *toubabs*.

I help a friend who owns a bar called Tiger Tiger in Kololi. I help him arrange tables and chairs during the season when it's busy. This gives me access to *toubabs*. When the tourists arrive, I offer them drinks. If they are first timers, I start the conversation by asking about their flight and ask them their lovely names. I then introduce myself and ask where they come from. I sit and chat with them and we get to know each other. I normally conduct business with first timers as they are more eager to visit markets, animals and schools.

Several aspects of this quote illustrate that beach hustlers like Andy do make some strategic decisions. Firstly, they volunteer to work for free with the expectation that this will provide opportunities for them to access *toubabs*. Secondly, the status of a tourist as a 'first-timer' (first visit in the country) or a 'repeater' (a multiple visitor) is essential information for beach hustlers. It provides an indication of the extent to which the tourist is aware of social norms and prices for goods and services in the Gambia. Less informed tourists are mostly targeted as it is easier to make money from them. This is not only because they are more open to accept offers, but also because they can be easily exploited. Hotels and tour operators advise tourists to avoid divulging this information to locals, particularly beach hustlers.

In addition to occupying spaces that tourists frequent, beach hustlers also acquaint themselves with their movements. This particularly applies to un-registered beach hustlers who must tout for potential clients. Whereas registered beach hustlers normally meet clients at their place of work, i.e. kiosks, stalls, craft markets and taxi stands, the unregistered ones have to follow the itineraries of the *toubabs*. Andy, for example, has a schedule that is adapted to the tourists' itinerary:

Fridays I go to the airport because lots of tourists come on Fridays. Although I am not expecting anybody, I still go there with nothing and sometimes come back with something. When I get access to them at the airport I can make money by getting

some change from them or by helping them to change their currency. The plane arrives around midday, so at 2pm I go down to the beach, say hello to people, and try to chat to them, asking them where they come from.... I try to convince them, propose my work to them. Saturday and Sunday are spent on the beach as most will want to relax. Mondays are visiting hours before noon but most will come early to go to the beach. Normally they come back after four to swim. I know their visiting places and I go and wait for them there. I know this because I observe their movements.

Andy is of course not the only beach hustler who makes an effort to inhabit spaces where he can easily gain access to tourists. Several other beach hustlers I have spoken to have their own ways of making sure they get access to spaces where tourists would normally converge. Although none of these follow a strict schedule as Andy does, the loose pattern they follow is mostly guided by factors such as instinct, acquaintance, previous experience and the time of the season.

#### **4.3.1 The Airport: ‘Welcome to the Gambia’**

The Gambia’s airport is also known as Banjul International Airport. It consists of two buildings (one old and abandoned and the other new), providing a perfect juxtaposition of the infrastructural woes and achievements of the first and the second republic. Some would argue that the airport is symptomatic of the modesty of President Jawara and the flamboyant virtues of President Jammeh. The old airport building built by the government of the first republic consists of a small waiting lounge, a departure hall and a small corridor for arrivals. It only has one runway and it looks more like a train station than an airport.

In 1994, after immediately assuming power, the Jammeh government abandoned the old structure and built a modern airport complex with an extended runway and a bigger waiting hall, partitioned into a check-in area and a waiting area. Facilities in the waiting hall include a bar and restaurant and a number of shops selling African art and crafts, an information desk and currency exchange bureaus, as well as stalls representing local cell phone providers like Qcell and Africell. During the tourist season, the airport is always bustling with noise with lots of people occupying the waiting area, especially when a flight is expected to land from Europe. Friday and

Tuesday afternoons are the busiest as most chartered flights from the UK and Scandinavia are expected.

People occupying the waiting lounge are mostly there for two purposes: those genuinely expecting visitors like family and friends and those hanging around to find ways of making money from newly arrived tourists. Amongst the latter are beach hustlers who come to look for potential customers they could sell their services to and a few youths who loaf around looking for an opportunity to offer help with carrying luggage in return for some coins. Beach hustlers thrive in this bustling environment as it provides an opportunity for them to speak to newly arrived *toubabs*. Some, like David, approach newly arrived *toubabs*, and talk to them as if they have met them before. Hustlers use these introductory conversations with *toubabs* to offer them services as local guides. David told me that he has acquired many customers using this trick:

Tourists would like to have a drink first before they go to the hotel. This is where I try to meet them and talk to them. But I have to be smart so that I am not kicked out by security. I have to be theatrical and pretend I know them and that they are my guests. I play smart by hugging them and making noise to show I miss them, telling them welcome back. At first they are scared and bewildered but with time they get to know I am nice.

For beach hustlers, meeting *toubabs* on arrival is an ideal way to market themselves and to establish networks as newly arrived tourists are always eager to get to know local people. The *papasi* in Zanzibar also wait at ferry docks in Zanzibar Town to meet newly arrived tourists and to offer them guiding services (De Fransisco, 2004:9).

### **4.3.2 From Palma Junction to the Beach**

Besides the airport, beach hustlers extend their activities to the TDA. The hub for these activities is Palma Junction. Connecting Kololi village to the shore of the Atlantic Ocean is a short road from the popular Bertil Harding highway leading to the beach. At the top of this junction (called Palma Junction) is the Palma Rima Hotel. The street connecting Palma Junction to the beach is known as ‘the strip’. It consists of a military check point at the very top, a few bars and restaurants and a taxi stand where tourist

taxi drivers wait for customers. At least five hotels are located along 'the strip'. The military check point controls the movement of people entering and exiting the beach. The security officers ask locals to prove that they work in the industry by showing their ID cards. Beach hustlers without a valid pass find it difficult to evade the security check point.

The tourist taxi drivers have their stand in the middle of the road, opposite a famous restaurant called Bukarabu. Owned by an English woman, Bukarabu is popular for serving British food and is frequently visited by British tourists. Bukarabu is the first restaurant on that street which makes it a strategic location for the taxi stand. The tourist taxis are regulated by the GTB and normally charge fixed prices calculated by distance and the prices are displayed on boards placed near the stands. With many bars and restaurants, hotels and the famous Bukarabu, Palma Junction is a hotspot for tourists looking for a taxi to get into town. The taxi stand itself consists of a makeshift roof made out of palm trees and anchored by four bits of wood, a wooden bench and some loose bricks where taxi drivers sit to wait for customers. Their taxis parked across the road, they patiently sit and wait for customers while brewing *attaya*. The tourist taxi drivers are different from the normal taxis or the so called 'yellow taxis'. They are only allowed to operate within the TDA. They can be distinguished from ordinary taxis through their colour, which is all green with a white diamond sign on the sides and bonnet as well as their unique tourist number on the sides, whilst ordinary taxis are yellow with green stripes.

Due to the nature of their work, tourist taxi drivers are always involved in bitter competition for customers with the 'yellow taxi' drivers and other beach hustlers, such as bird watchers and craft sellers. For instance, professional bird watchers do not have their own cars, and so they rely on tourist taxi drivers to take customers on trips. However, feuds over payment occur during these transactions as the taxi driver would assume that the bird watcher is offering less than what the tourist is willing to pay. On the other hand, the bird watcher would not allow the taxi driver to directly negotiate with the tourist as they have a habit of charging the tourists exorbitant prices thereby discouraging them. In this situation the bird watcher risks losing the customer unless he has a second option. In most cases, this option entails the bird watcher walking with

the tourist up to the main road to get one of the yellow taxis, which are comparatively cheaper. This decision by the bird watcher does not go down well with the tourist taxi driver.

Conversely, the craft sellers in Kololi and Senegambia also complain that the tourist taxi drivers undermine their business by taking customers who want to buy crafts all the way to Brikama or Banjul when they are just around the corner. The drivers justify this by saying that they earn more money if they take tourists to places like Brikama, which are further away, rather than the nearer Senegambia craft market. Stanley Man told me that taxi drivers do this to secure their own interests as they want to earn more money.

Heading southwards, away from the taxi stands, one enters the beach area where tourists can have a swim, relax and enjoy the sunshine. The beach in the Palma section of the tourism industry is lined with about three beach bars. Solomon Fish Bar is the one that attracts the most tourists. It is a round house, situated at the northern end of the Kololi beach with coconut trees planted outside in a semicircle. At Solomon's, guests are seated inside the bar or outside in its well ventilated seating area right on the beach. Close to the beach bars are stalls built by the Gambia Tourism Board (GTB) where fruit sellers sell their fruit.

Before 2003, fruit sellers, who are mostly female, sold their fruits to tourists by hawking along the beaches. After the GTB introduced the registration system, a new stall, where they now sell their fruits, was constructed for them by GTB. This seems to have enhanced business profitability. A Poverty Impact study of fruit sellers estimates that, after they started using the stalls, their incomes have increased by 50-60% as a result of the changes in the way they conduct their business and of improved access to the tourists (Bah and Goodwin, 2003). The stall changed the nature of their relationship with the tourists and they no longer hawk. Although the stalls have provided increased profitability, this has also led to more competition amongst the fruit sellers themselves and between fruit sellers and juice pressers. For example, around Solomon's beach bar alone there are 20 fruit sellers sharing a stall and even more juice pressers all trying to sell to a limited customer base.



Figure 7: Hanging out and drinking attaya with taxi drivers in Palma Rima



Figure 8: The new stall built by GTB for fruit sellers in Bakau Beach.

#### **4.4 To ‘Align’ and to ‘Rhythm’: The Hustling Strategies of Beach Hustlers**

To ‘align’ and ‘rhythm’ the *toubab* are key strategies in a beach hustler’s efforts to make money from tourists. To ‘align’ means to understand the *toubab*’s culture and to speak their language. To ‘rhythm’ means to bring the *toubab* into the world of hustlers and make them understand their life situations. For Andy, it is first important to establish some form of relationship with *toubabs* before offering them services. Aware that they are normally suspicious of strangers, Andy claimed that he would first clear the air of mistrust by initiating a dialogue with the *toubab*. Some modicum of patience is needed to successfully ‘align’ the *toubab*. Hence, patience is a key skill in beach hustling. As Andy told me, “working as a tour guide, you have to have patience and be nice to even the *toubabs* who are not nice to you. They might come to be your friend tomorrow”.

This sentiment was also echoed by Matilda, a Swede I met in the Gambia and who later became my acquaintance and agreed to be interviewed. She told me that the pleasant character of the beach hustlers she comes across and their ability to be patient overwhelm her. For her, this contrasts with what she has heard about beach hustlers as people who are only interested in meeting *toubabs* who will help them with either money or travel or both, as she shares her own experience:

The people I met don't really want these. Some are happy with me standing and chatting with them for five minutes and just say goodbye and have a nice day. But most really want to have your contact details like Facebook, email, Skype or phone number.

Matilda proceeds to tell me about Bob, a friend she met whilst in the Gambia:

He is nice and we get along well. Although I am financially stronger, he drives me around in his car and will not let me pay for petrol. But he has never asked anything from me. He is so poor that he buys one cigarette at a time. He sells weed to taxi drivers to survive. He sleeps in one of the taxi cars. I will spend weeks in his family home but they will not let me pay for food. But I once bought them a bag of rice. He has never expressed any hopes of travel to me. He says he likes Gambia and would not want to travel to Europe.

Matilda also shared the experiences of one of her friends who visited the Gambia on a previous occasion. She was walking around looking for an ATM that accepts MasterCard. A guy suddenly approached her and asked what she was looking for. After telling him that she was looking for a MasterCard ATM, the guy volunteered to take her round to look for one. At first she was hesitant going around with a stranger looking for a cash machine. After some persuasion and because she badly needed the service, she accepted the offer. It took them the whole day and a long trip in a *gele gele* (a mini bus) to Banjul to find one. The guy paid for all the fares and would not accept money from Matilda's friend. They however exchanged phone numbers.

This account, together with Matilda's experience provide examples of how beach hustlers can go to any length to establish long-term relationships with *toubabs*. As we have seen, they would even use their last finances to invest in such relationships. It can be difficult for an outsider to untangle the motivations behind these goodwill gestures. Although Matilda and her friend found this to be a kind gesture and thought that the guys were just being nice, I would suggest that this is a strategy that beach hustlers employ to gain the trust and friendship of *toubabs*. A similar motivation was found among the beach hustlers that Nynazi et al. (2005: 565) studied in the Gambia. They observe that "more advanced *bumsters* prefer to initially invest in the relationship with



*toubabs* with the assurance that they will reap the profits at the latter stage of the relationship”.

#### **4.4.1 ‘I am learning Polish’: Learning the *Toubabs*’ Language**

One of the ways hustlers ‘align’ the *toubabs* is having the ability to communicate with them in their own language. As such, the majority of the beach hustlers I have met are multilingual, speaking several European languages including German, Swedish and Norwegian that they have learnt through their long interactions with *toubabs*. This helps them to easily communicate with non-English speaking tourists and also to initiate relationships.

Indeed, studies have found that beach hustlers in other contexts also speak several European languages (Venables, 2009; Pruitt & LaFont, 1995; Davidson & Taylor, 2005). Although beach hustlers in the Gambia speak English, which is the official language, their command of the English language in both accent and grammar does not match their limited schooling. David who speaks almost perfect English despite the few years he spent at school told me this when I complimented his language skills:

As a beach hustler, you have to be able to talk and speak good English so *toubabs* can understand you. You need to be flexible, smiley and happy. I have met Polish tourists. Some don’t speak English but I can speak a few words and I am learning their language. So my language skills are developing.

According to David, the ability to communicate with *toubabs* in their language has two advantages. Firstly, it is a means of impressing upon them the fact that they care enough to try to learn their language. Secondly this engenders familiarity which in turn breeds satisfaction as well as understanding and friendliness. Besides, what this quote seems to suggest is that interacting with tourists using their language both constructs and maintains a relationship based on cultural understanding. As it turns out, David is not the only hustler learning Polish to be able to communicate with Polish tourists who have started visiting the Gambia in large numbers. Other hustlers I have met in Kololi, with Polish dictionaries in their possession, told me that they are learning Polish to ease their communication with tourists from Poland.

In addition to speaking the language of the tourists, beach hustlers also endeavour to imitate their accent. David, for example, has the ability to speak English with a Cockney accent which he acquired through years of interactions with tourists from London. Other beach hustlers who knew that I spoke Swedish would insist on speaking the language with me. I would sometimes be left impressed by their mastery of the language and their accent, which is locally acquired. I would suggest that the ability to speak the language of the *toubab* with a mimicked accent is an important strategy for getting their attention and to earn their respect, as David aptly put it:

We like to imitate toubabs. So we talk like them. We have to align or rhythm them. So we take their accent. Aligning them is part of the strategy to get the toubabs. This means understanding their culture and talking their language.

David and other beach hustlers told me that to ‘align’ or ‘rhythm’ *toubabs* not only means imitating their culture and lifestyle but also adopting their world view. Bringing themselves to the level of the *toubabs* by demonstrating to them that they speak their language and understand their culture is a strategy that beach hustlers use to initiate relationships with them.

#### **4.4.2 ‘Call me Stanley Man’: The Elegance of European Names**

An interesting aspect of beach hustlers’ strategies is the adoption and use of nicknames. This is a part of beach hustlers’ strategies to ‘align’ the *toubabs*. A great majority of hustlers have nicknames that they use regularly in the industry to present themselves to tourists. Most of these are Western names and are acquired after they have started hustling. Both Weiss (2004) and Giddens (1994) attribute the use of Western names by local populations to the impact of cultural globalisation which represents the formation of complex social ties between the global and the local, dubbed the “glocal”. Beach hustlers never use their local or traditional names to present themselves to *toubabs*. David explained to me the significance of adopting and using Western names:

We have to have European names in the industry. It’s easy for the tourist to understand. It’s also fashionable. The toubabs know these are not our names so they ask what our real names are and this leads to conversations.

Unlike game hustling, where nicknames are adopted for the purpose of disguising identity, beach hustlers' motives for adopting nicknames is a hustling strategy in itself. It is therefore a common practice among juice pressers and horse riders to also give their kiosks or stalls and horses Western names. Some name their kiosks after a generous *toubab* who sponsored them to start their business. Some use their own names or the names of their *toubab* girlfriends. "ML Juice Bar" is named after the proprietor himself, whose name is Momodou Lamin. "New Vision 2014", "VIP Five Star Juice Bar" and "Sulay and Linda's Juice bar", which is named after the owner Sulay and his girlfriend Linda, are some other examples.

Also, "Queenie", "Charlotte" and "Diana" are the names of some horses I have encountered being offered for hire around Kololi and Senegambia. Beach hustlers consider the use of Western names as a lure to start conversations with *toubabs* who are curious to learn about the stories behind the names. The use of Western names by beach hustlers reflects a general pattern I observed across Gambian society. Local football teams adopt the names of popular European football teams like "Real Madrid" or "Manchester United". Likewise, football players also adopt the names of famous European stars like Messi or Ronaldo. These names will be printed on the back of their jerseys. Some are stuck with these names long after they retire from football. Saikou, for example, was one of my former classmates in primary school and a very good footballer. He adopted the name of a former Italian footballer Del Piero. Though he has long retired from playing football, we still call him Del.



Figure 9: A kiosk of one of the Juice Pressers in Kololi



Figure 10: ML's juice pressing Kiosk



Figure 11: Sarjo the horse rider with his horse Queenie.



Figure 12: Implements used by juice pressers to make local juice.

### 4.4.3 ‘We have to dress poor’’: Dress and Appearance as a Hustling Strategy

Using language and Western aliases to ‘align’ the *toubabs*, beach hustlers also use dress and appearance to ‘rhythm’ them. As such, beach hustlers in the Gambia are easily recognisable through their outfits and general appearance. However, varying styles of appearance are adopted. Whilst registered beach hustlers dress neatly and casual as required by the GTB, the usual attire for un-registered beach hustlers is dirty ragged jeans or baggy trousers and T-shirts. What Andy describes as his uniform, for example consists of a red string vest and baggy shorts with *nyambalastic*.<sup>27</sup> David disclosed to me that beach hustlers choose to dress this way because “the *toubabs* like to help the ragamuffins<sup>28</sup>” and not neat guys. So hustlers have problems with trying to be neat.

The use of dress and body image to give an impression of their socio-economic conditions is the subject of anthropological research (Hendrickson, 1996; Newell, 2005; Venables, 2009). Unregistered beach hustlers in the Gambia portray an image of destitution through the way they dress to evoke sympathy from tourists. Sympathetic tourists sometimes offer gifts of clothing and other materials to these beach hustlers. Registered beach hustlers who must follow a certain dress code as prescribed by GTB do not benefit from these gifts, as Stanley Man, a registered beach hustler, complained:

We who dress neatly we don’t benefit from the generosity of tourists. They don’t give us left over clothes. They give them to those who dress really poor. They say we don’t need them. That’s why some hustlers dress poorly.

Having access to *toubabs* through language, western nicknames and appearance, beach hustlers resort to a variety of other strategies to make money from them. In the next section, I use the portraits and accounts of popular and successful beach hustlers to

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<sup>27</sup> Plastic sandals are commonly worn by Gambian youths. They are not very comfortable but are popular during the rainy season.

<sup>28</sup> Term used to refer to someone who is a roughneck or a streetwise tough guy according to the Jamaican patois dictionary. However, the term is used to describe rough and unkempt guys with no fixed abode.

show how beach hustlers make money by exploiting the tourists' lack of familiarity with the local setting and mores and by cultivating a relationship with them. Using Andy's case, I describe how unregistered beach hustlers use their work as local tour guides to make money from *toubabs*. Buju's case highlights the ways hustlers play on the sympathy of *toubabs* by exaggerating their poor living conditions to get assistance. Using the case of Stanley Man, I explore the importance of contacts and networks for registered beach hustlers, whose success depends on having a good *toubab* contact, which can be a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend living in the West.

#### **4.5 Andy the Local Tour Guide: 'Showing them the real Gambia'**

Andy is one of the most popular beach hustlers around Kololi. Born and bred in Brikama, he is 32 years old and has been a beach hustler for nearly ten years. Andy, unlike David who started his hustling activities at the tourist market, was introduced to beach hustling by friends who had already established themselves in the industry. Introducing himself as a local tour guide, he tells me that his job has not only helped him provide his family with the financial support they need, but also provided him with the capital he used to invest in his businesses.

I am a local tour guide and my job includes taking a walk around the area to meet and talk to *toubabs*. I meet European people and introduce myself. I also introduce what I do for a living. I offer the *toubabs* cheap services because the hotels and tour operators charge them expensive rates per hour. But we the locals, if we get half the price of those companies, it is good for us. Because we can look after ourselves from that money and help our families (sic).

I first met Andy in October 2013 through David, who is a close friend of his. We normally met at Palma Junction in the afternoons when he was free or at his house in Kololi in the evenings. Andy's success at Kololi and in Brikama overshadows his humble background and poor education. Having completed six years of primary education in 1995, he dropped out of school in grade 6 because his father, a night watchman, could no longer afford to pay his fees. In 1996, he went into petty commerce going round to households renting and selling Nollywood movies.<sup>29</sup> His

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<sup>29</sup> These are Nigerian movies which have a huge audience, particularly among females in the Gambia.

brother who owned a cola nut shop helped him with his start-up capital of 5000 dalasis. He used this money to buy Nollywood movies from some Nigerian businessmen in Serekunda market. Gradually, Andy expanded his business by opening a small stall along the Brikama highway, renting and selling Nollywood movies. A fire disaster in 2003 saw him lose all his investments. This coincided with the beginning of the 2003 tourist season and one of his friends encouraged him to join him on the beach to hustle.

In the beginning Andy commuted by *gele gele* from Brikama to Kololi on a daily basis to hustle. It was only when he started making enough money after his debut season that he rented an apartment in Kololi where he still lives. The apartment is a modest two bedroom flat situated in a compound with four similar apartments purposely built for renting. Because he knows the owner, he gets a discount and only pays 6000 dalasis (around £90) a month, which is low rent compared to similar apartments in the same area.

Andy's ability to charm and convince *toubabs* to hire his services is the source of all kinds of rumours and gossip among beach hustlers in Kololi. Some of his friends believe that he has a good *morro* (Mandinka for marabout or diviner) in Brikama who he consults for this purpose. The fact that Andy is a native of Brikama, a town considered the home of good marabouts, fuels these rumours. When I asked Andy if this was true, he just laughed, but neither accepted nor denied the claims. He told me that his work as a DVD sales man helped him master the art of seduction which is a requisite skill that beach hustlers must possess to succeed. To succeed in beach hustling, Andy told me that one must possess a certain and rare combination of charm, acumen and flexibility:

We need special skills in this job. You have to know how to approach toubabs. You have to be a good listener because if you don't listen you don't understand and know. You have to be able to talk and speak good English so toubabs can understand you. You need to be flexible, smiley and happy to charm the toubabs.

Trimingham (1959) has emphasised the role played by divination in most African societies. An understanding of contemporary religious praxis among West Africans and their socio-cultural significance was provided by Graw (2016) in his attempt to

provide an understanding of Islamic religious life through the study of divinatory practices. Using Senegal and the Gambia as case studies, the author found that divination is one of the most widespread and resilient institutions of Islamic ritual life in these countries.

In the Gambia, divination forms an important element of religious practice and divinatory ritual unfolds in the centre rather than at the margins of Islamic practice (Graw, 2016). As a technique of anticipation, divination enables people to predict the future. The majority of Gambians, regardless of religion, class and ethnicity, occasionally consult the *morro* in order to elicit divine favour, receive advice and signs regarding their livelihoods and seek protection from potential dangers (Ibid). In fact, a handful of my interlocutors admitted to me that they have at some point in their lives sought the services of a *morro* for the above purposes.

In the Gambia, and elsewhere in West Africa (ibid), several divination techniques are used to solicit information on the nature of and the right ritual remedies to clients' predicaments such as illness, marital complications, unemployment, livelihoods and migration. These include throwing cowrie shells and interpreting their patterns (*kooringo*), interpreting outcomes of arithmetic writings on sand (*ramulo*), and interpretation of what the diviner saw in his dream during his sleep following specific prayers (*listikaaro*). Once the *morro* has been able to 'see' the problems of his *talibo* (the person seeking divination), ritual remedies are proffered in the form of giving out *saada* (alms) or prescribing the need for special *dua* (supplicatory prayers). The *saada* can entail sacrificing the blood of a goat, sheep or chicken or the distribution of cola nuts and biscuits to wayfarers, old people or children. In some cases, the *morro* prepares and gives his *talibo* a *nasso* (holy water) to wash with or *safo* (amulet) to wear. For hustlers like David, who intimated to me that they have consulted the *morro* to seek help, claim that they have been provided with all the above remedies for the purpose of possessing good luck in meeting a 'good *toubab*'. Despite its widespread use, divination as a local Muslim practice, have come under attack as unlawful innovations in the Gambia and elsewhere (Launay, 1992).

Although Andy never explicitly admitted to me that the ease at which he makes business with *toubabs* is a result of divination, the significance of such local forms of



Islamic practice in that context is certain to conjure such thoughts. Operating on the margins of the industry and having to overcome their negative reputation, beach hustlers like Andy have a difficult task of winning the confidence of potential customers who normally approach them with suspicion. I have on many occasions watched from a distance beach hustlers failing to persuade tourists to take them on as a guide. Andy explains their failure, blaming it on the approach of beach hustlers:

These guys don't understand the *toubabs*. They just rush and speak to them and tell them let me take you here and there (sic). For me I rhythm them and bring them into my world. If you don't rhythm them they cannot come with you because they come from another part of the world where they do not expect to meet somebody like you. So if you meet them you have to talk to them to give them confidence.

To convince the *toubabs* to buy their services, the more entrepreneurial beach hustlers like Andy and David carry books and albums that they use to publicise the kinds of services they offer. Andy showed me his album with pictures of local markets, the crocodile pool and other local sites. The albums also contain photos he took with previous clients during tours. The book has a handwritten map and a brief description of the places he proposes to take the *toubabs*. Handwritten testimonies and reviews were written at the back by previous clients. The pictures and testimonies serve as references to prove to future clients the quality of their services as they help to impress potential clients. They have to be likeable, but also show themselves to be professional as local tour guides. In short, beach hustlers like Andy are adept at making their services indispensable through the use of a myriad of skills, methods and artefacts.

Using these skills and artefacts, Andy and other beach hustlers entice new clients by telling them that they can show them the 'authentic' Gambia. They stress the uniqueness of their services despite taking tourists to the same places week in week out. Once a tourist is interested, they are urged to pay the equivalent of either £5 or £10 as a deposit, to secure a half day or a full day trip. A normal full day trip includes visits to Serekunda market, the batik factory in Latrikunda, the crocodile pool in

Bakau, the monkey park<sup>30</sup> in Senegambia, the Arch 22 in Banjul, Lamin lodge and then a boat trip along the river Gambia to watch mangroves. These trips allow beach hustlers the chance to spend valuable time with tourists who talk to them and tell them their problems. They provide the right opportunity for beach hustlers to make money from tourists.

Sellers of ‘cultural experiences’ (Taylor, 2000:48), like Andy and other beach hustlers, can be considered as ‘culture brokers’ who ease the transition into the Gambia for their clients. Culture brokers are found in all cross-cultural situations and are very likely to appear in tourist resorts where they often play a major role in social and cultural change patterns (Brown, 1992). Eric Cohen (1985: 10) talks about the benefits that tour-guides both local and official, can bring as ‘pathfinders’ and ‘mentors’. In the Gambia, they act as translators in a linguistic sense as tourists do not speak local languages and most locals cannot speak English and other European Languages. More significantly, they serve as mediators between locals and tourists. Tour guides, like Andy, create a physical and cultural landscape for the tourist. They control where the tourist went, what they see and how much they paid for it. They also control the amount and the quality of communication between the tourist and the local population.

### **‘We do not charge them for our services, yet nothing is Free’**

Beach hustlers do not charge their clients for their services. Rather, they tell the tourists to give them whatever they have and that they are not doing it for money but to help make their stay memorable. As Andy explains:

We normally do not charge fixed prices for our services. We instead tell tourists to give us anything. We make a lot of money this way as generous toubabs can give 3000 to 4000<sup>31</sup> dalasi for a trip.

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<sup>30</sup> Also known as the Bijilo Forest Park which is located near the Senegambia Beach Hotel in Kololi. It is popular for sighting two out of three breeds of monkey in the Gambia. These are the green velvet monkey and the red colobus.

<sup>31</sup> Around £60 to £70.

During these trips, hustlers make extra income by acting as interlocutors for their clients, bargaining and negotiating prices for them. For example, when tourists want to buy something from the shops or at the market, beach hustlers tell them to allow them to negotiate the price in the local language so they can get discounts. The beach hustler will then make a deal with the seller and the tourist is charged at a higher price. The profit is then shared between the seller and the beach hustler. ‘I would then make sure that I either leave my hat or spectacles behind so I can go back to get it along with my share’, Andy told me. Similar strategies are used by beach boys in the Caribbean who make a financial profit from foreign women through their local networks by taking tourists for dinner at a friend’s restaurant where they are overcharged and the reward is split between the beach boy and the friend (Taylor, 2001).

Beach hustlers are not the only ones charging tourists higher prices. Local businesses outside of the Tourism Development Area also inflate prices for *toubabs*. The barber shop where I normally get my hair cut in Bakau, for example, lists a special price for tourists, D250 as opposed to D50. “The *toubabs* have money. So paying D250 for a haircut is nothing”, the owner said to me. He is aware that it costs £10 for a haircut in the UK, which is much more expensive than what he is charging. Therefore, his services are cheap with regards to the *toubabs*. Many people in the Gambia feel justified to make money from *toubabs* given the perceived economic disparity. As such, there exists two price sets: one price for Gambians living in the Gambia and another higher price for “foreigners”, tourists or Gambians living in the Diaspora. This is a phenomenon well documented in other countries where tourism is a big industry (Wamwara-Mbugua and Cornwell, 2008).

### **‘Taking them to our homes’**

Beach hustlers also use their work as local tour guides to offset the economic pressure of sending monthly allowances for the upkeep of their families. Most beach hustlers are the breadwinners of their families and they are expected to send monthly allowances to their families to buy provisions like rice and other food items, medicine and to pay for their children’s or siblings’ education. As such, as part of their guiding itinerary, beach hustlers suggest to tourists to visit the “locals” in towns to see how they live. Once the clients are willing, they will then be taken to their own family

compounds. The tourists will be advised to buy gifts like rice, cooking oil and other foodstuffs to take with them as gifts according to the dictates of Gambian culture and tradition. David narrated to me how he became very popular in his neighbourhood when some of his *toubab* clients bought ten bags of rice for his home and his neighbours.

In spite of the fact that they are advised by tour operators and hotels to ‘be wary’ of interpersonal contact with local people, many tourists find visiting locals to be the ultimate authentic experience. This gives beach hustlers opportunities to extend the benefits of tourism to the wider community. Andy told me that taking tourists to visit his family helps him to ease his own burden as a breadwinner:

Most of them when we take them to visit local people, especially our family, they buy them rice and onions and some other foodstuffs. This covers another place for me. Because then I don’t have to buy it. I don’t have a wife but I buy food for my mum and sisters and brothers.

#### **4.6 Buju the Fisherman: ‘You are poor and I want to help you’**

Other beach hustlers play on the sympathy of the *toubabs* they sell their services to by exaggerating their poor living conditions to get assistance. This is achieved through both appearance and conversation. Nyanzi et al.’s (2005) definition of *bumsters* mentioned above aptly describes this strategy. The popular perception among Gambians that *toubabs* are wealthy and generous compels beach hustlers to portray themselves as destitute to evoke the sympathy of and assistance from tourists. These beach hustlers aggravate their deprived socio-economic situation to the *toubabs* by fabricating stories about their living conditions. They tell the *toubabs* that they are homeless youths struggling to survive. This is mostly done during conversations whilst taking the tourists around. This strategy has worked for many beach hustlers who secured help from *toubabs* to either start their own businesses or who send them monthly remittances.

Buju's case is a good representation of the beach hustlers that resort to these strategies. Hailing from Basse<sup>32</sup> in the upper river region of the Gambia, Buju comes from a poor farming family and so has never been to school. Instead he helped his dad on the farms. He is in his early 40s and has spent half of his life in the industry. Buju told me that the poor economic prospects of farming and the distress of seeing his parents live in absolute poor conditions compels him to take the journey into the urban areas to hustle. A tall guy with long dreadlocks and imposing looks, Buju is revered among other beach hustlers. He told me that they call him "Buju" because he is a fan of Buju Banton, the Jamaican reggae musician.

Buju started beach hustling as a local tour guide by taking clients on fishing trips on boats owned by others. After a while, he was employed by a company that offers game fishing<sup>33</sup> trips to tourists. This company was owned by a British couple. Working for this company not only helped Buju to master the art of game fishing, but it also provided him with the opportunity to access tourists and to establish contacts and networks. Due to his likable character, Buju met a *toubab* couple who got him a boat to start his own business:

The couple enjoy game fishing and they come every year. Whilst on our trips I will entertain them and be nice to them. I told them I was poor and do this to help my family. They feel (sic) me and said you are very poor and we want to help you. We have a boat in Holland that we only use in the summer. We don't mind bringing the boat for you so that you can make a living, to look after yourself and your family. So they brought the boat. It has helped me look after myself and my family.

"To feel" as used in this context means "to understand", "to like" or "to feel sorry for". The help Buju got from the *toubabs* proved to be life changing. With his own boat, Buju started his own game fishing business in Kololi and has employed six boys to work for him. He takes tourists on recreational fishing trips in the Atlantic. Buju and others like him who do this for a living are called "fishermen". Although they mostly engage in game fishing, they do commercial fishing during the off peak season to

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<sup>32</sup> A major town in rural Gambia.

<sup>33</sup> Game fishing or sport fishing is a form of recreational fishing where large fish renowned for their sporting qualities are targeted.

survive. Showing me a photo album of their fishing trips and the fish they have captured with clients, Buju proudly described his work:

Tourists don't know about artisanal local fishing and so they are interested if we introduce them to this. Some learn fishing from us.



Figure 13: Military officers from the TSU talking to fishermen in Kololi.



Figure 14: Fishermen in Kololi posing with a tourist and their catch.



Figure 15: Fishermen's boats on the beach in Kololi



Figure 16: Hanging out and drinking *attaya* with fishermen in Kololi.

## **4.7 Stanley Man the Taxi Driver: ‘In the industry, contact is everything’**

The cases of Andy and Buju show how beach hustlers use their work as local tour guides to create opportunities to make money from tourists. We have seen how Andy used a combination of tactics to make money from his tourist clients that he used to fulfil his aspirations of social and economic advancement. We have also seen how Buju portrayed an image of himself to his tourist clients to get the help he needed to start his own fishing company. Using the case of Stanley Man, we explore the importance of contacts and networks for registered beach hustlers like taxi drivers, bird watchers, fruit sellers and juice pressers in their attempts to generate the income they need to fulfil their aspirations.

Due to them being registered with GTB and being forced to follow prescribed guidelines, registered beach hustlers resort to different strategies. Their modus operandi is quite different from their unregistered counterparts as they do not have the latitude to move around marketing their business and touting for customers. Therefore, they rely on their place of work as the only marketing or selling point. Competition, therefore, among registered beach hustlers is severe. As such, registered beach hustlers rely on verbal recommendations by former clients to their friends or acquaintances visiting the Gambia. As Mariama told me: “old friends market our business”.

In addition, written reviews on travel websites such as *TripAdvisor* are also a way through which contacts help registered beach hustlers get new customers. This illustrates the ways in which information and communication technologies (ICT) has changed the work of some beach hustlers. A few beach hustlers I have met have created Facebook pages that they use to market themselves and their businesses. Some have created their own websites for the same purpose. Malick Suso, a bird watcher who has his own website, told me:

Before, all the tourists knew about Gambia was through the reps. Now the Internet has changed this. Tourists have more access to information now through the net. Tourists find us on the Internet through good reviews or through recommendations from friends. I have a Facebook page where



former clients also write reviews about my business. I also have a website.

Most beach hustlers have an ambivalent feeling towards *reps* who act as the main liaison between the tour operators that bring in tourists and the hotels. They are employed by the tour operators and as expected, would market the services of their employers. Websites like *TripAdvisor* and *VirtualTourist* are littered with reviews written by tourists about their experiences and the services they received from beach hustlers. The reviews below, for example, were written by tourists who used the services of bird watchers while on holiday in the Gambia:

“Bakary aka Charlie Bojang the Bird Guide is Amazing”

“I took two different birding trips with Charlie a while back and have never met such a knowledgeable or enthusiastic guide in any of the places I've visited. I've been to many game parks and over 50 countries but Charlie stands out. He knows all the best places to see the incredible variety of birds that the Gambia has to offer. You feel lucky to be watching someone do something that they so love to do. He's a treat. See his Facebook page for contact information under his full name. Reviewed 12 August 2014”.

“Birdwatching with Sanna Manneh”

“Sanna is very experienced in guiding tourists and he is very friendly. We spent (sic) good times with him and can recommend him to everyone who is interested in bird watching. If you know where to go you can see different types of the most beautiful birds. Reviewed December 2013.”

These illustrate the ways in which beach hustlers can access clients globally.

I use Stanley Man's case as a good example of the importance of contacts for the work of registered beach hustlers and the opportunities it comes with. Reviews on TripAdvisor commended him to be “a nice, friendly and reliable guide with his own car”. Through this, he acquired many customers, including Linda, the British woman who later became his wife. These days, Stanley Man hardly touts for clients and gets most of his customers through the Internet:

I once provided a trip for a British couple who were happy with my service and put a good review for me on TripAdvisor. Since then, I have had many other good reviews and in fact most customers I have got to know me through TripAdvisor. Most of my customers are repeat visitors and they book for my services before they arrive. Some will even ask me to pick them up at the airport.

I first met Stanley Man at the airport during my second field trip to the Gambia when he came to pick up his wife, who introduced me to him. Born and bred in Busumbala Village in Western Gambia before moving to settle in Kololi, Stanley Man is considered by his colleagues to be one of the lucky and talented beach hustlers in Kololi. He is also famous for using the phrase: “Call me ‘Stanley Man’”, when he presents himself to tourists. As such, many of his friends fondly called him this.

Born into an extended polygamous family with 16 siblings, Stanley Man dropped out of school in grade 6 in 1995 due to his family’s financial situation. His father sells wood on the Banjul highway in Busumbala and his mother, like all the other co-wives, is a housewife. Stanley Man told me that although his mother sometimes engages in horticulture with some other women in her *kafoo*<sup>34</sup>, the earnings from this enterprise were not enough to pay for her children’s education.

Dropping out of school and with no prospects of employment, Stanley Man secured an electrician apprenticeship position at a hotel called the Wardner Beach Hotel in 1999 through a cousin who worked there. His stint at Wardner was short-lived as the hotel was forced to close in 2002 and Stanley Man lost his job. Now a qualified electrician, Stanley Man secured another job at Fajara Hotel in Bakau in 2003 working on the same trade.

Although the salary was not good, Stanley Man managed to save enough to buy a second hand car for D22000 which he converted into a tourist taxi and started the tourist taxi business in 2009. Stanley Man told me that he did not have a driving licence when he bought the car and that a friend taught him how to drive using his car. Although he did not go through the normal procedures of obtaining a driving licence,

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<sup>34</sup> A peer group composed of women of the same age group engaging in common activities.

a cousin brother who is a police officer helped him get one through the “back way”.<sup>35</sup> He then registered with the tourist taxi drivers association, registered with GTB and applied for a TDA card.

Stanley Man started plying his trade as a tourist taxi driver at Fajara Hotel where he had already established contacts and networks through his work there as an electrician. In fact, he told me that the reason he decided to become a tourist taxi driver was because of the opportunity he had to access tourists by working at the hotel. Using his work as a tourist taxi driver, Stanley Man also doubles as a tour guide offering guiding services to clients who demand such services as bird watching or a trip to up-country. It was through this that Stanley Man met Linda, his wife-to-be, at the lounge of a hotel called the Bakotu Hotel, in 2012.

I met Linda on the flight on my second field visit to the Gambia. We sat next to each other and a flight delay led us into a conversation. When I told her about my research, she was astounded and told me that her husband is a tourist taxi driver and that she was going to the Gambia for their official wedding. She then offered to introduce me to her husband and I was invited to the wedding, which I attended. The wedding itself was a low key affair held at a small guest house in Kololi. It was attended by Stanley Man’s family, other beach hustlers and a few *toubabs*, one of which was Linda’s mother.

Linda is a 39 year old school teacher from Manchester. She told me that she is from a conservative, upper-class family with two siblings. She has two children from her previous marriage, a 19 year old son and a 21 year old daughter. Her children have since moved out and Linda lives alone after divorcing her husband. Linda told me that in hindsight she thinks she got married too early when she was still a teenager herself. Although her ex-husband was ten years her senior, she felt pressured to get married and thinks this played a key role in why the relationship did not ultimately work. She felt bored and unhappy after all those years and wanted to explore something new, something more exciting. Besides, the relationship with her husband came to a point when they hardly travelled together as they did before because he became more

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<sup>35</sup> Corruption and nepotism within the Police Force makes it easy for people to get a driver’s license by knowing someone in the Police Force without having to go through the prescribed test regulations.

interested in going on bird watching trips, which she is not too keen on. Consequently, their marriage succumbed to all these pressures.

When Linda's ex-husband decided to visit the Gambia on a bird watching trip, she decided to join him as it was the Christmas holidays and she did not want to spend it alone in their expensive home in Manchester. Although her ex-husband had been to many countries on bird watching trips, this was the first time Linda decided to join him. For Stanley Man it was the hand of destiny that brought Linda to the Gambia: "It was God's wish that I would meet Linda. The first time I saw her I never thought she would be my wife as she was already married".

Linda and her husband read about Stanley Man on *TripAdvisor*. They had read reviews that he was a nice, friendly and reliable guide with his own car. Upon arrival at Bakotu Hotel, they were eager to meet him and the first thing they did after putting down their luggage was to ask for him at the hotel reception. It was not difficult to locate him as the hotel receptionist knew him because he had left his business card at the reception. Stanley Man reminisced about that fateful meeting:

When I arrived at the reception, I greeted and introduced myself as Stanley Man. Linda and her ex-husband told me that they had heard about me on TripAdvisor and that they would like to book some bird watching trips. The husband was a bird watcher and they booked me for the two weeks they would stay.

The use of business cards is common among beach hustlers like Stanley Man. Some beach hustlers have visit cards that they distribute to customers and other tourists when they have the opportunity to do so. Some leave their visit cards at hotel receptions and restaurants and bars. This is done by striking up friendships with the people who work in these places. Again, this shows the ways in which beach hustlers tap into local networks. More audacious beach hustlers like Stanley Man not only rely on these networks but also distribute their business cards directly to tourists when the opportunity arises.

I normally market my business in a civilised way. I distribute my visit card to tourists and tell them what services I offer by showing them an album of places they might like to visit. I

give them my business card and show them my guide programmes.

Stanley Man told me that ‘civilised’ way of marketing means using business cards. He believes this leads to less hassling, which can put many tourists off. During my conversations with Stanley, he always emphasised to me that he is a hustler who does not hassle tourists. This principle not only earned him the admiration of Linda and her ex-husband but other tourists as well.

As per the agreement, Stanley Man was to pick Linda and her ex-husband up from the hotel at 8am daily and take them to bird watching hotspots like Abuko Forest, Tanji Reserve and the Kotu Stream Area. During these trips, Linda would sit in the car with Stanley Man while her ex-husband spent time in the forest watching birds, as he recalled:

When Linda’s husband was spending hours watching birds I was spending more time with her. This is how our relationship started. When they got back, they divorced and I started an online relationship with Linda. After two years, we decided to get married.

Before getting married to Stanley Man, Linda visited him in the Gambia five times within a year. It was during one of these visits that the traditional and religious wedding took place. They got married in a mosque in Busumbala in October 2013 and Linda converted to Islam, adopting the name Aminata Bojang.<sup>36</sup> Although Linda told me that she is now a very happy woman, she still has anxieties about her marriage to a Gambian taxi driver, who is a few years younger than her and whom she met while on holiday with her husband. She told me that online stories about the fate of similar relationships compounded her fears and anxieties. This is made worse by the apprehensiveness of her children, friends and other family members towards her decision to marry an African she met while on holiday: “My family was apprehensive about me marrying a much younger man who I hardly know. They are also not happy that I converted to Islam. Only my mum supported me.” This support was demonstrated in her attendance at Linda’s wedding in the Gambia.

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<sup>36</sup> Pseudonym is used to protect Linda’s identity.

As the case of Linda and Stanley Man shows, the significance of contacts is not only limited to acquiring customers and making money, but also to building long-term relationships that could open doors for other opportunities such as having the chance to travel. Although Stanley Man told me that getting a *toubab* wife and going to Europe was not why he started working in the industry, he, however, intends to use the opportunity of moving to the UK to study electrical engineering. His ultimate wish is to return and settle in the Gambia with Linda and to establish his own business.

The aspiration to become established in the Gambia and to achieve financial success and social status is a theme found in the accounts of many of the beach hustlers I encountered during fieldwork and who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’. However, some of the challenges they face within the tourism industry seem to be creating some ambivalence in their efforts to fulfil their objectives. I use the incident that transpired between Buju and other fishermen, and the GTB to illustrate some of the challenges that beach hustlers face.

On the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013, officials of the GTB accompanied by soldiers from the Tourism Security Unit (TSU) came to confiscate the boats of fishermen, including Buju’s boat. The boats were taken to the TSU post in Senegambia. Some boats were damaged in the process. I was in the Gambia by then doing the first round of my fieldwork. Although that trip focussed on researching internet hustling, I would occasionally go to the beach to speak to beach hustlers in preparation for my next round of fieldwork. I had not met the fishermen before this incident but once David informed me of what had happened, we decided to pay the fishermen a visit. This is how I came to meet Buju. Upon arrival at their base, and after introducing myself as a researcher interested in their work as beach hustlers, I was directed to speak to Buju, their boss, who explained what had happened: “They said we should leave here because our boats cause erosion and we make the place filthy. When we refused, our boats were taken to their base”.

Talking to GTB officials about the issue, I was told that the fishermen had been given notice to leave that area of the beach as it is not designated for fishing boat landing. Furthermore, GTB claims that the way the fishermen drag their boats in and out of the sea destroys the sand, causing erosion. As I wanted to probe further on this matter, a

former student who works at the GTB advised me that the order to seize the boats “came from above”. Being familiar with the situation, my assessment was that this was a political issue that I should refrain from pursuing further, lest I find myself entangled in a complex web of Gambian politics. I left the field a few weeks later.

During my second trip I went to see Buju for an update on the issue. He told me that they got their boats back in February:

We went to the depute<sup>37</sup> (pronounced de-pi-tee) in Kololi to give our complaint to this depute. He showed us how to fight this. We were supposed to see Mr President but unfortunately we couldn't see this Mr President. You understand, and later on we complained again to this depute. The depute then took the case to parliament. The depute said “ah, but me one thing doubt me into my place in the people I live with in the area because I have too much complain. The president said people have to go back to the land and my people have no land. Because you build all the hotels and buildings on my people's land. And what they have to make a living is the sea. How can you stop this sea to my people not to fish?” Then a letter was sent directly to the Minister of Tourism and they called the Minister to come there to parliament. The Minister said no, he is not the one who gave the order. Is the director (of GTB) just jump and give the order (sic).

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<sup>37</sup> Member of the Gambian National Assembly



Figure 17: Stanley Man's taxi parked at Palma Junction.



## 4.8 Summary

In this chapter I have shown how tourism in the Gambia has created both formal and informal employment opportunities for many of the country's youths. In particular, tourism has created opportunities of income generation for a group of young people who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility'. Known as beach hustlers, they engage in diverse informal economic activities on the fringes of the Gambia's tourism sector to generate the income they need to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement.

I mainly focus on the key strategies beach hustlers employ to strike up conversations with tourists, to gain their trust with the aim of getting access to them. In doing this, I show the significance of space and how beach hustlers manoeuvre to get access to these spaces. Although tourists mostly inhabit public spaces like the airport, the beach and restaurants, beach hustlers must negotiate access to these spaces by relying on networks or their social skills. For example, we have seen how beach hustlers establish relationships with restaurant owners to get access to tourists.

By presenting ethnographic case studies of the hustling strategies of David, Andy, Buju and Stanley Man, I show how beach hustlers resort to diverse strategies, depending on their status, not only to gain access to *toubabs*, but also to financially benefit from their interactions with them. Using the case of Andy, I show how unregistered hustlers with restricted access to the TDA work as local tour guides. I show how they first navigate tourist spaces to get access to *toubabs*. I further show how, by interacting with *toubabs* through their work, local tour guides use various tactics to generate extra income from them. We have also seen how Buju portrayed an image of himself to his tourist clients to get the help he needed to start his own fishing company. Using the case of Stanley Man, I explored the importance of contacts and networks for beach hustlers like taxi drivers, bird watchers, fruit sellers and juice pressers, which enable them to achieve both short-term economic achievement and initiate long-term personal relationships. I suggest that the use of language, Western names as nicknames, appearance and contacts and networks constitutes part of the

broader strategies that beach hustlers employ to '*align*' and '*rhythm*' so as to gain access to tourists with the aim of financially benefiting from them.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## The ‘Love’ and ‘Deception’ Methods: The Strategies of Chanters

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

A white, dirty curtain separates the small room at the back of the cybercafé from the main hall. Inside the room, a young man, whom I will call Bigger, lies down on a mattress. Looking feeble and struggling to get the words out of his mouth, he feigns helplessness and lets the doctor do the talking for him. A bandage with what seems like blood seething through was tied around his head. His guise tells anybody who looks at him that he only has a few hours to live. His muscular body is accentuated by a dirty conspicuous vest and similarly dirty shorts. His slippers struggle to stay on his dusty feet. Two other people, one wearing a white gown and Rahman, one of the café managers were standing over him. A laptop with a webcam on top of the screen was placed on a small table close to the mattress. From where I was standing, I could see the face of a white man with long hair tied at the back talking to the man in the gown. He looked worried. His last words before he disappeared offline were “Okay, let me rush to the Western Union”.

The story that follows this scene (given in more detail later in the chapter) characterises the techniques and strategies that a group of young men and women employ to make money from their interactions with *toubabs* online. Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter explores the hustling strategies and challenges of a group of young people who attempt to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement through Internet related activities, mostly in cybercafés. The chapter takes up one of the issues that the previous chapter touched upon, namely the ways in which young people who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ pursue local livelihoods by making use of the resources available to them. The advent of the Internet in the Gambia, which can mostly be accessed in cybercafés, provided opportunities for many unemployed urban youths. Lacking the appropriate education and skills to acquire formal employment and unable to migrate to the West due to stringent visa restrictions,

they spend their time in cybercafés employing various tactics to access and make money from *toubabs* by using the Internet.

The young people who engage in online hustling activities use specific language to describe themselves and their activities. They refer to themselves as ‘chanters’ and their activities as ‘chanting’. The *toubabs* they establish online relationships with are generally referred to as ‘contacts’. Contacts are further categorised into ‘real contacts’ and ‘friends’. ‘Real contacts’ are those that send them money and ‘friends’ are those that they are in touch with but do not send them money. Chanters can have as many as 1,000 online ‘friends’ but only two, three or four ‘real contacts’. Although all ‘real contacts’ start as ‘friends’, chanters will delete those friends who do not make this transformation from their friendship list as they are regarded as ‘time wasters’.

Mighty Dre, one of my key interlocutors, told me that chanting involves “making friends on the Internet with the aim of establishing a relationship that has economic and material benefits”. Zill, an experienced chanter, described chanting as: “searching for *toubabs* on the Internet and sweet talking them into helping you. We tell them things that will please them to get them to give us money”. Although none of my interlocutors were able to tell me the origins of the term chanting, I suggest that it is derived from the English word chant, which means to sing.

Initially, I had difficulties with understanding why and how online hustling activities came to be associated with singing. However, in the social context I find it corresponds with the trade of contemporary griots or *jelis* who use their voices to praise and sing to their patrons, expecting to get financial and/or material rewards (Schulz, 1997; Janson, 2002). As the above definitions of chanting show, the activity, although it does not involve singing, does contain elements of ‘sweet talking’ the *toubabs* to achieve their goals. It also corresponds with the effect of popular Jamaican reggae music which has greatly influenced Gambian society, youth culture in particular, during the 1980s and 1990s. To chant in Jamaican patois<sup>38</sup> means to sing, and I suggest that the use of the term chant by young Gambians is partly influenced by expressions in reggae music such as ‘*Rastaman chant*’ or ‘*chant down Babylon*’.

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<sup>38</sup> English-based creole language spoken primarily in the Carribean.

In this chapter, I first seek to describe the spaces where chanters operate. I then introduce the main chanters whose portraits make up this ethnography. I then explore their itineraries of accumulation by describing the strategies they employ to access and establish relationships with *toubabs* online and the techniques they use to make money from them. I further discuss the challenges of chanters in terms of how they compete with each other and the consequences of losing their contacts.

## **5.2 Setting the Scene: AON and GAMTEL**

Studies on the spatial distribution of cybercafés in developing countries indicate a strong presence in peri-urban settings (Rangaswamy, 2008; Gomez, 2012). It is therefore no wonder that Brikama, a peri-urban town lying south of the country's capital Banjul, has experienced a dramatic growth of cybercafé businesses over the past few years. The number of cybercafés has mushroomed from just one in 2005 to 38 in 2013. Anyone visiting the town will not have difficulty in finding a cybercafé either on the main Brikama highway or on residential street corners. From Nyambai to Kembuje (the areas where Brikama starts and ends), cybercafés are clustered in close proximity to each other.

In one area in Nyambai, I observed five cybercafés within a radius of 200 metres. On a busy street in Nema, where local government and administrative buildings are situated, there are three cybercafés (Global link, A&B and Millennium) between the former commissioner's office and the governor's office (with just ten compounds in between). This distance is not more than 220 metres. These configurations are mainly coincidental and do not amount to a 'model of spatial competition' (Hotelling, 1929), which involves businesses clustering in groups instead of spreading evenly throughout a community to maximise their market share. In her work on small-scale African enterprise clusters, McCormick (1999) suggests that small business clusters may help small enterprises to overcome growth constraints.

With the exception of the Gambia Telecommunications Company Limited (GAMTEL)<sup>39</sup>, a government owned cybercafé, the cybercafés in Brikama are privately owned and located within residential buildings. This indicates the growing use and

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<sup>39</sup> GAMTEL is the principal telecommunications company of the Gambia.

adoption of technology outside of development interventions. It is in these privately owned cybercafés that chanters start hustling before moving their operations to GAMTEL as they provide comparatively cheaper connection rates. The cybercafés in Brikama are always busy, with peak patronage in the late afternoon and evening.

The sizes of the cafés range from those with only just 5 computer terminals to one café (GAMTEL) with 42 terminals. Mostly accommodated in small rooms initially built to be rented out as local shops (or *bitiques*<sup>40</sup> as they are locally known), the cybercafés are normally small with very poor ventilation. The majority of the cybercafés lack proper windows, making the rooms dark and stuffy. It is in these cybercafés that I spent time observing and talking to chanters. Although I conducted observations and interviews in all the cybercafés in Brikama, the AON and GAMTEL served as my main research setting.

### 5.2.1 AON: “IT, Electronics and Beauty Solutions”

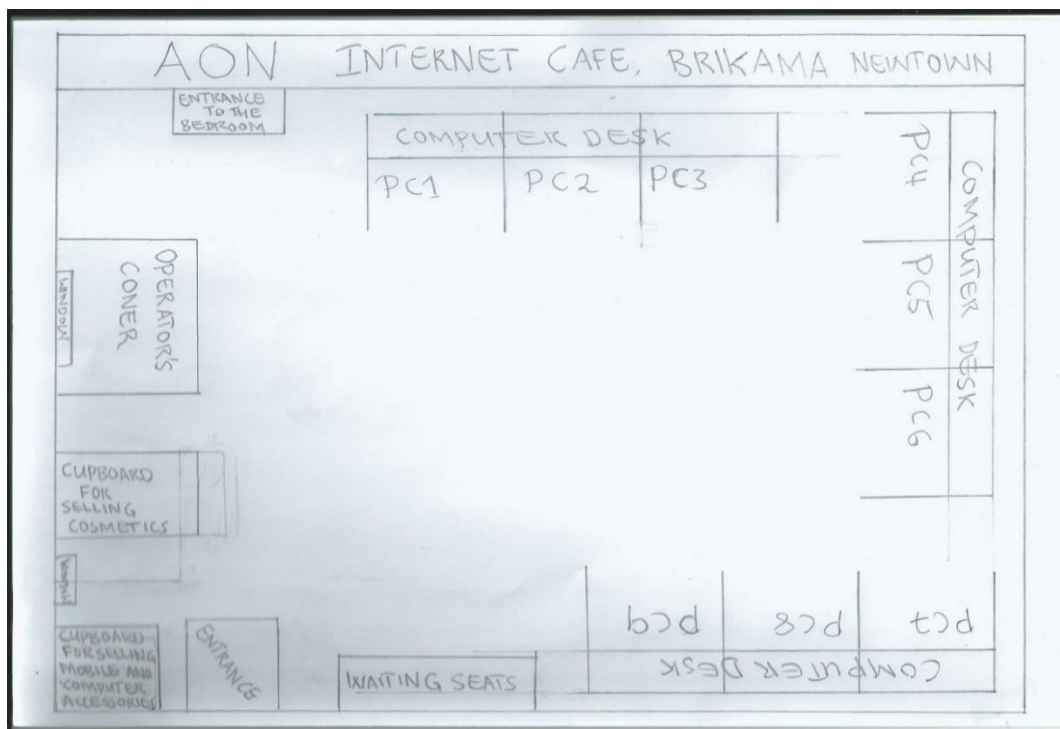


Figure 18: A graphic representation of the inside of the AON cybercafe (produced by the author).

<sup>40</sup> Borrowed from the French meaning boutique.

Cybercafés in Brikama are named after their owners (for example Bas Internet Café, named after the owner Bas), or a famous landmark adjacent to it (for example FMB Internet Café named after the community Radio FM Brikama or Montego Bay Internet Café, named after the popular Montego Bay mini market to which it is adjacent), or global buzzwords (for example, “Global Links”, “IT Solutions” or “Millennium” Internet cafes). The name given to the AON cybercafé is unique in this regard. A family run business, it is overseen and managed by Alkali, the second son in a family of twelve. It has nine PCs and has been in operation for almost three years. It is open seven days a week from 9am until midnight.

The great majority of AON’s customers are students. They usually come either before or after school as evident by their uniforms. Some spend the whole day in the café in their uniforms. Children as young as 12 years old are also among the AON’s customers and can sometimes be found browsing until late at night. These kids, like those found in Indian cybercafés (Rangaswamy, 2007), enjoy the informal ambience of the café and its relatively unconstrained rules about Internet browsing. This is not surprising given the fact that Burrell finds cybercafés ‘appealing spaces’ for young people to escape the surveillance of authority (Burrell, 2012: 43). Although government regulations prevent cybercafés from allowing those under the age of eighteen from browsing after 10 pm, Alkali told me that he does not implement these controls as he does not want to lose his customers.

The AON is in the middle of a small nondescript residential street. A blackboard advertising the services (printing, scanning, photocopying and browsing) it offers and the accessories available for sale (laptops, hard drives, webcams, phones, earphones and pen drives) is placed outside the café. An A4 size paper, displaying the prices for services, is pasted on the glass door, which serves as the main entrance. Browsing at the AON costs D10 for 60 minutes or D5 for 30 minutes. Customers who buy two or more hours of browsing time receive an extra 30 minutes for free. Similar to cybercafés in other African contexts (see Smith, 2008; Steiner, 2011; Burrell, 2012), no cold drinks or coffee are available for sale. Burrell (2012: 28) therefore argues that referring to facilities that provide public access to ICT in developing countries as cybercafés is generally a misnomer.

The veranda of the AON serves as a waiting area for customers. However, the two benches placed on the veranda are not only used for this purpose as non-customers, mostly neighbours and Alkali's acquaintances, hang around to chat and drink *attaya*. This form of socialisation found in Gambian cybercafés serves as a point of contrast to what has been reported in Accra's cybercafés (Burrell, 2012) where a limited amount of sociability occurs. For example, Smith (2008) observes that although the most popular cybercafés in the towns of Umuahia and Owerri in Nigeria serve as meeting points for young people, the lack of sitting spaces except for the computer terminals discourages any form of social interaction.

The AON café itself is a room of not more than 6m x 4m and PCs are placed on tables in an integrated fashion. The seating configuration inside the AON leaves no room for extra seating inside the café, making social interactions less than ideal. In addition, and similar to most privately owned cybercafés in Brikama, this arrangement does not ensure private browsing. Alkali's own desk, which consists of a laptop, a printer/photocopier and a scanner, is placed in a small corner inside the café. Internet connections at the AON can be so painfully slow that one wonders why customers do not go elsewhere. It turns out that the situation is as bad if not worse in other cybercafés, except GAMTEL.

The AON is similar to other privately owned cybercafés in terms of their *raison d'être*. The cybercafés are either run as a family business to provide basic subsistence for the family or owned by a person, normally a civil servant, who opens it as a side business to complement their salary. Situated in residential buildings, they are all similar in layout, price, and clientele. Their interiors are modest and minimal in décor. Although they bear some resemblance to the cybercafés in Accra (Burrell, 2012), they deviate from past studies that have focused on the rich material culture and spatial configuration of cybercafés in Western countries (Wakeford, 2003; Laegran and Stewart, 2003). The cybercafés in Brikama also share the same challenges, prominent among which is erratic electricity supplies, high taxes and duties, poor Internet connections and competition from GAMTEL.





Figure 19: Advertisement outside the AON cybercafé.



Figure 20: Inside the AON cybercafé.



Figure 21: Young people busy browsing inside the AON cybercafé



Figure 22: A painting on the veranda of the AON cybercafé.

## 5.2.2 GAMTEL: “Where big things happen”

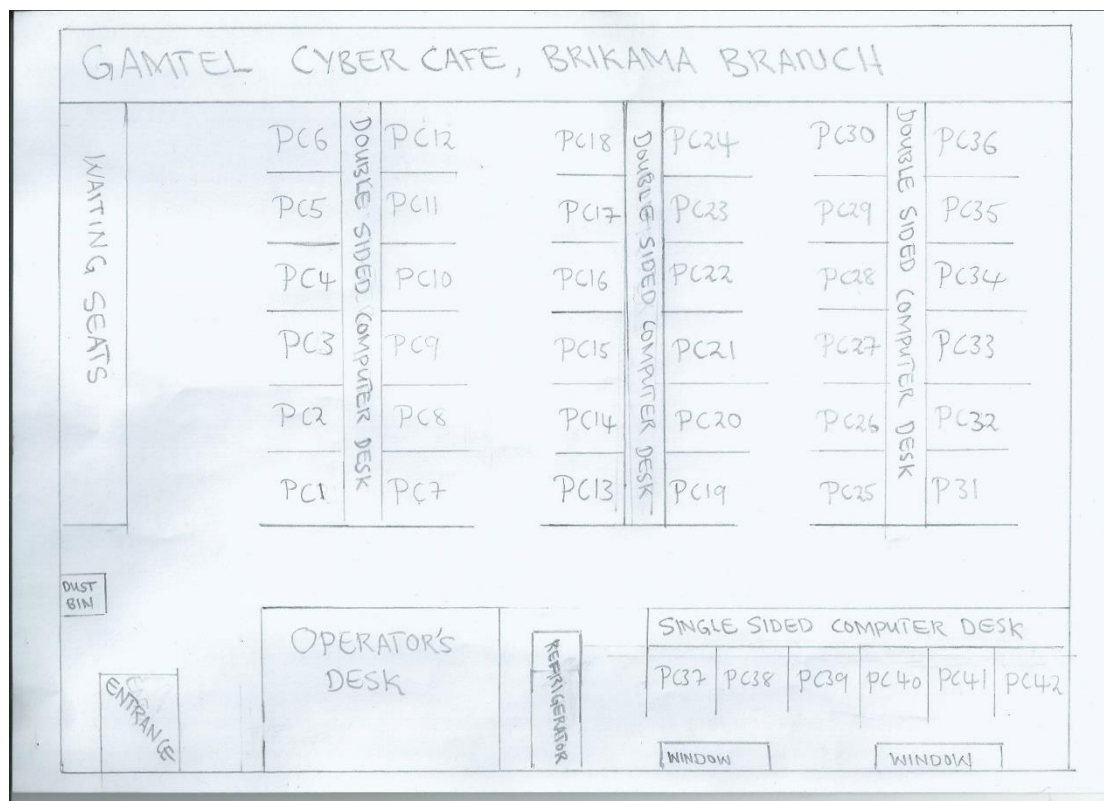


Figure 23: A Graphic representation of the inside of the GAMTEL cybercafe (produced by the author)

Unlike the AON and other privately owned cybercafés, GAMTEL is at a different level in terms of comfort and general technical provisions. With round-the-clock electricity (the facility has a big generator that automatically starts up in power cuts) and a high speed Internet connection, it is a government run cybercafé. GAMTEL is a parastatal company, charged with the task of overseeing the provision of telecommunications and Internet services in the country. In accordance with its aim to provide Internet access to every Gambian, GAMTEL runs cybercafés in different towns in the country. Among these, the Brikama GAMTEL cybercafé is the biggest with 42 PCs.

GAMTEL is the hub for chanting activities in Brikama. It has a reputation as being the cybercafé where young people go to establish online relationships to make money. This reputation has made many avoid going to GAMTEL lest they be associated with chanters. The extent of this was illustrated by a warning from an acquaintance who

cautioned me to “be careful lest they mistake you for one of the GAMTEL boys” when I told him I was going to GAMTEL.

The GAMTEL cybercafé is situated on a busy road linking the market and the car park. With many shops and street hustlers selling mobile phone top ups, SIM cards, mobile phone accessories, peanuts, fruits and food, the immediate surroundings are always intense with activity. The sound of music (*mbalax, reggae or zouk*) emanates from an adjacent recording studio that sells CDs and audio cassettes. Wooden benches are placed outside the recording studio under a neem tree. Here, people either sit to pass time or to wait for a vehicle that will take them to their destination. Most of my conversations with chanters took place under this tree on the wooden benches where they normally sit either to wait for online appointments or just to hang around.

The building of the GAMTEL cybercafé is nestled in between the post office and a Western Union outlet. Chanters gain a lot from this location, as we shall see later in this chapter. Unlike the smaller cafes, GAMTEL boasts a more sophisticated décor, with modern flats screens and new computers. The seating arrangements also ensure some modicum of private browsing as workstations are partitioned by thick piece of cardboards. However, a glance from a position behind the customers enables anybody inside the cafe to see what the customers are doing online. The manager’s desk is positioned in a way that they have full view of the activities taking place inside the café. A PC, a scanner and a printer are placed on the desk. A long wooden bench is situated near the manager’s desk for waiting customers. Further inside is an empty room the size of a standard prison cell which is used as a makeshift mosque.

Notices are plastered on the concrete pillars that serve as anchors for the building. These notices include the browsing tariffs (the cost of browsing in GAMTEL is D12 for a 30 minute session compared to AON’s D5) and the general rules and regulations such as “only one person to a PC”. This rule, however, is almost always flouted as it is difficult to enforce due to new users needing someone to sit near them to teach or help them. One notice that was of particular interest was written on a poster pasted outside the GAMTEL door and on two pillars inside and on the regional manager’s door. It showed a photo of a young girl sitting in front of a computer screen and it read:

Do you know what your little sister is doing online? This photo shows a young girl (under 15) on a dating website. Recently, a teenage boy was caught sending pictures of his private parts to his gay friend..... Internet providers like GAMTEL should assume responsibility for protecting our children from online paedophiles. And also GAMTEL Internet cafes are the most popular venues for these children. Let's act before it's too late.

Although GAMTEL's policy is that kids under the age of 18 (ID cards are required to prove this) are not allowed to browse, this is difficult to enforce as most youths do not have ID cards. Children as young as twelve years old can be found browsing. The two managers on duty at any point in time, and whose job is to enforce GAMTEL's rules and to coordinate the activities of the café, lack either the will or the capacity to do their job. Hence, the relationship between the chanters and the managers is defined by a tacit understanding of reciprocity where favours are given and returned. For example, employees will help chanters scan and upload photos (sometimes obscene) and receipts to their *toubab* contacts or allow them to do things that contravene GAMTEL's rules and in return, chanters reward them for their help by giving them a share of the money they receive.

### **“20 minutes for PC 25”: The Ambiance**

The social ambience of GAMTEL on a normal day is reminiscent of activities in a busy stock exchange. The majority of customers are glued to their screens chatting with online partners through Skype using headsets. Web cams are positioned on top of the computer screens to facilitate face-to-face interactions. Multiple conversation windows intermittently flash on their screens. The sounds of keyboards, pings from instant messages and purrs of conversation are clearly audible. Occasional shouts of “manager 20 minutes for PC 25”, for example, can be heard from customers wishing to extend their browsing sessions.

GAMTEL is normally busiest between 6pm and 9pm when both students and workers arrive. It can sometimes be difficult, if not impossible, to get access to a PC during these times. As I sat on the bench inside GAMTEL one evening, an army officer (in full military uniform) came and sat next to me, complaining that he has been coming to GAMTEL for three nights in a row without gaining access to a PC. He has a

girlfriend in the UK who he is so desperate to talk to, he told me. He did not get to speak to her either that evening as no PCs were free before closing time. To avoid finding themselves in such situations, customers who can afford it either buy a full day's session or bring their own laptops that they connect to GAMTEL's wi-fi by paying the prescribed browsing fee.

The social ambience at GAMTEL extends to its outer space. At any point in time, around 100 to 150 people will be occupying these spaces, just hanging about waiting for free PCs or socialising. However, social events can see these numbers reduce noticeably. For example, GAMTEL is almost empty during feasts like *Tobaski* and *Koriteh*.<sup>41</sup> GAMTEL is also normally quiet during big football games in the English Premier League, UEFA Champions League and the *nawetaan*<sup>42</sup> as most chanters will congregate at video clubs or at the *box bar* mini stadium to watch football.

## **The Gamtel Boys**

I started chanting at GAMTEL and that was about eight years ago. Many people have made it here. Some have gone to Europe and some have built houses, bought cars and started their own businesses. Big things happen here. That is why the place is popular today for chanting. – Zill, a chanter.

The chanters who normally ply their trade in GAMTEL are locally known as the 'GAMTEL boys'. A typical GAMTEL boy is in his early twenties. He normally spends the whole day in GAMTEL or around its vicinity and buys on average four hours browsing time a day and spends on average D1600 a month, which he can easily afford.

His style of dress and his general comportment is determined by his earning capacity. He dresses modestly before making his first money but abandons these clothes for more expensive and colourful clothes once money starts coming in. He loves football and is a fan of one of the best teams in Europe, donning replica jerseys on match days. He wears expensive Nike trainers and American baseball caps and his jeans are drawn down in a "kriss-kross" style exposing his underwear. He wears gold plated or silver earrings and huge necklaces with an assortment of finger rings. He possesses and likes

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<sup>41</sup> Public holidays in celebration of Islamic festivals.

<sup>42</sup> Football tournament played during the rainy season.

to display expensive gadgets like his iPhone or iPad. These items are sent to him from abroad by his *toubab* contact and he collects them from the local post office adjacent to GAMTEL.

His style of dress and his general comportment is also symbolic of his success. This is measured by the amount of *toubab* contacts he has and how much money he receives from them. His success is also translated into the plane tickets he buys to send his parents to the pilgrimage in Mecca, the new house he is building and the car he drives. This guarantees him upward mobility and status in society as his perceived fortune and social transformation will be much talked about. He is popular and unknown people from far and wide will come to seek financial assistance from him. Chanter's lifestyles and consumption patterns as expressed by the GAMTEL boys can be located in theoretical debates on masculinity and identity.

A few scholars have looked at how the appropriation of different styles, material goods or ideas shape masculine identity (Schoss 1996; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; Weis, 2004). In particular, MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga's (2000) study of the Congolese *sapeurs* is of theoretical relevance. The French verb *se saper* means to dress well or elegantly and become famous and respected. For the *sapeur*, looking good was a sign of upward social mobility and a way of achieving recognition for one's accomplishments. In addition, Spiteri's (2014) study of Jamaican beach boys revealed that masculine identity in that context is constructed on "conspicuous consumption, ostentatious costumes and the need to provide economic support for one's family as well as to achieve some sense of status, respect, and reputation among one's peers" (xi). Similarly, whilst conducting ethnographic research on the hustling activities of low income African-American men in the USA, Whitehead et al. (1994) found that, "little men" (low in socioeconomic status) often talked of becoming "big" by establishing a "reputation" through the exhibition of wealth. Chanter's style of dress and general lifestyle patterns is symptomatic similar aspirations.

Although the Gambian hustlers I discuss in this thesis are not internationally mobile in a migratory sense (even though they aspire to do so but without having the ability), they aspire for upward social mobility through the display of wealth and the consumption of images. They perceive hustling as a viable path toward achieving their

economic needs in the context of scarcity. Being able to provide for their families and having the capacity to distribute wealth amongst other community members enhances their social status as well as their respectability in society as I shall show in the next chapter. Chanter's consumption practices enable them to objectify and redefine both their self-perceived and other-perceived social position and also their desire for social mobility. Like the fashionable *sapeurs*, chanters, through their consumption patterns, are also projecting themselves in an imagined elsewhere.



Figure 24: Inside the GAMTEL Cybercafé.



Figure 25: Young people busy browsing inside the GAMTEL cybercafé.



## 5.3 “You have to be a good liar to become a good chanter”: Chanters and the Tactics of their Trade

### 5.3.1 The Chanters

The chanters whose portraits account for this ethnographic chapter do not constitute a homogenous group in terms of the specific activities they engage in, their experiences and their professional backgrounds. For example, and in addition to Dem who we have already met in the introductory vignette, we have Bigger who is an enigmatic, medium height, well-built and very dark in complexion young man. A loner who hardly interacts with other chanters, he has a reputation of coming up with smart tactics to make money from *toubabs*. Everything I know about him is through his few acquaintances as he turned down every request for an interview.

Mr Fatty<sup>43</sup> is a 27 year old primary school teacher. Skinny and tall, he is the first son of a polygamous family of eight. His father is a retired janitor and his mother is a house wife.

My dad is not working so I am the breadwinner. I survive with my salary which is not enough and so I have to chant to complement my salary. I started chanting when I was looking for universities on the Internet. During these visits, I saw others looking for toubab friends on the Internet. I later saw that these were making more progress and so I diverted to also look for toubab friends. I started an operation I called operation find a toubab.

Being the eldest son, the responsibility lies on him to support his parents and younger siblings. These responsibilities prevent Fatty from getting married and having his own family. Hence, he is caught up in what Honwana (2012) refers to as ‘waithood’.

Like many government employees, Mr. Fatty has seen the real value of his salary fall over the years and has thus struggled to fulfil his obligations. This is why he decided to start looking for universities abroad in search of better prospects. It was during these visits to the cybercafés that he was introduced to chanting. His experience resonates with that of many would-be chanters, who first went to cybercafés for a variety of

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<sup>43</sup> A popular surname in the Gambia. It is used here as a pseudonym.

reasons, including simply playing games or watching music videos. Initially, Fatty only chanted during weekends but as his number of contacts grew, he started chanting every day after work. Most days he first goes to GAMTEL until 9pm, when it shuts, and then proceeds to the AON for the rest of the evening.

Mighty Dre has just turned twenty one years old, and has been hustling since he was nineteen. A school dropout, he calls himself a 'full time chanter'. Popular among his peers for his ability to easily get women to fall in love with him due to his handsome looks and charming personality, he has made a lot of money through chanting. Dre, as he is fondly called, drives a nice BMW and has built a house for his parents in the suburbs of Brikama. He however spends his money living an ostentatious lifestyle with a penchant for girls and partying. Dre told me that he is aware Gambian girls follow him for his money and not because they love him as they do not even care how he gets his money. Encouraged into chanting by his friends two years ago, he told me:

I started chanting at GAMTEL. My friend whose toubab contact was sending him a lot of money convinced me to get into it. I also saw my mates taking care of themselves and their families so I decided to chant and try my luck. I have been chanting for two years. I normally target old women of 50 and over. I have a white old lady friend I called mama. She is from Sweden. She is 52. I have another real contact in Germany who helps me a lot.

Kaddy is one of only a few female chanters in Brikama. She is eighteen years old and has never been to school. From a very poor family, her mother sells fruit and vegetables at the Brikama market. I got to know Kaddy at the AON where she normally goes to communicate with John her American boyfriend. Her mother, a middle-aged lady with a fair complexion, usually accompanies her to the cybercafés when she is not selling at the market. She normally sits behind Kaddy while she has Skype conversations with John.

Buba is a lean, baby-faced young boy. He is eighteen years of age. He is usually modestly but neatly dressed. His enthusiastic smiles conceal a sadness caused by his very poor background. He started coming to GAMTEL three years ago after dropping out of school. He told me that he started chanting to look for sponsors who would pay for his education so he can go back to school. I first met Buba when he had just lost

his first contact and was struggling to get money to browse. It was my second day at GAMTEL and I was occupying one of the PCs when he suddenly came over to me and greeted me in a nice way. He then told me that he wanted to browse but had no money and wanted me to give him my remaining time if I did not need it. He said he needed to talk to his friend on Skype. I then offered him my remaining minutes. He sat down and logged into his Facebook account. He called me over and showed me the picture and profile of his friend together with their conversations. He must have been in his 50s and was bare chested.

### **5.3.2 ‘Friends and Real Contacts’: The Accumulation of Friends**

To fully appreciate the intricacies of a chanter’s money making tactics, we first need to explore how they are introduced to chanting, by whom, the techniques they are taught and how they initiate contact with *toubabs*. Calhoun’s (1992) assertion that male hustlers are introduced to street prostitution through “peer introduction” and/or “situational discovery” is consistent with my findings on Gambian youths’ introduction to chanting. The majority of my interlocutors confirmed that they were introduced to chanting through their association with a friend and/or family member who is already an established chanter. A few indicated that they learnt about chanting by chance. Mighty Dre and Mr. Fatty, for example, illustrate these situations. They started going to cybercafés for other purposes such as searching for universities abroad.

The first thing chanters are taught by those who introduce them to chanting is the basic use of a PC. This includes the ability to use the keyboard, the mouse and to open email and social networking accounts. The would-be chanter is also given instructions on how to send friendship requests and tips to ensure that the potential friends are genuine. The chanter is also briefed on the general rules of engagement with the *toubab*. Would-be chanters are also exposed to some general tactics they can employ to make money, although these are improvised as the chanter becomes familiar with the trade. Once these skills have been mastered, the chanter is left on his own to create Hotmail, Yahoo or Gmail email and Skype accounts.

Accounts are created on all the above sites using different usernames and passwords. The email accounts are then used to sign up and open accounts on social networking sites. The principal sites used are Facebook, Tagged, Moco Space, Gay Romeo and Bull Chat. The first three are general social networking sites, while the latter two are exclusively gay social networking sites where gay and bisexual men meet to network, send instant messages and date. Some chanters only create accounts on gay networking sites, while others restrict themselves to other sites like Facebook. A few make use of a combination of both.

Discussing the accounts he has and how he uses them, Mr. Fatty explains:

I have accounts on Moco Space, Facebook and Tagged. But my favourite sites are Moco and Facebook. I open my account and upload my nicest photos and write nice things on my profile. I include information such as my age, occupation, education and hobbies. I then send requests to add friends.

He told me that he prefers Moco Space because it has a game component and that mostly mature professionals use it and it is easier to relate to them. In tandem with having multiple accounts, chanters make use of multiple ghost profiles. This enables them to expand their chances of accumulating as many friends as possible and also to separate their normal life from their chanting life. For example, chanters open three to four Facebook accounts with different names and profiles which are used for different purposes and audiences. Their genuine profiles are used to connect with Gambian friends and family (mostly abroad), while the ghost profiles are used to search for *toubab* contacts.

Chanters' aims, objectives and world view determine which social networking site they join. For example, those seeking to make quick money join gay networking sites as the general perception among chanters is that it is not only easier to establish relationships on these sites, but also easier to make money. Despite this general perception, a few chanters claim that they would never open accounts on these sites out of the conviction that dealing with gay people violates their religious beliefs. For instance, Fatty told me that he did not open accounts on either Bull Chat or Gay Romeo

as he does not like to deal with men and considers “gay money” as *haram*<sup>44</sup>: “I never add men as a principle because most are gay. Those who make quick money are those that deal with *batimen*”.<sup>45</sup>

Fatty and others who share his views told me that only chanters who want to make money from the “*batimen*” have accounts on gay networking sites. They argue that they are Muslims and their religion prohibits them from ‘eating’ the money of a ‘homosexual’. Therefore, Fatty narrated to me that he became incensed when a male friend on Facebook made comments like “gorgeous” and “sexy” on his photo. He interpreted this as an insult to his manhood and personality. He blocked the friend.

The issue of making money through gay networking sites can be contentious and is a source of stigma amongst chanters. As such, those who use these sites do not openly acknowledge this, as guys can be taunted for dealing with gay men. I once witnessed a quarrel between two chanters and heard one saying to the other: “You cannot impress me with your gay money”. That is why Buba never refers to his online male contacts as his partners but only as friends. He would also conceal the fact that he has accounts on Gay Romeo and Bull Chat.

Regardless of which social networking site is used and the type of relationship sought, chanters then proceed to send friendship requests. This is not done at random as some certain factors influence a chanter’s choice of request to get successful outcomes. Firstly, chanters start by viewing the profiles of people on the networking site and send requests to those who are single or to those they share the same “likes” with. Generally, chanters carefully target “older and fat white women” as they consider these people to be the most plausible prospects to establish relationships with. As such, Fatty told me that his preference is “old ugly women” who he can “sweet talk by giving them confidence”. Guys who look for online relationships with men have no particular preferences. They mostly seek single men, both young and old, who state on their profiles that they are looking for relationships. It should, however, be noted that in

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<sup>44</sup> Arabic term meaning sinful.

<sup>45</sup> A batiman is a homosexual in Jamaican patwa. It is a derogatory word.

some very rare cases *toubabs* also send friendship requests to chanters. This is particularly common with gay men looking for online relationships.

Once a potential contact accepts a friendship request, the chanters then start communicating with that person through the social networking site's chat room. These communications take the form of basic and/or general information sharing such as location, occupation, weather, and life in general. After a few chats, the chanter then urges the friend to share his or her Skype details. Insistence by chanters to communicate through Skype serves a few purposes. Firstly, talking to someone they can see through the webcam not only ensures the authenticity of the person they are in touch with, but also enhances flirtation and intimacy in the communication. Chanters cut all communication with those who refuse to share Skype details after a few unsuccessful attempts to convince them to do so.

Secondly, 'face-to-face' conversations have benefits for chanters who lack a high level of written English. They normally rely on verbal communications and do not have to ask others for help with reading and writing messages. Moreover, face-to-face conversations eventually take the relationship to another level. From then on, chanters consider the *toubab* now 'belongs' to them. During this stage of the relationship, the communication becomes more intense and takes place on a daily basis. Chanters are normally careful at this stage not to rush things and scare away the *toubab*, as to make money, it is crucial that the relationship is taken to the next level. The final level is where chanters resort to various tactics to make money from the *toubab*.

A cardinal rule of chanting is to avoid begging or soliciting help from the *toubab* contact in the early stages of the relationship. Instead, chanters invest their money by buying and sending African art and crafts as presents to the *toubab* in the initial stages of the relationship. The *toubab* reciprocates this gesture by sending shoes and other items to the chanter. Facilitating this exchange is the local post office where chanters can be found queuing outside on Thursday afternoons when the mail arrives to receive the parcels posted to them.

Communicating with *toubab* partners online who cannot speak English can be intimidating for many chanters. Unlike beach hustlers who speak a couple of European

languages, chanters only speak English, and for some their English is not that good. Chanters use tools such as Google Translate to communicate with non-English speakers. For example, when a chanter wants to send a message in Dutch, he first writes it in English and then translates it into Dutch using Google translate. He then copies and pastes the translated version into the chat box. The reverse is done when he receives a message. Chanters find this service very useful as it helps to break down the language communication barrier between them and their online partners.

### **5.3.3 ‘Lovers and Deceptors’: The Accumulation of Wealth**

Chanters resort to various strategies to make money from the *toubabs* they meet online. These strategies can be broadly categorised into the “love method” and the “deception method”. These two methods are not mutually exclusive and chanters use a combination of both.

#### **The Love Method**

By far the most common, this entails establishing multiple relationships with several *toubab* men and/or women and claiming to be in a serious relationship with them. Once a relationship is established and the chanter senses some emotional attachment, he then gradually starts demanding money and soliciting other forms of help from the *toubab*. Chanters are also sent monthly allowances from their *toubab* contacts/lovers.

Mighty Dre is renowned in GAMTEL for using the love method. He has a string of women that he is in relationships with. He told me that he does not demand large sums of money so he does not scare the *toubabs* away. He often asks for as little as £20 from each one of them for his monthly upkeep. Using this strategy, Mighty Dre sometimes makes as much as £120 a month if six women send him £20. This is a lot of money when changed into Gambian currency and far exceeds the monthly salary of a lawmaker. Mighty Dre also demands extra money to pay for social events like *Tobaski*.

One afternoon, a few days before *Tobaski*, Mighty Dre invited me over to his PC. He was simultaneously chatting with no fewer than six women on both TAGGED and Facebook as shown by his screen. Appearing in one of the Facebook chat windows was the photo and conversation of a middle aged lady (in her mid-forties). The name

“Chastity G in Allentown P” appeared at the top of the chat window and below the conversation read as follows: “I am here sweetie. How are you doing?” Dre replied “Am cool love, just missing ya”. The ladies in the other chat windows were “Shirlene”, also roughly the same age in Asheville, “Cathy O”, slightly older, say about 50 in Cheyenne, WY and “Tammy S” in Topke, KS. All the conversations revolved around love and missing each other and how they wished to be near each other. The message that, however, drew my attention was the one from “Jane”, one of Dre’s lovers, which read:

*“32 Euros sent through W Union. The answer is Facebook. Please no more money talk if we shall remain friends on Facebook. The purpose is not economic as I see it. I hope your Tobaski will be good”.*

Dre interacted with all these women, shifting from one chat window to another and replying to their messages without getting distracted or raising any suspicion from the women. Dre told me that this is what he does for a living and that in a good month and depending on how many women he is in contact with, he can make around D25,000 (around £350) a month. Dre’s engagement with the *toubab* women he meets on online somewhat correspond to the activities of the ‘players’ in the tourist resorts of the Dominican Republic who use their relationships with female tourists to their advantage, ‘performing’ at being in love in the hope of being able to leave the island (Brennan,2004: 202).

Female chanters also use the ‘love method’ to make money from their online male partners who occasionally send them money to pay for education and basic subsistence. Kaddy, for example, applies this method to John, her ‘sugar daddy’ she met on Tagged. Kaddy told me that John is a wealthy movie star in Hollywood. Whether this is true or not, the idea that Kaddy is dating a movie star in the US was a cause for hope for a brighter future for Kaddy and her family. John has promised to marry Kaddy and to take her to the US. In the meantime, the man is sponsoring Kaddy and her family, as she told me:

I am very happy and lucky as well. He is the first man I added when I opened an account on Tagged and now we will get married. Since I met him, I have not added anyone else and I



do not accept requests from other people. I do not want to spoil my chances. He has been kind to me. He is rich and he sends me money all the time. He loves me a lot.

Unlike the male chanters, Kaddy does not have multiple relationships. She told me that she has not sent any more requests to other men since she met her John and does not accept requests from other men. The reason for this is that she does not want to spoil her chances. It seems that Kaddy is content and grateful with what John is doing for her and her family. Among the female chanters I had conversations with, Kaddy is the only one exhibiting this level of loyalty, suggesting perhaps that she is not chanting for short-term financial returns but a long term relationship based on ‘companionate love’ and marriage. In their quest for short term financial gains, chanters who use the love method use the discourse of love and marriage to convince the *toubabs* they meet online into believing that they are in a genuine relationship.

Studies of marriage in contexts similar to the Gambia<sup>46</sup> have underscored the importance of marriage as a long-term project that balances reciprocal fulfilment for the partners with communal objectives of strengthening kinship ties and meeting religious expectations. In the context of post-neoliberal reforms, however, economic challenges and a growing gap between expectations and opportunities, particularly for young urban Gambians, are undermining this balance of motives. As many young Gambians struggle to fulfil socio-cultural obligations in a context of ‘involuntary immobility’, my young interlocutors are turning to establishing online relationships for financial and material profit. This alternative form of income generation, based on orchestrating online love relationships with foreigners, represent a shift away from the values of ‘companionate love’ and marriage that adhere to traditional understandings of love and marriage in a predominantly Muslim Gambian society.

Chanter’s use of the ‘love method’ contradicts companionate love’s ‘prioritization of and greater personal investment in the marital bond over other relationships’ (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006: 4). Chanter’s use of the love method involves a sacrifice of both emotional closeness and sexual intimacy in favour of anticipated economic gain. Though recent anthropological literature proposes a global transition toward

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<sup>46</sup> See Diop’s (1985) study of marriage in Senegal and Wolof Society in general)

companionate love and marriage, evidence from my encounters with chanters suggest that young urban Gambians are prioritizing short-term material gain over longer-term projects of social reproduction.

In a similar vein, drawing from their ethnographic research on marital and non-marital relationships in Senegal to explore the varied and contradictory effects of late modernity and the neoliberal moment on marriage and social reproduction, Hannaford and Foley (2015) found evidence which suggests that desire for marriage grounded in intimacy and love is receding in the face of persistent economic challenges in urban Senegal. While marriage remains compulsory for Senegalese women, new socioeconomic challenges are motivating them to innovate and improvise within it. They claim that ‘many Dakaroises are pursuing relationships with the hopes of securing immediate financial benefit, with waning regard for formerly central concerns with kinship ties, caste endogamy, emotional closeness, and social reproduction’ (ibid).

In using the love method, chanters also demonstrate their ability to ‘perform love’ (Patico, 2010). As illustrated by Dre’s many ‘love’ relationships with *toubab* women, chanters relationships with their online partners is not based upon a relationship of mutual affection and intimacy between two partners. Patico (2010) underscores that the lines between “actual” and “fake” performances of love are often fuzzy. Hence, Brennan’s work on Dominican sex workers examines how they perform love in their encounters with their clients. Understanding love as something to be ‘performed’ and as entangled with strategic, economic activity for the workers who feign love in order to secure economic benefits (particularly in the form of visas), corresponds with the situation of chanters.

A second variation of the love method involves looking for gay partners on either Bull Chat or Gay Romeo and establishing a relationship with them. Buba told me that this method is the most lucrative. Despite this, Buba revealed that most chanters never meet their online gay partners even though some express the desire to come and visit them. When this happens, the chanters scare the *toubab* by telling him that Gambian society is hostile to gays and that they could go to jail. The *toubab* is then referred to the

Gambian president's threats that any gay man who sets foot in the Gambia will be beheaded.

Most of the communication takes place through Skype where nude photos are exchanged which eventually escalates into online sex. Before explaining to me how it works, Buba nervously looked around to check no-one else was listening:

Gays have money and once you tell them you are gay, they send you money. You tell them you are gay but that you face a lot of stigma. Your family has abandoned you and you have no one to help you. They will feel sorry for you and start helping you.

As evident in the above quote, chanters not only lie about their sexual orientation to their online partners, they also give them the impression that their choice to associate with them is making them experience harsh conditions from both their family and society in general. In other words, the chanter indirectly tells the *toubab* that he is being abandoned by his family because of the sacrifice he has made to be with him. This in itself is a strategy to make money as the gay partner will feel partly guilty for the chanter's situation and so will send money to him.

In an attempt to generate wealth by pretending to be homosexuals and sometimes engaging in online homosexual activities, young Gambian chanters face a particular challenge. Operating in a society where Islam is the predominant religion, a religion that rejects homosexuality and homosexual acts, the majority of chanters who identify themselves as Muslims face the challenge of reconciling their religiosity and sexuality. Hence, to earn a living in the context of scarcity, young chanters negotiate their everyday religion and sexuality. In Indonesia, Boellstorff (2005) has found that dominant social norms render being gay and being Muslim "ungrammatical" with each other, especially in the public sphere. In the Gambian, to some extent, same-sex sexual relations is a cultural and religious taboo and have recently become a political controversy through President Jammeh's anti-gay rhetoric. Despite this, some chanters view homosexual relations as a strategy and as solution to poverty, unemployment and economic hardships.

Some chanters are of the view that gays are wealthy. Hence, they present themselves as gay men living in a gay hostile society in an effort to not only benefit financially but also to position themselves in larger international networks. Among the youths in Accra, Burrell's (2012:28) ethnography explores how the Internet promises young cybercafé users a route to 'change the humdrum daily fight for livelihood, challenge claustrophobic cultural norms, construct cosmopolitan identities and seeking social and economic mobility'. For the chanters in this study, who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility', this strategy provides them the opportunity to pursue mobility through non-migratory means.

### **Looking for Men Online.**

One of the ways in which chanters make money from online gay partners is by engaging in online sex with them. I have on many occasions observed chanters having online sex with male partners in full cybercafés without drawing the attention of anyone else. The first time I encountered these scenes was at the AON, where upon entering, I saw the screen of PC 1 showing blurred images of an old naked man lying on a couch masturbating. The boy using the PC was around 19 years old. He was also pretending to be masturbating by holding his penis, although he had his clothes on.

For chanters, sending a photo of their private parts or just pretending to be masturbating in front of a screen for a few minutes is an easy way to secure them a considerable amount of money. Dem confided that he sometimes engages in such activities. He tried to defend his actions by adding that his relationships with gay men are only virtual and never become physical. In fact, he described the *toubabs* who enjoy these online romances as 'foolish'. Dem told me he finds it hard to understand the pleasure their online partners get from these encounters.

The online sexual encounters for profit of young Muslim chanters like Dem and the young boy whose activity I mentioned above does not only challenge popular perceptions of sexuality in Africa, the Gambia in particular, but also reveals contradictions inherent in chanter's masculine self-identity. Similar to the bodybuilders who sell sex to gay men in California (Klein, 1989), Chanters who engage in online homosexual activities to make money struggle to juggle homosexual

behaviour with their heterosexual identity. It is ironic that chanters engage in online homosexual activities to generate the income they need to construct masculine identities based on fulfilling socio-cultural roles in context where such activities are condemned. Hence, chanters create a psychological framework that permits hustling while rejecting the possibility that they are gay. Reiss's (1971) study of street delinquents as hustlers and the norms they generate to separate themselves from homosexuals is particularly applicable here. For chanters like Dem and Buba, remaining emotionally removed from the homosexual relationship by keeping it at the level of exchange, distinguishes them from the gay male who would do it for lust or love.

Nonetheless, chanters like Dem capitalise on their partners' desire to have an online romance with them to make extra income. They tell the partner that having an online romance at the cybercafé is not safe any longer and that for the romance to continue they need their own private laptop. Once the partner is willing to provide this, the chanter inflates the price of a new laptop but buys a second hand one upon receiving the money. Some will not even buy the laptop and will use the money for other purposes. Dem bought a laptop with the money his contact sent him but later sold it as it became too expensive for him to maintain. Internet data in the Gambia is expensive.

Although Buba still comes to GAMTEL despite having been bought a laptop by one of his partners (because he enjoys the ambiance), his best friend, Sehu, stopped coming to GAMTEL when his contact sent him money to buy a laptop. He now mostly browses from home. He only usually comes to GAMTEL when he runs out of money to buy Internet data. He, however, uses his laptop in GAMTEL by connecting to the Wi-Fi.

### **The Deception Method**

In addition to the love method, chanters also resort to using deceptive methods to make money from their *toubab* contacts. This method involves fabricating plight stories to get financial assistance from *toubab* contacts. To achieve the desired outcome, chanters fabricate stories which are backed up by supportive documents like receipts. These include telling lies about being sent away from school, to being involved in an accident. Explaining how it works, Mr. Fatty told me:

The whole thing about the Internet is begging and deceit. We explain our conditions to the toubabs. We make life seem hard for them. We exaggerate our poor living conditions. We tell them we lost our parents and we have no one to take care of us. Through this they feel sorry for us and send us money.

Dem added that:

When they want to help us, we inflate the prices. We send false invoices and false school admission letters. But we have to be a smart liar to succeed in this. To be a smart liar is to have a good memory and to avoid lying all the time.

Mr. Fatty has been less successful in using the love method. However, his success in using the deception method has gained him recognition and respect amongst his peers. Like Mr. Fatty, the chanters that employ the deception method are those who are reluctant to engage in online sexual activities as a source of income. Instead, they find various ways to make money from *toubab* contacts whose relationships with them are primarily based on friendship. For example, a few of Mr. Fatty's contacts are families who regard him as a son. They occasionally send him money and pay for his education. Despite him being a teacher and not a student, he told the families that help him that he is a student. For instance, a Dutch family sends him D10, 000 (£150) every term to pay for his fees. As evidence that he has indeed paid the fees, Mr. Fatty prepares a forged receipt that he scans and sends to the family. With his access to school documents, he also forges the term reports that he sends. He also sometimes poses and takes photos in a school uniform that he sends together with the term reports.

A variation of the deception method that is used by all chanters, regardless of the type of relationship they have with their contacts is called the "emergency trick". All my interlocutors have told me that they have at one point used this trick, particularly when they urgently need money. The trick involves terminating all communication with *toubab* contacts for a couple of days. This, according to my interlocutors, will make the contact become worried about their welfare and they will be inclined to ask about their whereabouts once they resume communication again. Chanters use this opportunity to fabricate stories that will prompt the contact to offer financial assistance. Some of the stories I heard from my interlocutors include fabrications such as 'a parent is sick and has been admitted to hospital with no money to buy life-saving

medication or that a big storm has brought down their home leaving him and his siblings and parents homeless'. These stories are supported by forged medical bills, pictures of small children standing in front of a broken down house or a picture of an old woman lying in a hospital bed, which are scanned and sent to the contact. Chanters gain by inflating the cost of the medical bill or the cost of anything that the contact is ready to help them with.

Although not all contacts send money to help, having many contacts and telling them the same story opens up opportunities for at least one or two to provide assistance. The story of Bigger that I briefly narrated in the introduction of this chapter provides a perfect scenario of how the emergency trick works.

It was two days before *Tobaski* and GAMTEL was busy as usual as chanters need money to buy rams for their parents and new clothes to celebrate the event. Whilst sitting chatting with Rahman, the café manager on duty that morning, Bigger came in and asked to speak to him in private. They went outside and after a few minutes, Rahman came back and explained what Bigger wanted to do. Basically, Bigger had requested to use the small empty room situated in the corner of the cafe. Bigger said he needed money badly as *Tobaski* is fast approaching and things are hard. He said his *toubab* friend had sent him money a few weeks ago but he used that money for some other purpose and would not just want to demand more money.

Bigger planned to tell his friend that he was involved in a motor accident and urgently needs lifesaving surgery. He wanted Rahman to allow him to use the small room as a makeshift hospital room. Ten minutes later, Bigger showed up with another man, a laptop and a small mattress which was to be the hospital bed. The man he came with was to act as the 'doctor'. Bigger also came with a bandage and a small bottle containing red liquid that looked like blood. Once in the room, he tied the bandage to his head and a small amount of the liquid was poured on the bandage to make it appear that he was wounded on the head.

Once the laptop was connected and the web cam fixed onto it, Bigger lay down on the mattress. The Skype call was made and his friend (Hendriks) picked up. After exchanging a few pleasantries, the friend asked what had happened and Bigger

pretending to be too weak to speak narrated that he was involved in a motor accident and that he could not talk but the 'doctor' would explain. The 'doctor' then took over and explained the situation to Hendriks and told him that his friend needed urgent surgery if he is to survive from the injuries sustained from the accident but that the clinic's policy dictates that the money needs to be paid up front which is about 15,000 dalasis (around 300 euros). Hendriks pleaded with the 'doctor' to go ahead and do the surgery and said that he would send the money after work as he was at work but the doctor refused. He left work straight away and went to the nearest Western Union outlet to send the money. He promised he would call back in half an hour.

After exactly 25 minutes, Hendriks came back online and gave Bigger the Money Transfer Control Number (MTCN) and the amount which was about three hundred euros. Bigger thanked him and told him he would keep him updated. As the Western Union office is just adjacent to GAMTEL, Bigger went straight there and collected the money. He came back and saw Rahman outside and then left with his mattress and the doctor. He had already removed the bandage from his head. But for the next few visits to GAMTEL, whilst talking to Hendriks he would have the bandage tied to his head. I am not sure how much he gave Rahman but I am sure he got something for his *Tobaski*.

This is just one of Bigger's many tactics that made him popular in GAMTEL. Although this method might be morally questionable to an outsider, the general perception among chanters is that it is okay as long as it is done to get money from the *toubabs*. As Rahman confirmed to me, "When you know how to lie to get the money from the *toubabs*, people respect you and you become popular as someone with a smart brain".

This incident reveals that, with a 'smart brain', little effort and some collaboration from café managers, chanters can make easy money. This is, of course, facilitated by ICT. Within just a few minutes, Bigger made three hundred euros. This is more than the monthly salary of a government minister in the Gambia. It also shows that chanters have the ability to evoke trust, sympathy and assurance from their contacts. The time I spent with chanters made me understand that to be a good chanter, one needs to possess certain qualities. Chanters are very assertive and they never give up. They have the ability to make their case in a convincing way and the manner in which they handle



the many contacts they have and the patience with which they give them the attention they need is just incredible.

Nonetheless, in employing the love and deceptions methods, young chanters' everyday lives are not only presented as a site of economic creativity, but also of religious transgression. A line of studies have sought to inquire how young Muslims try to solve the problem of living piously in a society dominated by materialist tendencies and secular rationality. Being young Muslims, hustling forces some of my interlocutors to contradict or evade strict religious principles and moral norms. Although a few chanters interrupt their hustling activities to perform, *salaat* (daily prayers), sometimes practiced in the makeshift mosque inside GAMTEL or a nearby Mosque, the majority of chanters ignore the call to *salaat* and would miss *Jum'ua* (Friday prayers) so as not to miss their online appointments. Even though the majority of the hustlers perceive religion, Islam in particular, as an integral part of their cultural identity, acts of worship as prescribed by Islam, such as the five daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan are either practiced irregularly or postponed until the latter stages of their lives.

The experiences and daily practices of young Muslims living in secular societies has been captured by anthropological works that focus on their everyday experiences of religion in the notion of '*islam mondain*'. This notion helps us to understand the variety of ways in which Muslims reflect upon religion and religiosity (Otayek and Soares, 2007). For instance, Debevec (2012) writes on "moderate" Muslims in Burkina Faso who, although they recognize the importance of *salaat* for their religious practice, nonetheless postpone these *salaat* until a later stage of their lives. For the large majority of chanters, being Muslim is not about engaging in pious acts (daily prayers, fasting, and so on) so much as it is an expression of their religiosity. In discussing what it is like to be both young and Muslim in rural Niger, Masquelier (1996), finds it useful to distinguish religious identity (a sense of belonging to a religious community) from religiosity (the performance of religious acts) as the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Some people perceive religion to be an integral part of their cultural identity even though they do not regularly engage in acts of religiosity. For others, conversely, religiosity is more important than religion.

Moreover, Chanter's engagement in online homosexual activities to make money raises some fundamental moral questions. For instance, how do young Muslim hustlers reconcile their online homosexual activities with their religious beliefs? For the majority of my interlocutors, who practice Islam in a secular context, religion is more a matter of negotiation 'than some immutable normative codes' (Bayat and Herrera, 2010: 18). These youths strive to perceive and interpret their Islam in ways that can accommodate their marginal socio-economic situations. By engaging in online homosexual encounters, the young generate a youthful Islam that is more plural, open, ambiguous, and seemingly contradictory.

Young hustlers' negotiation of everyday Islam is also demonstrated in their refusal to get married and build a family as sanctioned by Islam. It was striking that, unlike the majority of Tablighi youths in the Gambia who featured in Janson's (2014) study, none of my principal interlocutors mentioned getting married and building their own families as part of their aspirations. The young Gambian Tablighis that Janson encountered considered early marriage as a 'divine contract with God that should be entered into as early as possible to prevent the dangers of having pre-marital sex' (Janson, 2014: 16). However, it should be noted that the young chanters in this study and the Tablighi youth featured in Janson's study live parallel lives. The former group engage in activities for worldly material rewards and the latter striving for divine rewards in the hereafter.

I suggest that, for the majority of my interlocutors, marriage constitute part of their long-term strategies, hence a postponement of their Islamic duties. The hustlers told me that marriage and family has to wait as supporting their parents' takes precedence. Besides, the majority claim that having a family will not only give them an increased burden but will also restrict their freedom. Moreover, circumstances of dwindling economic opportunities and ever-escalating inflation caused by the effects of neo-liberal economics has forced the majority of my male interlocutors to 'postpone' or altogether 'avoid' getting married. Masquelier (2005) observed a similar situation among the young Mawri men in Niger.

This is quite understandable as, in contemporary Gambia, getting married remains a very costly affair as marriage ceremonies have come to be characterised by

conspicuous displays of wealth due to the spiralling bride wealth inflation to untenable levels and the high expectations from in laws for the groom to offer a generous *maay bu njekk* (first gift) (Buggenhagen, 2012). However, my female interlocutors considered getting married early (in the early 20s) and having children as an important aspect of their lives. My female interlocutors expressed this view by using a popular Wolof saying, '*taaaruu djigueen seey la*' (meaning the beauty of a woman lies in marriage). This supports Bledsoe's (2002: 70) view that marriage, for Gambian women, is of major consequence.

In a country where around 60 per cent of the population are young people under the age of twenty-four (Janson, 2014), Gambian hustlers are not the only religious actors whose immoral activities deviate from their Islamic beliefs. In fact, Islam is not the only way to lead a moral life in Gambian society. In her study on the Gambian Tablighi youths, Janson (2014) found that different groups of youth deploy different strategies in manoeuvring between being young and Muslim, and these strategies are not necessarily of a religious nature. This study contributes to a recent trend in social science scholarship that focuses on young Muslim's daily lives (Marsden, 2005; Debenev, 2012) by attending to how young Gambian hustlers negotiate their youthfulness and Muslimness against the general backdrop of socio-economic constraints.

#### **5.4 “Who stole my *toubab*?” Interactions among Chanters**

In various types of hustling activities, including male street hustling or 419 scams, patterns of hustling exist to which participants respond and adhere to. These take the form of norms and etiquette that regulate behaviour and organisational structures to ensure stability. However, chanters in the Gambia operate within the context of non-existent norms and social organisation. Very little collaboration exists amongst them and they do not work in networks. They sometimes exchange ideas and show each other new tactics or refer each other to new websites but they never conspire to make money from a *toubab*. The exchange of ideas mostly takes place outside the cybercafés (under the veranda of the AON or the neem tree of GAMTEL) where chanters hang around either to take a break, drink *attaya* or to wait for online appointments. The exchanges revolve around recent experiences with a particular *toubab*. In such cases,

a chanter narrates how he eventually made money from a *toubab* who was initially reluctant to send any. He will describe the trick(s) he used.

Rivalry and competition also defines the relationship between chanters. This revolves around who makes the most money and who has the best contacts. Chanters have a habit of boasting about how rich their *toubab* is and how they have more real contacts than anybody else. The wealth of their *toubabs* is displayed by the vehicles they drive and the amount of money they receive weekly from the Western Union. This display of wealth does not go down well with other chanters who would be envious of the chanter's achievements. This engenders rivalry.

Another related element that defines a chanter's relationship is mistrust and suspicion. This was confirmed by Alkali who told me: "My customers don't interact and are always suspicious of each other. They work individually and do not work in networks". Chanters do not interact because they do not trust each other. This mistrust came about as a result of past experiences where chanters are involved in stealing each other's online contacts. These occurrences have led to physical fights among chanters and in some cases end up at the police station.

Contact stealing can be done in various ways and chanters known to have good contacts are targeted. One way is to pretend to be standing behind a chanter while he is online and memorise the name of one of his contacts. The chanter then sends a friendship request to the contact and once in touch, he will say bad things about the original chanter. As a result, chanters hate it when other chanters stand behind them. Contact stealing is also done by inspecting PCs where previous users did not sign out of their accounts because they forgot to do so or because the electricity went off in the middle of their browsing period. The contact thief will then change the password of the account so that the account holder is denied access. He will then open a new account and transfer all the contacts to the new account". A café manager narrated an incident to me involving a regular chanter who came in to chat with his *toubabs* but soon realised that all his contacts had been deleted from his account. He then suddenly stood up almost in tears and shouted "who stole my *toubabs*?"

In other ways, stealing is done by a trusted interlocutor. Some chanters are not educated and so require the services of a “middle man” to communicate with their *toubabs*. These middlemen can either be the chanter’s friend or one of the boys who hang around in the cyber cafes purposely to render this service. Sometimes this service is provided by café managers. The “middlemen” offer their services as interlocutors between chanters and their contacts. After learning their passwords and everything about their contacts, the middlemen will then sneak into the account to steal the contacts or tell them bad stories about the chanter.

Kaddy almost lost John to Clutch, a café manager who was acting as her middleman. As she has not been to school, she found it difficult to communicate with John and so had to rely on his services. Having access to her Facebook account, Clutch went behind Kaddy’s back and told the American that Kaddy had died a sudden death and that her family needed money for her funeral. To convince John, Clutch brought an old woman in front of the web cam and presented her as Kaddy’s grandmother. The man sent some money to Clutch for the supposed funeral which he pocketed. When Kaddy realised that Clutch was no longer willing to help her, she started going to the AON where Akali helped her access her Facebook account and she uncovered Clutch’s lies. She then changed her password and started communicating with the American again.

Incidences of the above nature and how chanters react to them illustrates how the internet is perceived to be providing opportunities for chanters to access global wealth through the ‘ownership of a *toubab*’. Chanters perceive foreign connections to be ‘enriching’, and so when Kaddy thought that she had lost John, she felt completely shattered thinking that her coveted place has been lost in the process.

#### **5.4.1 The Nightmare of Losing a *Toubab***

Chanters can lose their *toubabs* as a result of their contacts being stolen. This situation can be very distressing for many chanters. However, chanters do not only lose *toubabs* through someone stealing their contacts. In most cases, they lose the *toubab* when they become too greedy and ask for too much money or when their lies are detected. In rare

situations, the *toubab* suddenly stops communicating with a chanter when he or she meets someone else. When this happens, *toubabs* terminate all contact with them.

David, my research assistant, and Dem are two of my interlocutors who are yet to recover from the trauma of losing their *toubabs*. Dem started chanting in 2009, and he got a good *toubab* contact who was not only paying for his education but also sent him money to survive. He met him at Gay Romeo and they became “friends”. After 18 months, he lost this *toubab* contact when a friend who had access to his emails went behind his back and requested 75 euros from his *toubab*. The friend told the *toubab* that Dem had fallen ill and had been admitted to hospital and that they needed money to pay for his bills. Because he had sent Dem 13000 dalasis (£200) a week before that without any knowledge of the friend, the *toubab* became angry and ceased all communication with Dem. Though he did not delete Dem from his contact list, he would not reply to either his emails or online conversations.

Dem fell into a state of limbo and depression as losing his contact created an uncertain future for him as he was not only sponsoring his lifestyle, but also paying for his education. Dem wrote 25 emails to the *toubab* begging and pleading with him to tell him what he had done but the *toubab* never replied. Dem was furious when he found out what his friend did (he was told by another friend who knew about it) and nearly got into a physical fight with him. Although they are no longer friends, Dem is hopeful that the relationship with the *toubab* will be restored one day.

I asked Dem how he felt when he realised he had lost his *toubab*:

I felt depressed and confused. I thought my whole life was destroyed. The man did everything for me and was sending me money at least every month. I used the money to help my grandmother, to pay her medical bills, to buy rice and other basic commodities for the house. Since I lost him, I have been struggling to do these things as I still can't find a good contact like him.

As for David, he lost his *toubab* when his lies were exposed. He was very young, about 16 years old, when he started beach hustling and was lucky to meet a Dutch family. The family sympathised with his situation and promised to take care of him and sponsor his education. The family then started sending David a lot of money to build

a holiday house for them in the Gambia. However, David misappropriated these funds on bad investments, girls and other family members. He bought two cars, lived the high life and spent the money frivolously. David summed up his life during this period:

I thought I was never going to be poor. I ate meat whenever I wanted to. I had accounts that were replenished every month. I had easy access to money. I was helping my mum and sponsoring the schooling of my siblings. I was also good to other people and helped many people. I also used most of the money to party. I knew they were going to come one day but I thought that I would make enough money from my other investments to be able to buy land and build on it before they came. I was using this money irresponsibly and this to some extent affected my school. No one advised me as all they wanted was my money.

When the family eventually visited and realised that David had not built any house but instead misused the funds, they ceased all communication with him on their return. David became frustrated and almost went insane. He started abusing drugs, blaming his misfortune on the wider society, believing that some people had taken him to the *marabouts* to destroy him. With hindsight, David believes that the help provided by *toubabs* does more harm than good. He considers himself a victim of the *toubabs*' generosity by declaring that "this kind of help is destructive".

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter, I have documented the hustling strategies of a group of youths who call themselves chanters. Drawing on their accounts, I have shown how young marginalised Gambians who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility' make use of accumulative opportunities provided by the Internet to achieve socio-economic advancement. The chapter specifically described the strategies employed by chanters to make money from their unsuspecting online partners, mostly *toubabs*. By resorting to a variety of strategies, chanters are able to accumulate the wealth they need to fulfil their family obligations and also to ensure future financial security. Although some of the strategies can be morally questionable, chanters justify their hustling activities as worthwhile.

The accounts of the chanters in this chapter underlined the importance of a unique kind of income generating strategy for which opportunities have flourished in the wake of the proliferation of ICTs in developing countries. To secure economic advancement, young Gambians, mostly men, cultivation of relationships with foreigners is perceived as highly desirable. As they struggle to make something of themselves, some young men end up breaking religious and moral rules to ensure economic survival.

We can see clear similarities in the way beach hustlers in the previous chapter and chanters' use of *toubab* contacts provides them with income earning opportunities. In relying on the generosity of and assistance from *toubabs*, they portray an image of poverty and social exclusion and how these are used as a way of appealing for help from their *toubab* contacts. Chanters' strategy of acquainting themselves with the interests of their potential candidates before sending them a friendship request corresponds to beach hustlers' strategies of 'aligning' the *toubabs*. It provides a platform for easy conversations and makes it easier for chanters to know what the *toubab* likes so that conversations can be directed towards their interests.



## CHAPTER SIX

### Hustlers' Aspirations and how they are Shaped

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter of this study, I argued that the Gambian youths who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility', such as the majority of my interlocutors, pursue local livelihoods to generate the income they need to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement. Drawing on the life stories and hustling activities of 'beach hustlers' and 'chanters', I have described how a group of young Gambians take advantage of the resources and opportunities available to them. By employing a variety of strategies, they make money from their interactions with *toubabs* in the tourism industry and through Internet mediated encounters to achieve their aspirations. In this chapter, I move away from describing the hustling strategies of beach hustlers and chanters. I will now attempt to describe in as much detail and depth as possible the aspirations of the hustlers in this study and the forces that shape and influence these aspirations, and to analyse how their hustling activities provides them the opportunities to fulfil their aspirations.

The primary aspiration of beach hustlers and chanters is to achieve social and economic advancement. This aspiration is shaped and influenced by socio-cultural and family dynamics such as gender, generation, reciprocity and the attainment of social status. In the Gambia, this involves expectations of breadwinner responsibilities such as providing financial and material support for parents, children, siblings, the extended family and the community in which one resides and the quest for economic stability and a self-owned compound. In addition, access to consumer goods such as designer clothes, cars and ICT gadgets like mobile phones is also a sign of upward social mobility.

In this chapter, I interconnect the trajectories of beach hustlers and chanters in terms of their aspirations and how they are shaped. I start with an analysis of the socio-cultural and family dynamics in the Gambia and how they influence and shape the aspirations of hustlers. I then proceed to identify the aspirations of the hustlers in this

study and provide examples of how these aspirations are achieved based on forms of livelihood not based on international migration.

## **6.2. Generation, Reciprocity and Status: Shaping Hustlers' Aspirations**

Inter-generational relations, reciprocal social exchange and upward social mobility are perhaps the most potent theoretical constructs that can help us to understand the ways through which socio-cultural and family dynamics shape the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters. The beach hustlers and chanters of this study expressed their aspirations of social and economic advancement in terms of fulfilling the expectations of intergenerational relations and reciprocal social exchange. Although the majority claim that the aspirations of fulfilling these are born out of cultural and religious values and moral obligations, a few cited affection as the primary influence.

For instance, Stanley Man's conversations with me were always punctuated with talk of using part of his earnings from the taxi business to make sure that his mother lives as comfortable as possible. As such, he has set her a fixed monthly allowance in addition to sending her money occasionally when the need arises. For instance, when she gets ill, Stanley takes a break from his business and takes her to a private clinic, buys all her medication and provides her with dietary necessities. Although Stanley expressed support for his mother as fulfilling a moral and religious obligation, he cited his strong affection for his mother as the principal driving force. Whenever our conversations touched upon the issue of his relationship with his mother and the support he provides for her, he reminisced how she struggled to raise him and his siblings in a difficult polygamous context where his father had to deprive them of basic necessities to provide for his other children. His mother had to use her meagre earnings from the sale of her horticultural produce to make sure that her children were well fed. Stanley Man has resolved to pay back this debt.

But like all other forms of social exchange, reciprocity between parents and their children is not simply based on pure affection or religious values. It also involves matters of interest and expectation (Jonsson, 2012). In the Gambia, I observed that earning money to provide for one's family is not always purely born out of the

affection children have for their parents or vice versa. It is also an expectation that must be fulfilled. Children who fail to fulfil this expectation are not given the regard they deserve in their family and society in general. The case of David illustrates the extent to which reciprocal social exchanges have become based on interest in some Gambian families. Despite his young age, his status within his family was elevated when he was receiving huge sums of money from his *toubab* friends that he was sharing with his family members and others in society. However, when the funds dried up, he felt that the affection he received both from his family members and the wider society ended:

If you don't have money, even your own mother does not love you. Money elevates one's social status and gives you a special place in society. When I was having money, I became big (sic). My status was elevated within the family. I was consulted for all the decisions even though I was the youngest in the family. My sisters washed my clothes by offering to do it. People start offering me their services. I was welcomed to social gatherings and wherever I went people showed me love and showered me with praises. But all this stopped when my money got finished. Family members started talking about my downfall and started blaming me. The people I was helping in society started avoiding me.

From David's experience, we learn that giving money was part of the relations that ensured not an intimate tie to one's family members but respect from siblings and society at large. Affection in some Gambian families, in this sense, reminds us of Carsten's (1995) description of the Malays in Pulau Langkawi where kinship is not considered a fixed position, but is a constant process of being determined by the kinds of exchange relations that exist between family members and others in the community.

### ***Barako***

In addition to the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters being shaped by the dynamics of generational relations and reciprocal social exchange both within the family and the society at large, almost all of my interlocutors also recognised the importance attached to acquiring *barako*, the Mandinka word for 'blessing', in their hustling aspirations. Although the concept of *barako* (or *baraka*, the adjective) is thought to be strongly linked to Islam, some evidence suggests that its use predates

Islam (Von Denffer, 1976). However, *barako* is an important notion among Muslim populations in a number of African contexts, including the Gambia.

Whilst *barako* is indeed a central concept in Muslim minds worldwide, its precise meaning, usage and source varies somewhat from one society to another depending on the history of the cultural context. Within these contexts, there is sometimes a shift of meaning from the primary meaning of blessing/empowering to mere power itself (Goerling, 2010) For example, in many West African animistic groups *baraka* is one of the terms for power rather than blessing. This power is charismatic power or the magnetic emanation of persons endowed with it (Cruise O'brien and Coulon, 1988). In most North and West African societies, *baraka* means blessing transferred from one person to another through descent, inheritance, sharing a meal with someone who holds *baraka* and through physical contact between the holder (mostly holy men) and the receiver of *baraka*, such as the *marabout* and his disciple (ibid).

In exploring the concept of *baraka*, Gelner defines it as “plenitude”: “Above all it is blessedness manifested amongst other things in prosperity and the power to cause prosperity in others by supernatural means” (1970:43). In his study on ideas of success in Bornu, Nigeria, Cohen (1966) found *baraka* to be a sacred power that blesses its holder and allows him to bless others and succeed in life through supernatural means. In the African Islamic tradition, the concept of *barako* is considered to be a close equivalent to charisma (O'Brien and Coulon, 1988). The term has been translated to mean ‘benign force of divine origin, which bestows superabundance and prosperity and psychological happiness’ (Searcy, 2010).

Within Gambian society in general, and among my interlocutors in particular, *barako* is an important component of social life and parents are considered to be its principal source<sup>47</sup>. In essence, Gambians believe that to accumulate wealth, secure already accumulated wealth or prosper in life, one must get *barako* from their parents. As Andy told me, “I go to the beach and hustle. When I have something, I take it back home and help my parents and family, so that I will have *barako*. This helps me to prosper

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<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that according to the Quran, GOD is the unique and direct source of all *barako*. Hence, the *barako* that children acquire from their parents originally comes from GOD through worship and supplications.

on the beach and opens so many doors for me”. In addition to Andy, the majority of hustlers I spoke to also equate their success in whatever they are doing to be partly dependent on the *barako* they get from their parents. The importance of *barako* in Gambian society is also reported by Gaibazzi (2010: 146) in his study on young Soninke migrants in the Gambia who invest whatever money they make in their parents (both subsistence and other materials) with the hope that this will acquire them the *barako* to succeed in life.

*Barako* as a source of success and prosperity is earned and, according to my interlocutors, it has to be deserved. Children acquire *barako* by providing material and financial support to their parents and making their old age as comfortable as possible. As such, acquiring *barako* is a matter of obedience and devotion to parents. Devotion is rewarded by supplicatory prayers *or duwa* and in general it flows from the state of satisfaction which the child is able to induce in his/her parent. The attachment of *barako* to an individual’s success or failure is so ingrained in Gambian society that idiomatic expressions such as *baraka dingo* or *mo barakalingo* and *mo barakantango* are used to describe successful and unsuccessful individuals respectively. Success here is measured in the amount of wealth or materials such as cars and compounds on display and the financial and material support provided for parents and others in society. In some cases, the loss of an individual’s wealth is also connected to his or her lack of *barako*. I found the acquisition of *barako* to be an influential motivation for the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters. This aspiration is motivated by the desire to prosper and the avoidance of stigma. Children who are accused of not providing care for their parents are not only considered to lack *barako* but are publicly criticised and incur a loss of reputation within their families and communities.

Although, in the Gambian context, *barako* is mostly associated with material connotations as in the idiomatic expressions used to describe those who have or lack *barako*, it should be noted that *barako* has spiritual dimensions as well. For instance, among the *murids* in Senegal, the *barako* or blessings that male and female disciples receive by offering cash to the big marabouts are thought to be spiritual and material at once for, through them, disciples gain access not merely to eternal prosperity but also to worldly wealth (Buggenhagen, 2012.). Although the majority of hustlers

expressed the material dimensions and rewards of *barako* through material success, a few claimed that they also hope to secure a place in *Janna* (Heaven) by providing for their parents as prescribed by Islam.

### **Upward Social Mobility**

In addition to generational relations, reciprocal social engagement and the acquisition of *barako* from parents, achieving enhanced social status and upward social mobility has an important, if less direct influence on the aspirations of hustlers. Because beach hustlers and chanters consider their social positions as marginal, they believe that their only chance of upward social mobility is to earn money to fulfil the expectations that will give them societal recognition and elevate their status. In Gambian society, the possession and display of wealth and modern consumer goods are important markers and determinants of enhanced social status. Previously, markers such as level of education and membership of a particular family lineage were among the determinants of social class. However, these have been largely eroded and social class in contemporary Gambian society is, to a large extent, now determined by factors such as wealth. It used to be that the elder siblings were consulted before key family decisions were made. That has now changed and the one who provides the money is given that respect and status.

Most of my interlocutors, both young and old, pointed out that respect is bestowed primarily upon those who are successful, and the most convincing evidence of success is money. The issue of who is wealthy and who is not is quite problematic in Gambian society. Some people who display markers of wealth such as nice cars are not in fact always wealthy but just engage in activities to get by. In some cases, the Serahule ethnic group have a particular strong reputation of being wealthy individuals who avoid flaunting their wealth and just live as modestly as possible. Nonetheless, many young people from marginal backgrounds with limited or no education have been able to enhance their social status through international migration. These young people return home as *semesters* after hustling in Europe or the US for a few years. They drive nice cars and build houses in opulent and upper class neighbourhoods like Senegambia and Bijilo. Although these *semesters* are not always wealthy, in the strictest sense,

their ability to live and work in the West provides them with the opportunity to earn enough money to be able to live a middle class life in the Gambia.

However, due to ‘involuntary immobility’, the majority of the hustlers in this study took advantage of the income earning possibilities available to them to enhance their social status. They take advantage of local opportunities to earn the income they need to acquire the markers of enhanced social status. These include providing types of support for parents and other family members that are visible to the rest of society, owning a compound and displaying modern consumer products like cars. Indeed, pursuing local livelihoods, as those described in the previous chapters has helped the majority of my interlocutors to achieve their aspirations of upward social mobility. Using the money they earn from their hustling activities, the majority of beach hustlers and chanters display their new found wealth by providing material support to their family, such as buying cars and other modern consumer goods like flat screen TVs for parents and other family members, buying them satellite disks so they can watch global TV channels, and helping other members of the community. In addition, some hustlers invest in profit making enterprises which are also considered to be markers of wealth and success and, hence, upward social mobility.

For instance, Stanley Man told me that he was ‘nobody’ before he left his village of Busumbala to go and hustle in the industry. Nobody knew him and elders would pass by without even greeting him. However, once he had made it on the beach and started visiting his village with some *toubabs* and helping sponsor projects and using his own car to drive his family members on their diverse errands, he became popular and respected:

When I didn't have money here, I was nothing, nobody knew me, nobody cared about me, nobody respected me, nobody talked to me, nobody says hello to me. All of a sudden, because I have a car and come around with *toubabs*, they think I am rich. I have become big, and my status is elevated in the social hierarchy from being lower class to upper class.

The aspiration of hustlers to enhance their status and to achieve upward social mobility is also expressed through the desire to acquire modern consumer goods which are material markers of upward social mobility. Hustling provides hustlers with the

consumer goods they need to achieve these aspirations. For example, the gifts that beach hustlers and chanters receive from *toubabs* range from gadgets like mobile phones and watches to designer clothes. These are markers of economic success and upward social mobility in Gambian society and so those who display them are considered to be economically successful.

Similar to the lifestyle of the *sapeurs* in Congo-Paris MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga's (2000) hustlers aspire to construct individual reputation and status through the ostentatious display of designer clothes and gadgets. Hustlers ostentatiously display their material goods when visiting family and friends or attending social occasions. For example, although beach hustlers dress very poorly while hustling on the beach, they sport expensive designer clothes and brandish their mobile phones to demonstrate their success when they go back to their villages or towns. One Sunday afternoon, I coincidentally bumped into Andy in Brikama. He was neatly dressed sitting in a *grand palace* with his friends drinking *attaya*. He was not wearing his usual "uniform" and when I teased him about this the next time we met at Palma, he amusingly told me:

As hustlers, we have to dress poorly so that the *toubabs* can feel sorry for us and give us stuff. But when we go to visit our parents and family, we have to dress nicely to show that we are successful. We take with us the clothes, mobile phones and other materials that we get from *toubabs*. This makes our friends envy and respect us.

The above quote indicates that hustlers do not only hustle for short term survival but also to be considered successful. Success, in post-colonial Gambian milieu, is assumed to be read off by the possession of status markers and by the capacity to consume. Rowlands (1999) argues that success, evaluated according to such a set of ideals is motivated by the outcome of escaping from poverty. Moreover, Andy's statement indicates that hustlers engage in what Veblen (1994) refers to as 'conspicuous consumption' in that their specific goal is to advance personal success and impress others thereby gaining their esteem and envy. Since success elicits envy and hence the danger of sorcery attacks (Rowlands, 1999), hustlers like Andy enlist the services of diviners to provide them protection.



Although hustling has helped the majority of hustlers in this study to achieve upward social mobility, the case of chanters indicates that some of the activities they engage in to make money from *toubabs* risks tainting their reputation and jeopardises their projects of achieving upward social mobility. As I have shown earlier, one of the strategies that chanters employ to make money is to pretend to be gay and establish intimate relationships with gay men they meet online. Rumours of such activities have circulated in Brikama and many people consider the chanters to be making their money through these means. Homosexuality and homosexual acts are frowned upon in a town like Brikama. Hence, chanters and their activities are stigmatised.

For instance, when I asked a school teacher about the GAMTEL boys, his first reaction was to associate them with 'gay activities'. He also regretted the fact that most of them had dropped out of school and lamented their 'bad attitude'. Despite making enough money and that they display this by helping people and living large, chanters' aspirations of achieving social status can be a setback as the teacher's perception that the GAMTEL boys are involved in gay activities is widespread in Brikama. Fanding, a grade twelve student, when asked for his opinion of the GAMTEL boys, told me that "they make a lot of money, I want to be like them but I don't want to be gay". Chanter's seemingly miraculous accumulation of wealth attracted vociferous criticisms.

The extent to which some of the activities of chanters are widespread in Brikama and the potential it could destroy their reputation was illustrated during my conversation with a group of parents who were all women. There was consensus among the women that, through chanting, some boys had lifted their families out of poverty. One woman said, "If you go to GAMTEL, you will find them there, that is where they live and work." An older woman said her neighbours were renting until one of their children started going to GAMTEL where he met a friend who built them a house, bought them a car and took the parents to Mecca. Although they saw these acts as good, one of the younger women who had been quiet and attentively listening joined the conversation. She told me that whilst she appreciated what chanters are doing for their parents, she was apprehensive about the manner in which some of them make their money. She gave an account of a conversation she had heard between her younger brothers: "I was pretending to be sleeping in my room one day when I overheard my brothers chatting

about GAMTEL. The younger one was telling the older brother about how a man had offered him money to show his private parts but that he had refused”. Although the women expressed their surprise and consternation with this revelation, they attempted to defend the chanters by claiming that trying to stop the activity would pose serious problems as most families depend on the money they get from their children who go to GAMTEL for their daily survival.

### **6.3 Aspirations of hustlers**

In the previous section, I discussed the factors that shape the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters. I draw on the accounts of key hustlers to provide an understanding of the aspirations of hustlers. Their accounts suggest an analytical categorisation of hustlers’ aspirations according to the following typology: providing financial support for subsistence purposes for parents and other family members, buying a compound and building a house, sending parents to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca, establishing businesses to ensure economic stability, providing help for the community and achieving upward social mobility. To this typology, we can add the aspirations of hustlers, chanters in particular, whose initial aspirations were based on acquiring educational qualifications to secure better paying jobs.

At this stage, it is worth mentioning two things. Firstly, this typology reflects the narratives of my interlocutors and, therefore, does not imply that all young Gambians can be placed in these categories. Data gathered from other sources indicate that there exists a minority of young people whose aspirations are based on earning money to live a life of partying, drugs, women and alcohol in Senegambia and other popular places of amusement. However, this typology provides a schematic representation of the aspirations of the beach hustlers and chanters of this study. Secondly, although all my interlocutors consider providing subsistence support for parents and other family members as their principal aspiration, their earning capacity determines the priority given to each aspiration. In general, hustlers aspire to achieve all the aspirations included in this typology.

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, the ability to migrate to the West and hustle provided opportunities for many young Gambians to achieve their aspirations.

In a few rare cases, it was also connected to the ability to get a top civil servant or international organisation job. The increasing difficulties of international migration and the limited level of education and lack of skills of the youths in this study have seen them make use of informal opportunities to achieve their aspirations. The great majority of the hustlers in this study have managed to achieve some or all of their aspirations through either beach hustling or chanting. The majority of them expressed general satisfaction about their present situation. Dre, for instance, always boasts to me that he does not envy the *semesters* anymore as he has done whatever they do. This has engendered some competition between those who hustle at home and the *semesters*. David told me that “chanters make enough money and so they compete with the *semesters*. They copy their lifestyles and compete with them by driving nice cars with loud music, building big houses and showing off their wealth”.

Hustlers’ ability to fulfil their aspirations by pursuing local livelihoods can be illustrated by drawing on the life stories and outlining the trajectories of chanters such as Mighty Dre, Biggar, Kaddy and Buba, and beach hustlers such as Andy and Stanley Man. All of these hustlers came from low socio-economic backgrounds with limited education and requisite skills that could get them good jobs. Their chances of migrating to the West to hustle are also restricted by their lack of finances and the proper network to secure a visa. Hence, to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement, they make full use of the income earning opportunities and possibilities available to them.

### **Rice and Rams**

The majority of beach hustlers and chanters who took part in this study intimated that hustling has helped them to fulfil their aspirations of providing food, medical and other expenses for their parents and other family members, and contributing to social events. Dem, for instance, is one hustler who makes sure that he buys a bag of rice for his grandparents every month and pays for their medical bills and other expenses. Although his grandparents get help from other sources, for example their own children and other relatives, Dem claims that he feels it is his responsibility to do whatever he can to support them: “they have taken care of me since I was a child. It is time for me

to help them. One day I hope to send them to Mecca”. Just like Dem, Fatty also told me that he makes sure he sends ‘chop money’ to his parents in Dobo every month.

In addition to providing basic subsistence, hustlers also contribute to supporting their parents and other family members during social events like naming ceremonies, funerals and Muslim feasts like *tobaski*. This is particularly the case during Muslim feasts when people have to wear new clothes. Muslim feasts are normally expensive occasions as every family will want to celebrate in style. Western Union outlets and banks are full with people receiving remittance support from family members and friends during the days approaching these occasions. Beach hustling and chanting have become a source of income for my interlocutors to provide the financial support that parents and other family members need during these occasions. They buy the ram to be killed during *tobaski*, as prescribed by Islam, and the new clothes that family members wear to celebrate the day. Fatty told me that regardless of the circumstances, he must make sure that he buys the ram that his father will kill during *tobaski*.

Although the price of rams has skyrocketed in the past few years, hustlers told me that they must do everything to buy a ram. Fatty told me that failure to provide a ram for his father will incur ‘shame’ and a general sense of ‘hopelessness and failure’ on his side. Thus, Fatty and other hustlers who find themselves in this situation make sure that they buy a ram during *tobaski*. It is no wonder that Bigger resorted to deceiving Hendriks to send him more money just before *tobaski* so that he could fulfil this obligation. Buying a ram for one’s parents and other family members is a measure of success in the Gambia and hustling provides this for many of my interlocutors. It is also considered by my interlocutors to be a performance that will give them *barako* through the *duwa* of their parents and other beneficiaries.

In general, the norm in the Gambia has been that providing subsistence and a ram for the annual *tobaski* festivities is a masculine role that ‘marks the men from the boys in a typical Gambian family’ (Nyanzi and Bah, 2010). However, with gender roles changing, it is now socially acceptable, as is sometimes the case that female members of the family like daughters and wives contribute to the family and support other family members. A few of my older interlocutors told me that their adult daughters sometimes provide the annual *tobaski* ram for them. Kaddy, for instance, is now solely responsible

for the upkeep of her family through the money she receives from John, her American boyfriend. She provides all the support the family needs during social occasions and buys the annual ram. The fruit and vegetables that Kaddy's mother sells in the market are not enough to provide for all the needs of the family. Although Kaddy has an elder brother who claims to be an *oustaz* (a Quranic teacher), his pay is poor. I learned from Kaddy that even her older brother sometimes depends on her earnings from John. Kaddy's contribution to the family is indicative of trends in changing gender roles in Gambian society.

The above situation, where young men rather than family heads are acting as breadwinners and young women buying the *tobaski* ram, suggest that post-neoliberal Gambian society is experiencing changes in gender and intergenerational relations. What we are seeing is an inversion of the respective positions of parents and children in family and household responsibilities, resulting in a decrease in traditional familial patriarchal norms. Janson (2014) provides evidence for the inversion of gender roles when she found a reconfiguration of gender norms amongst the Gambian Tablighi's she studied as a result of new forms of piety. The inversion of gender and intergenerational roles inevitably led to ongoing negotiations among household members (Buggenhagen, 2012). For instance, as discussed in chapter three, young adults new roles as breadwinners of the household has put them in a stronger negotiating position as they have become independent from the authority of their elders.

In addition, the majority of my female interlocutors with the financial capacity to provide for their households told me that they are experiencing a process of 'liberation' since they benefit from the relaxation of gender divisions and patriarchal control. This liberation comes in the form of having access to resources by taking part in economic activities thereby not being consigned to solely domestic responsibilities. Mbataru (2007) observed similar dynamics at play in Kenya's post-coffee society where he reported a reversal of gender roles at the household and societal levels. According to Mbataru (2007: 101), "the post-coffee society is characterised, firstly, by new economic activities and, secondly, by the reversal of gender domination, itself

characterised by women increasingly taking over responsibilities hitherto labelled masculine threatening both male potency and morality”.

### **Sending Parents to Mecca**

In addition to owning a compound, beach hustlers and chanters also aspire to send their parents to Mecca to perform the *hajj*. During the 1980s and 1990s, most parents who went on the pilgrimage were paid for by their sons and daughters living and hustling abroad. Although this still happens, young Gambians who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ and who aspire to achieve this goal make use of local opportunities for income generation. Performing the *hajj* is a very important religious rite of passage and constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam. It is also an important marker of success and prestige not only for the provider, but also for the beneficiary. The return of the parents from Mecca is celebrated with elaborate ceremonies that will be announced on the radio. Cows will be slaughtered to cater for guests. The child who sent the parents to Mecca is praised and honoured by both his elders and his contemporaries.

Andy told me that since he was young, all he dreamt of was sending his mother to Mecca whenever he could afford it. After hustling on the beach for a couple of years, he gathered enough money by having a good season. He fulfilled this aspiration by paying for his mother to go on the pilgrimage two years ago. Andy told me that he believes one of the reasons for his success on the beach is because he sent his mum to Mecca. According to Cohen (1966:132), *baraka* can be obtained by anyone who goes on a pilgrimage to Mecca and presses himself against the *Kaaba* wall whose special sanctity can impregnate the pilgrim with *baraka*. Andy believes that his mum’s supplications for him at the *Kaaba* enhanced his success and brought him prosperity. By sending his mother to perform the *hajj*, Andy believes that he did not only get *Barako*, but also enhanced status among family members, neighbours and friends in Brikama. He is now consulted on family decisions, and elders will greet him with reverence when they meet him. He also observed that his fellow hustlers accorded him more respect when they heard about this achievement.

## Owning a Compound

The aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters go beyond providing basic subsistence to include buying a compound where they build a house for themselves and/or their parents. Those who can afford it buy two compounds. For my interlocutors, owning a compound is a symbol of success and a marker of upward social mobility. Building a house for one's parents is a way of acquiring *barako*. As such, a man who cannot do this is seen as someone who lacks *barako*. Therefore, a man's status in society is mostly determined by whether he owns his own compound. This is so important that compound heads display their surnames on the gate of their compounds, for example in the way that reads "Turay Kunda", meaning the home of the Turays. The compound becomes a symbol of success. By displaying their names on the property, compound owners transform economic wealth into social status. This social life of properties, to paraphrase Appadurai (1986), is precisely what aggrandizes their owner's name, and transforms economic wealth into prestige and renown.

Mighty Dre is one hustler who achieved this aspiration and when I asked him whether he considered himself a successful hustler, he replied "Yes of course, I have my own compound". I found his family name visibly painted on the main gate of his compound in Misira, a suburb of Brikama. Through the money he makes from hustling on the Internet, Mighty Dre has built a house for his family to move into. Initially, Dre and his family lived in a two bedroom rented house. When Dre grew older, he slept at his friend's house as the rented apartment became too small to accommodate them all. Dre told me that he was born in this overcrowded house as his father has two wives and eleven children. As a young boy growing up, Dre told me that all he dreamt of was to grow older and get a job to build a house for his parents. He recalled an instance when the landlord threatened to evict them for not paying the rent. He grew up with the aim of sparing his family "the humiliation of living in rental houses for the rest of their lives".

In a society where one's achievements and status is determined by the ownership of a compound, renting from others is often an emblem of failure, shame and humiliation. Hence buying a compound and building a house is an important 'achievement-related' (Long and Moore, 2013) aspiration for many of my interlocutors. Although Long and

Moore (2013:3) argue that what people might consider as an achievement varies depending on a particular context, and that much of the literature considers phenomena such as academic attainment, sporting prowess or business success as synonymous with ‘achievement’, my interlocutors experienced ‘achievement’ by houses they build, the new cars they buy and the fancy clothes they wear.

In addition, the provision of an own compound for parents and other family members is not only linked to achieving and aspiration but also to acquiring *baraka*. In the case of Mighty Dre, the house he built for his parents will both bring him *baraka* and elevate his social status and that of his family. Dre is not educated and his chances of migrating or getting a well-paying job were slim. Hustling provided him with the opportunity to fulfil his childhood dream. Even formal employment could not have provided this opportunity for him and he mentioned some of his family members who have worked as civil servants all their lives without being able to buy their own compounds. Andy has also bought a piece of land in Jamissa (a new settlement on the outskirts of Brikama) where he built a modest two line house structure for his parents and siblings. For Andy, this was one of his aspirations when he started hustling.



Figure 26: The new house built by Mighty Dre in Misira.

As suggested above, hustlers’ aspiration to provide subsistence and other forms of material comfort for their parents, paying for them to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca,



building houses for them and paying for Muslim ceremonies such as *tobaski*, are born out of the desire to acquire *barako*. *Barako*, in this sense, involves both material success and spiritual salvation. However, the immoral manner and nature through which hustlers, chanters in particular, make their money can raise questions. Even though the chanters who engage in homosexual activities to make money know fully well the money is *haram* (forbidden by Islam), they still use it to pay for *halal* (prescribed by Islam) activities such as buying the *tobaski* ram and sending parents to Mecca. Islam forbids *haram* money to be used to pay for the *hajj* and it is cited that Allah, the source of all *barako*, will not accept the supplications of such pilgrims. Cohen (1966:132) claims that *barako* can be obtained by anyone who goes on a pilgrimage to Mecca and presses himself against the Kaaba wall whose special sanctity can impregnate the pilgrim with *barako*. For the chanters who send their parents to Mecca by using ill-acquired money, it leaves one to wonder whether they will get the *barako* they expect through this deed.

### **Establishing Businesses**

Beach hustlers and chanters also expressed their aspirations in terms of establishing their own businesses. Prompted by the economic success of some *semesters* who had started their own businesses and are doing well, a few hustlers considered acting on the economic opportunities that interactions with *toubabs* gave them to establish their own enterprises. For them, this does not only ensure self-employment but also a stable income and a secure future. It is also a way of contributing to the family. Hustler's investment can range from taxis, stores that sell provisions and second hand materials like clothes and spare parts, cybercafés and grocery shops. These businesses provide hustlers' parents and families with the income they need for daily expenses like medical bills.

Andy is one hustler who has been successful as a local tour guide in a chain of small scale businesses in Brikama, managed by his family:

I opened a video club in Brikama New Town and I have a shop that sells mobile phones and accessories. I also have a taxi in Brikama. This helps me a lot because when business is not good at the beach my family can use the money from the business to take care of themselves.

For Andy, these investments fulfil three purposes. Firstly, it provides both employment and subsistence for his family. Although Andy sends money back home every month, the businesses serve as insurance during months when he cannot make enough money to send any back home. This mostly happens during the off season when business at the beach is slow. Secondly, Andy believes that with no education or skills his business investments will provide a safety net for him during old age when he can no longer work as a tourist guide. Thirdly and most importantly, unlike the beach hustlers in Kenya and the Caribbean who define success as having more than one foreign girlfriend (see Eid Bergan, 2011; Cabezas, 2004; De Francisco, 2004), one of the basic thresholds of success among beach hustlers is having fringe investments in the form of shops, taxis and other income generating enterprises. Therefore, Andy's business investments are not only considered as success by his colleagues at the beach, but also by his friends and family back in Brikama.

Other chanters I encountered during my fieldwork have also managed to invest the money they made from chanting into small businesses like mini-markets, taxis and cybercafés. Boy Sere is one such chanter:

Personally, chanting gave me lots of opportunities. Many of my toubab contacts came to visit me here and they opened businesses for me and this is helping me a lot. I also have friends whose toubab friends bought taxis for them, opened cybercafés for them and other businesses.

Boy Sere does not chant anymore and he told me that he makes enough money from his businesses. I normally met him in one of his shops in the New Town area of Brikama where he sells used tyres that he imports from Sweden. He was one of the first chanters in Brikama and started around 2003 when the activity was not very popular but was highly rewarding. Although he does not chant anymore, Boy Sere is making enough money to meet his obligations and to fulfil his aspirations. As the only chanter among my interlocutors with his own family (a wife and two children), his obligations include feeding his family, supporting his parents and helping other relatives when he can. Boy Sere told me that he started chanting whilst he was going to cybercafés to explore the opportunities for migration to the West. When it became apparent to him that this was

becoming hard to achieve, he diverted his attention and energies to chanting. Boy Sere's aspiration when he started chanting was to get a *toubab* contact who would help him to open a big shop in Brikama, and to own a compound. Now, he has two compounds and his parents are occupying one of them. Once this goal was achieved, Boy Sere stopped chanting and is now focusing on his business.

Bass, the owner of Bass Cybercafé, is also another chanter who, through chanting, achieved his aspirations of establishing his own business. Bass opened his cybercafé business through chanting. He met his Dutch partners through the Internet. Because he was educated and unemployed, they sent him some computers to start his own business. They also came down to help him build the structure of the cybercafé, which is located in Bass's family compound in Nyambai. Now Bass runs a successful cybercafé and during an interview in his cafe, he told me:

The café business is mine and I started it almost six months ago. Before going into this business, I used to be a chanter. Through this, I had some partners based in Holland and they wanted to help me start a business. I decided to go into the café business partly because I studied computer science. I was donated some computers from Holland and after realising that I have an empty space in our compound, I thought venturing into the café business will be worthwhile and my friends from Holland came down to help me build the structure.

### **Charity begins at Home**

The aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters are not limited to providing support for their parents and other family members. It also extends to providing help and supporting others in society such as neighbours and friends. Although all of my interlocutors first express their aspirations towards their immediate and extended family, a few expressed their aspirations in terms of providing support for the community in which they either hailed from or resided. This form of generalised reciprocity refers to the situation where people feel an obligation to give back to the

community. In the Gambia, social status is not only earned from helping family but also the wider community in which one resides.

Stanley Man is one hustler who emphasised his aspiration of helping people in his community. Using the phrase ‘charity begins at home’, (meaning that whatever opportunities he comes across on the beach, he would prefer to take it back to his village rather than some other place), he told me that it is the obligation of every individual to help people in his community. Working as a taxi driver in the tourism industry is providing him the income he needs to fulfil his aspirations in terms of helping his family and community. He was able to fulfil this aspiration through his association with *toubabs*. Stanley takes the *toubabs* who he provides guiding services for to his home village of Busumbala. He convinces them to sponsor school projects like libraries. Stanley has been successful in this as some of his *toubabs* are now supporting schools by donating materials and offering scholarships to students. Stanley explained the strategy he uses to fulfil his aspiration of helping his community:

I take my toubab customers to Busumbala as charity begins at home. So my presence in the industry provides an opportunity for my community. My job also brings other opportunities for other families as I will take tourists to visit poor people and they will sometimes offer help by buying them a bag of rice and giving them money.

In 2012, Stanley Man took some *toubabs* from the UK to Busumbala to visit some schools. They started a charity called “Wing Dreams” to provide support for the schools. They sponsored projects ranging from building toilets and classrooms to providing running water for three schools in the village. In addition, the charity also provided financial help for many poor families by sending them monthly allowances. Stanley Man coordinates the activities of the charity in Bususmbala:

The charity supports individual families by sending them money every month. I coordinate the activities of the charity. They send a lot of money. They help about eight families in Busumbala. Each family receives a bag of rice every month. They also provide scholarships for 10 boys and girls including those with handicaps. Each receives a monthly stipend of 3500 dalasis (£50). Three of these are my sister’s children.

As illustrated by the quote, Stanley Man can be considered as a local philanthropist who brings people who want to help his community and people in addition to the education opportunities provided by Stanley Man to the people of Busumbala.

The culminating effect of fulfilling aspirations of providing support for parents and other family members, owning a compound and establishing a business helps beach hustlers and chanters to attain upward social mobility. As I have argued, these are markers of success. In addition to this, enhanced status is also achieved through the display of modern consumer goods like cars, designer clothes and ICT gadgets like mobile phones. Hustlers, chanters in particular, use the money they make from hustling to buy modern consumer goods like designer clothes and expensive mobile phones. Some get these goods from their *toubab* contacts. They also spend their wealth on expensive cars and living expensive lives. The new-found wealth of hustlers has elevated them in the social hierarchy with some people now admiring, respecting and looking up to them. A student told me that he thinks they are cool: “They have nice cars and they build big houses. Many respect them now”. Mighty Dre, the hustler with the many *toubab* lovers, told me that hustling has enhanced his social status: “People admire and respect me now”.

### **Unfulfilled Aspirations?**

Even though the above cases have demonstrated that pursuing local livelihoods has provided opportunities for beach hustlers and chanters who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ – an aspiration to migrate but the inability to do so – to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement, the case of a few hustlers I encountered during my fieldwork shows that the aspirations of some hustlers remain unfulfilled. This mostly involves those hustlers who had aspirations of finding sponsors to pay for their education. In fact, the majority of the hustlers I spoke to intimated that their initial aspiration when they started hustling was to find someone to help them pay for their education. They all claimed that the rising cost of education and the inability of their parents and other family members to pay for their education was one of the motivating factors that forced them into hustling. For them, the initial thinking was that education was the key to them fulfilling their aspirations of social and economic advancement. The logic behind this was that through proper education,

they could get a good job that can provide them with the means to achieve their aspirations.

For instance, Buba and many chanters like him link their aspirations of finding formal employment with their aspirations to achieve a school leaving certificate, without which their chances of getting formal employment are restricted. However, once hustlers start receiving money, they become entangled in social pressures. Instead of using the money to pay for the education, they prioritise solving family problems. As David explained to me, “you cannot have all that money and give it to the headmaster whilst your mother is sick with no medication or you see your younger siblings going hungry”. So most hustlers divert the money intended to pay for their education to cater for their family’s social needs. Buba told me that the first money he received from a *toubab* friend was meant to pay for his school fees but he used the money to pay for his mother’s medical bills and ‘took care of other stuff’.

Apart from being entangled in social pressures, another factor that contributes to hustlers abandoning their educational aspirations in favour of full time hustling is the perception of the value of schooling among many Gambians. There exists some disillusionment among young Gambians that school education can provide a decent job, money and good social status. The majority of my interlocutors challenged the widely held notion that a school certificate translates into success and social mobility. The school certificate, which many considered to be a panacea for success and upward social mobility, has all but lost its lustre among Gambian youths. Now, instead of aspiring to achieve educational achievement, many Gambian youths aspire to engage in activities that can generate them enough money to build a house, own a flashy car and distribute money to family, friends and others in society. Through these acts, success is measured and upward social mobility is assured. Beach hustlers and chanters have come to realise that the school certificate can no longer help them fulfil these aspirations, as all it gives you at best is a low paying job or at worst, no job at all.

The most explicit evidence among my interlocutors that school education is no longer able to fulfil their aspirations is the *semester* syndrome. *Semesters* are Gambians living in either the US or Europe who return home on holidays flaunting their wealth and live in opulence. They build big houses, drive nice cars and randomly distribute money.

Some send their parents to Mecca for the pilgrimage. Although *semesters* are known as Gambian hustlers living in the West, what is not known is the nature of their hustling. Most claim that they have decent jobs, but there are suspicions that some are engaged in the drug trade as no paying job can provide them with the amount of money they display after being away for one or two years.

As the majority of *semesters* are normally school drop outs who after a year or two of hustling achieve what their teachers could not afford in their entire working life, many young people I spoke to draw inspiration from them. During an informal conversation with some pupils at a primary school in Brikama, I asked them what they wanted to become when they finish school and one of the girls, probably about ten years of age, answered that she wants to become ‘a *semester*’.

## **6.4 Summary**

Although international migration still forms the life trajectory of many young Gambians who wish to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement, the beach hustlers and chanters of this study who find themselves in a state of ‘involuntary immobility’ pursue local livelihoods to achieve their aspirations. The aim of this chapter has been twofold. Firstly to explore the aspirations of the beach hustlers and chanters whose hustling activities are described in the previous chapters and to illustrate how their hustling activities provides them the opportunity to achieve their aspirations? Secondly, to highlight the factors that shape and influence the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters and how these aspirations are negotiated in a context of familial and societal dynamics. I showed and argued that familial and societal factors such as intergenerational relations, reciprocal social exchange and the desire for upward social mobility are key factors that shape the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters. To illustrate this, I drew on the cases of my key interlocutors.

Using a typology drawn from the narratives of key hustlers, the chapter further identified the aspirations of beach hustlers and chanters. It argued that these aspirations go beyond the mere responsibility of providing subsistence for parents and other family members to owning compounds, sending parents to Mecca, establishing

businesses and helping other people in the wider society. Achieving these aspirations helps hustlers to attain upward social mobility.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Summary and Conclusion

Taking refuge from a scorching June afternoon heat during the rainy season of 2014, a few days before I was due to leave the field to return to Edinburgh, I sat with my young nephew, Sax, and his friends in their *grand palace* in Nyambai, one of the neighbourhoods in Brikama. Called Orlando, their *grand palace* is situated on the Brikama highway on the veranda of a grocery shop. One of my nephew's friends was brewing the *attaya* as we all sat quietly enjoying the ambiance of the main road while we listen to music playing from the small CD player placed on a small wooden stool at the corner of the veranda. The overwhelming feeling of lethargy that I usually experience around this time of the day during the rainy season and the thoughts about my impending journey back to Edinburgh occupied my mind. I was not particularly listening to the lyrics accentuating from the dull speakers of the CD player until a song by a young Gambian teenager called ST, caught my attention.

ST is a 'Brikama Boy' and a newcomer in the Gambian music scene. However, his breakthrough came in 2013 when he released his debut single called *aling domo* (meaning 'eat me up' in the Mandinka language). This was quickly followed by the music now playing on the CD player called *respecko* or respect. The song, a genre of rap hip hop sang in Mandinka with some English lyrics, depicts the experiences of young Gambians who find themselves in a dilemma of not getting the proper education and skills needed to either get a better paying job or a visa to travel to the West. He elaborates on how it has become difficult for young Gambians to achieve their aspirations of social and economic advancement. What makes the song particularly interesting for me is that its lyrical intent is to drive home the conditions of young Gambians who consider migrating to Europe as their only means of achieving their aspirations of earning respect and upward social mobility. As such, they risk their lives by embarking on the dangerous journey to Europe through 'the back way'. The following lines sums up the song:

*Am feeling so lonely as all my boys have left for Libya....*

*Hardship upon hardship makes them to take this way.....*

*They have waited in vain for the plane which never came, air Dabai<sup>48</sup>*

*Inspired by friends who have gone and succeeded....*

*Brought electricity to their homes and built big houses....*

*Rejected by the embassy when they sought visa....*

This song on the aspirations of young Gambians to get to Europe by all means in order to change their conditions resonates with what has been written so far in the anthropology of young Gambians aspirations and their livelihoods strategies. Certainly, the majority of youths in contemporary Gambia embrace a gripping desire to migrate, although the ability to do so remains to be out of their reach. This condition of ‘involuntary immobility’ (Carling 2002), which is epitomised by the ‘*nerves*’ phenomenon (Gaibazzi, 2010), has seen young Gambians resorting to various endeavours to respond to their situation. For some, the prospect of migrating to Europe or the US to ‘hustle’, is the only means of changing their present conditions. Much as some young Gambians are drawn to this prospect, an exploration of the endeavours of those who refuse to sit and ‘wait for mobility’ (Jonsson, 2008) by pursuing alternative forms of livelihoods that are not based on migration indicate the desires of some young Gambians to achieve their aspirations in a context of ‘immobility’.

Generally speaking, the current trends of ‘immobility’ have made it hard for many Gambian youths to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement. Previous generations of young Gambians resorted to international migration to fulfil their aspirations thanks to visa-free travel between the Gambia and most European countries. However, the introduction of strict European visa requirements has seen some young Gambians looking inward for opportunities. Thus they engage in and pursue local livelihoods as a way of displaying agency while refusing to accept a life of poverty and economic hardship. Having the opportunity to fulfil their aspirations at home is important, and in this thesis hustlers claimed that it is better for them to have “tried to succeed at home rather than failed to migrate, than not to have tried at all”. With the above in mind, this study represents the first detailed ethnographic study

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<sup>48</sup> A short-lived Gambian airline which flew between 1996 and 1998.

focussing on youth hustling within the Gambian urban context. The study deconstructs the myths and dominant social perceptions among Gambians that one has to migrate to Europe or the US to achieve aspirations of social and economic advancement.

The life stories of the hustlers that constitute this ethnography challenge both scholarly and popular conceptions that migration to the West is considered to be the only means of achieving social and economic advancement. Their cases represent the lives of many young urban Gambians with whom I conducted research. They do not view hustling abroad as the main exit option from a situation of impasse in which economic and political uncertainty prevents them from progressing towards a more economically secured future. Europe for them is not necessarily an El Dorado or the only opportunity or possibility for socio-economic advancement. In addition, the hustling activities that the beach hustlers in this study employ to achieve their aspirations diverges from the hustling strategies of Gambian bumsters who provide sexual services to tourists as a key strategy to achieve their aspirations.

The current environment of economic crisis, political uncertainty and constraints to migration in the Gambia is giving rise to an urban context in which young men, grappling with 'visa problem' (Gaibazzi, 2014) and tired of waiting, become agents of creativity and hope. They realise that the world around is changing partly due to globalisation and that Western countries are no more willing to open their borders to unskilled migrants who they consider to be social and economic liabilities. This study shows that, whether they stay in the Gambia or get the chance to migrate, some young Gambians do more than just sit and dream and fantasise about their unfulfilled aspirations. Some youths actively construct a place for themselves in their families and communities. Similar to the young men Jonsson (2012:114) studied in Kounda, the hustlers of this study apply 'various strategies to make meaning out of non-migration and to construct their identities without migration'.

As I argued in Chapter One of this thesis, my research on the aspirations of young Gambians and the strategies they employ to achieve them diverges from other approaches that put emphasis on international migratory aspirations of young Gambians in terms of achieving social and economic advancement (see Brown, 1992; Wagner and Yamba, 1986; Nyanzi et al., 2005). Instead I have chosen to tell the stories

of those who pursue local livelihoods by taking advantage of the resources available to them to achieve their aspirations. Drawing on the life stories of a group of hustlers, the study has sought to shed light on the ways young Gambians who find themselves in a state of 'involuntary immobility' employ a variety of income earning strategies in order to fulfil their aspirations. For these groups of young people, the possibilities of migrating to the West are limited. Hence, they internalise the opportunities provided by their interactions with *toubabs* both within the tourism industry and Internet use in cybercafés.

In illustrating how a group of young people make use of limited but available resources to respond to social and economic pressures, to improve their life circumstances and control their destiny, I put particular emphasis on the introduction of tourism in the country and the role it plays in creating informal employment and unofficial ways of making money for many of the country's youths within the industry by benefiting from the presence of tourists. I suggest that the co-incidence of tourism development in the Gambia and the economic situation of the majority of Gambian youths led to the advent of beach hustling as young unemployed Gambians identified livelihood opportunities. In the same vein, I established the emergence of new technologies and the impact it has on the hustling patterns of many Gambians. This is demonstrated in the ways some families are making a living by investing in cybercafé businesses. It is also explicitly evidenced in the ways Gambian youths or 'chanters' adopt and appropriate ICT as a tool for income generation.

In this conclusion, I reflect upon and summarise the main findings of this study and consider their implications while showing how the ethnographic cases used throughout this thesis differ from other literature of a similar genre. The three ethnographic chapters provide the central findings of the study which attempts to fill a gap in Gambian studies, more specifically in the anthropology of Gambian livelihoods and urban ethnography (see Chant and Evans, 2010; Moseley, Carney and Becker, 2010; Chant and Jones, 2005 and Gaibazzi, 2015 for a few examples). It is hoped that utilising an ethnographic lens to reflect upon young Gambians' contemporary responses to their economic situations and their socio-economic aspirations will offer a new way of studying an already existing issue. As already highlighted in the introductory chapter, this thesis tells a different story of the livelihoods strategies of

young urban Gambians. It focusses on the lives of young urban Gambians who ‘stay put’ Gaibazzi (2015) due to restrictions in international migration. In particular, it explores the strategies they employ by drawing on the opportunities provided by locally available resources to fulfil their aspirations of economic and social advancement. I will now discuss each chapter individually and reflect on their scholarly implications.

Following the introduction of the study in the first part of Chapter One, where I provided the background, focus and theoretical relevance of the study, I dedicated the rest of the chapter to a review of the works of a number of social anthropologists whose approach to hustling and aspirations frame and motivate this study. This helped us to situate this study within broader theoretical frameworks. The theoretical concepts of hustling and the livelihood strategies of urban youths and how these provide opportunities for social and economic advancement were tackled. In addition, the literature on aspirations and aspiration formation were reviewed to make sense of the factors that shape and influence the socio-economic aspirations of Gambian hustlers.

This was followed by a methodological discussion in Chapter Two. This discussion centred on how the research was conducted as well as the challenges of doing fieldwork ‘at home’ and the hazards of ethnographic field work in general. Chapter three provided the political and economic context of the Gambia. After briefly describing the social context of and family dynamics in the Gambia, I showed how external shocks and poor policies precipitated a grim economic climate, pushing many Gambians into abject poverty. Unemployment is pervasive, salaries are poor, and the cost of living is rising on a daily basis causing a sharp fall in the standard of living of many Gambians. This culminated in a situation where the majority of youths find limited possibilities to achieve social and economic advancement through formal means such as employment.

In Chapter Four, I principally drew on the accounts of four beach hustlers to provide an insight into the lives, career trajectories and income earning strategies of youths who make a living in the Gambia’s tourism industry by engaging with tourists. I showed how beach hustlers employ different strategies depending on their status as registered or un-registered. Despite this, I showed the importance of space, access to

*toubabs* and contacts with them for their hustling activities. Accessing these spaces and establishing contacts with *toubabs* paves the way for beach hustlers to play on the naivety and sympathy of the *toubabs* to make money or to get material help from them. I suggest that the strategies of beach hustlers are multi-level. Firstly, they utilise certain strategies to get access to *toubabs* and these include learning and speaking the *toubabs*' language, adopting and using Western nicknames, and utilising dress, image and appearance. The success of these strategies in facilitating access leads to the use of other strategies to make money or to get material help.

To illustrate this, Andy showed us how he first acquaints himself with the schedule of the *toubabs*, to find ways to navigate their spaces and then 'rhythm or align' them to get access to them. He then shows us how he uses his work as a local tour guide to employ a combination of tactics to make money from his tourist clients. We have seen how he advertises his services by using personal souvenirs and luring tourists to buy these services by not charging them, although he makes more money through this. Playing on his customers' naivety of the social context, Andy and other beach hustlers like him not only make money from *toubabs*, but also get them to provide material help for their families by taking them to visit their homes.

Through these activities, Andy is not only providing subsistence for himself and his family, but he has also secured his economic future by investing some of his earnings into other private businesses run by his family. As it turned out, this investment was a wise move for Andy. With a very poor tourist season due to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, 2014 and 2015 have been a difficult period for many beach hustlers. Andy's investments mitigated for him this hard financial period. In addition, Andy has also bought a compound where he built a house for his family to stay. The economic ability to provide subsistence and a home for his family and to have his own business enterprises is widely seen as an achievement of social and economic advancement. When I called Andy to check how he was coping under these circumstances, he told me that after spending a month in TDA and not making anything and still paying rent, he decided to return to Brikama to focus on his businesses. He revealed that he has opened a new mini supermarket near the main petrol station where he spends most of his time. He, however, still intends to go back to the beach when the fortunes turn around again with the "coming of more tourists hopefully next season".

If Andy uses his work as a local tour guide to use various tactics with his *toubab* customers and to make money from them, other beach hustlers portray an image of themselves to seek sympathy from the *toubabs* to get material help. We have seen how Buju was able to establish himself as a key player in the tourism sector by playing on the sympathy of the *toubabs* he took around for game fishing and who later sent him a boat to start his own fishing company to “help himself and his family”. Buju’s case is indicative of a trend where unregistered beach hustlers, through their activities, can get the contacts they need to transform themselves not only as registered hustlers but also as major economic operators in the industry. This view is supported by Stanley Man’s case. His work as a taxi driver and his contacts with many tourists provided him with opportunities for short-term economic achievement and allowed him to initiate long-term personal relationships.

The chapter on beach hustling illustrates not only the importance of tourism in ‘shaping local articulations of culture’ (Ebron, 2002: 163), but also on the hustling practices of young Gambians. I have argued that tourism was introduced in the Gambia as a response to the country’s poverty, lack of mineral resources and reliance on a single cash crop of peanuts. Now, Gambians vie for the attention of tourists and craft themselves to their desires as demonstrated by the majority of beach hustlers. Through the activities of beach hustlers, we have seen how tourism in the Gambia has become an economic process ‘that comes into being through performing Africa’ (ibid: 166). Hustlers like Andy through their work, market an aura of Africa by using books and albums to show images of places that can attract tourists.

In Chapter Five, I described the hustling activities and strategies of a group of hustlers who call themselves chanters. Just like beach hustlers, chanters are a group of young people who saw the possibilities of migrating to the West to hustle and to achieve social and economic advancement diminish as a result of strict visa restrictions. Hence, the advent of the Internet and the proliferation of cybercafés in their neighbourhoods made possible their dreams of interacting with Westerners through virtual means. They use this opportunity to their advantage by employing different methods to gain economically from these interactions.

I have shown how chanters first endeavour to be knowledgeable in basic IT to be able to chant. Knowledge of using basic IT and opening accounts in forums where they can access *toubabs* is followed by the use of various tactics to make money from them. I have also identified the income earning strategies of chanters to principally include the 'love method' and the 'deception method'. I have argued that the basis of these two types of strategy is to make as much money as possible from *toubabs* with relatively little effort. I demonstrated this by showing how Mighty Dre, a young chanter with a number of white online lovers, uses the love method to target and make money from 'older fat white' women. This approach seems to work for Dre. With his string of girlfriends sending him money on a regular basis, he has achieved upward social mobility through earning enough money to buy his own compound, to take care of his family and to access consumer goods such as cars and mobile phones.

We have seen how chanters like Dre's use of the strategy they describe as the 'love method' provided them income earning opportunities. Although love, in the romantic sense of the word, is considered a universal human experience (Jankowiak, 1995), Gambian youths, my interlocutors in particular, experience, imagine and perform romantic love differently in the context of urban poverty. In using the love method, chanters like Dre's conception of love differs from older generations, whose notion of love is based on emotional satisfaction, gendered norms and identities, kin-based expectations, concerns for social respect (from parents as well as peers), marital prospects and social reproduction (Chant and Evans, 2010; Hirsch and Wardlow, 2006). In a context of post-neoliberal reforms, the hustlers I encountered in this study negotiate love outside marital relationships based on the desire to fulfil various basic survival needs and/or aspirations for socioeconomic (and geographic) mobility, even if relationship decisions and behaviours are also driven by other factors such as physical attraction and pleasure. This illustrates the ways through which 'young love' (Chant and Evans, 2010) is negotiated in the context of economic scarcity and shows how relationships form part of diversified livelihood strategies used by young Gambians.

If Chapters Four and Five provided insights into the activities of Gambian hustlers in terms of their strategies of accumulation, in Chapter Six I showed how hustling provides opportunities for the majority of hustlers to fulfil their aspirations of social



and economic advancement. Drawing on hustlers' stories, I described the socio-economic aspirations of hustlers, how they are shaped and the ways through which hustling provides opportunities for them to fulfil those aspirations. They expressed these aspirations in terms of fulfilling social and cultural obligations, acquiring consumer goods and achieving respect, as ST alluded to in his song, and social status.

The aspirations of hustlers and the factors that shape them are embedded in expectations from their families and communities. These are further influenced by the notion of acquiring *barako*. The social obligations that hustlers aspire to fulfil are born out of the principles of reciprocity and social exchange. Relations of reciprocity, in turn, are based on both intergenerational obligations which assume highly moral and religious overtones in Gambian society. In this sense, young Gambians feel that it is an obligation to reward parents for bringing them into this world and to take care of them by providing financial assistance and other social luxuries. Hence, in Chapter Six, I analyse in detail how generational and gender relations and interactions influence and are influenced by hustling. The norm of reciprocal social exchange informs the structures and values that hustlers use to justify their hustling activities. I showed how customary emphasis on redistributing wealth to help parents and other family members puts unique pressures on hustlers.

The findings that emerged in this ethnography can significantly contribute to the theoretical literature in the field of youth studies and livelihoods, the contextual use of ICTs and non-migration in terms of how young people experience and adapt to conditions of immobility.

Firstly, although this study focuses on the livelihood strategies, exploring the dynamics of 'staying behind' among young urban Gambians, it evokes issues that have a wide resonance in Africa and in Africanist scholarship on youth. In many gerontocratic African societies, youth is seen as a transitory phase to adulthood, and its elongation, in contrast to the Western view, is not perceived as a desirable outcome (see Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Alber, Van der Geest and Reynolds-Whyte 2008). With increasing socio-economic restraints and scarcity in neoliberal Africa and the decay of post-colonial states, African youths have progressively faced difficulties in securing the means to fulfil the moral and financial requirements with respect to their parents

and their households, and thus be considered adults (Cruise O'Brien 1996; Masquelier 2005; Vigh 2006; Roth 2008). This impasse has determined a relative marginalisation of youth in several contexts, particularly in urban Africa.

In the midst of this perpetual economic crisis, young Gambians who dream of a better future in an 'imaginary elsewhere but must generally contend with the scarce opportunities of the here' (Masquelier, 2005:64) now eke out a precarious living with little hope of ever overcoming marginalization. Unable to secure the promises of a regime change in 1994, which gave new hope of the attainment of social maturity and economic prosperity, some young Gambians turn to hustling along the beaches or in the cybercafés to change their situations. Yet, others defied the odds of death by taking the perilous 'back way' to Europe. Their predicaments are similar to that of youths in many other African regions (Cruise O'Brien 1996).

Moreover, recent theoretical insight on prolonged economic distress in Africa emphasizes that economic hardship and the scarcity of resources transforms the context in which young people construct new ways of "being in the world" to fulfil old and new aspirations (Makhulu et al. 2010:19). As elsewhere on the continent, economic scarcity and lack of opportunities in the Gambia have left young men unable to become "successful and respected adults in their community" (Honwana & De Boeck 2005; Mains 2007; Masquelier 2005), and neoliberal reforms have disrupted a clear linear narrative leading to social adulthood. Hence, many youths resort to both licit and illicit ways of making a living

Consequently, writing on the situation of post-colonial African youth, (Comaroff and Comaroff (2005: 23) states that due to their dire economic situations, the youths of Sub-Saharan Africa find their own "ways and means" to survive which sometimes 'involve the supply of hitherto unimagined services, that may involve illicit or stigmatised forms of work blurring the lines of legality/illegality'. Hence, they create their own social worlds and 'innovative spaces for action' and their own modus operandi. Maira & Soep, (2005: xvi) refers to these spaces of action as 'youthscapes' where young people invent strategies of survival by subverting authority and fashioning new ways of functioning and manoeuvring on their own (Honwana, 2012: 23). These survival strategies include diverse portfolios of livelihoods ranging from

casual work, licit or illicit activities (Chigunta, F., Schnurr, J., James-Wilson, D., and Torres, V. (2005) or youth-led enterprises (Thieme, 2014).

In the case of chanters, we have seen how by employing various tactics (de Certeau, 1984) to make money from *toubabs*, they transgress the boundaries between the licit and illicit. For instance, we have seen how chanters illicitly acquire fake receipts and school fees invoices that they send to their *toubab* contacts as evidence to back their deceitful tactics. In addition, some of the tactics that chanters use can be morally questionable. By preying on ‘old, fat and ugly’ single women on the internet and manage to convince them to send them money, chanters like Dre are involved in the type of ‘romance scams’ that can be perceived to be immoral.

Secondly, migration seems to be one of the main ways in which many African youths have chosen to change their situation. Besides the fact that migration might be a well-entrenched livelihood strategy in many African contexts, African youths’ compelling aspiration to travel (out of Africa) is thus symptomatic of an actual or imagined exit option from situations marked by abjection and by a lack of perspective in relation to self-realisation at home (Horst 2006; Pandolfo 2007; Vigh 2009). Gambia does not seem to be an exception. By the late 1980s, Gambians’ hopes in postcolonial modernization had vanished in the face of socio-economic stagnation and political uncertainty. Many urban youths began to explore the prospect of migrating particularly to the West, whether to still pursue education or to work. However, the introduction of stringent visa restrictions by mostly the UK and the USA in the post-coup era curtailed the migratory aspirations of many young Gambians. Finding themselves in a condition of ‘involuntary immobility’, they pursue local livelihoods by taking advantage of the resources (the tourism sector and internet availability and access in cybercafés) to fulfil their aspirations of social and economic advancement. Hence, social mobility was sought in the context of physical immobility.

Third, through the discussion of the activities of chanters in Chapter Five, I demonstrated how ICTs and Internet access in particular have implications for the literature on ICT use in developing countries. As mentioned elsewhere, this literature distinguishes two primary research foci (Brown & Grant, 2010; Avgerou, 2010). These include studies that focus on understanding technology “for development,” and those

that focus on understanding technology “in developing” countries (Qureshi, 2010). Recent anthropological work has focussed on the nexus between agency, marginality, communication and technology in Sub-Saharan Africa (De Bruijn, Pelckmans and Sangare, 2015). The majority of these works focus on how ICTs have infiltrated and changed people’s lives in these settings.

For instance, Mirjam de Bruijn, Francis Nyamnjoh & Inge Brinkman’s (2009) edited work on the appropriation of the internet in marginal communities is illustrative of the ways new technologies are re-shaping social realities among marginal populations in African societies, and how Africans and their societies are, in turn, shaping the technologies of communication. Similarly, Katz’s edited volume (2008) makes a valuable contribution to literature on non-developmental and contextual use of ICTs. This collection not only shows how ICTs have an impact on ‘developing countries’ in terms of economic and technological development, but on the way that their users appropriate technologies in a way that is meaningful to them (Katz 2008). What this collection demonstrates is that ICTs are involved in the daily lives of ordinary people across the globe yet are adapted in different ways in different contexts. Thus, characters like Dre, Buba, Kaddy, Dem and Biggar represent the stories of young people whose contextual and non-developmental patterns of Internet use in cybercafés is considered to provide opportunities of social and economic advancement.

Even though the chapter on online hustling concentrates on the appropriation of the internet by marginal populations as a livelihood and survival strategy, I do not categorically propose that this phenomenon overshadows internet use in developing countries. It does however provide us with a new lens through which to think and contextually understand about ICT use in developing countries. Hence, this ethnography will contribute to our understanding of the ‘non-developmental’ and ‘contextual use of ICT’ by marginal populations as it focuses on the type of public access Internet use that so far has not been given any attention within the ICT for development and public access discourse. This will greatly contribute to research on the role of the Internet in supporting the subsistence and livelihoods of poor youths (see Wyche et al., 2013). In addition, the study will help to fill the empirical void in public access to ICT research in the Gambia with respect to their patterns of use, opportunities and their impacts for both human and social development.

Fourth, the case of Gambian hustlers also show how acts of adopting special lifestyles and consumption patterns are considered to be part of a broader strategy for advancing personal success (Rowlands, 1999). In contemporary Gambian society, success, status and social mobility have come to be determined more by the capacity of consumption and conspicuous display of modern consumer goods (wearing expensive clothes, having and displaying ITC gadgets like tablets and expensive mobile phones, building big houses and driving nice cars) and wealth distribution than by previous capacities based on educational qualifications or profession. This ‘material culture of success and status’ (ibid) has led to a shift from a society that rewards production to a society that recognises consumption. Hence, in contemporary Gambia, heightened involvement in consumption has become the privileged means of making value and marking identity (Friedman 2002; Miller 1994).

Finally, the findings of this ethnography express well the inherent contradictions that characterise the lives of hustlers as reflected in the ways they struggle to reconcile their activities, social and religious beliefs and lifestyles. For instance, in their quest to acquire *barako* from parents, chanters use the money they acquired immorally, through either deceit or by engaging in homosexual activities. This money is used to sometimes pay for their parents to go for the pilgrimage in Mecca or used to buy the ram needed for the Islamic feast of *tobaski*. Hence, chanters convert immoral money into moral money. The money they use to pay for what Islam prescribes is acquired through means that Islam prohibits. In addition, many chanters also struggle to reconcile their homosexual hustling identity with their off-line heterosexual identity. By acting as gay men online, chanters adopt and juggle between contradictory characteristics and disparate roles. Being associated with immoral activities and yet striving to fulfil their social, cultural and religious obligations is a key paradox for hustlers.

In addition to the above theoretical contributions, this study methodologically contributes to the field of ethnography by applying integrative qualitative research methods and bringing to the fore the complex socio-cultural, economic, and political hazards of doing ethnography at ‘home’. The findings of this study and the subsequent descriptive accounts are to a large extent influenced by the design of the field study. The literature on fieldwork and ethnography has long highlighted and debated the problems of generalising from a few cases. Is it possible or appropriate to generalise

the results grounded in a few cases to a larger population? It has been noted that the approach one takes is dependent on whether the research is directed towards “the development and testing of a theory or towards a generalisation about a finite population of cases” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). If the goal of the research is theory development, the strategic selection of cases is deemed appropriate.

With hindsight, the trajectory of this study could have taken different approaches and there are many areas that could have been explored. I would like to hear and tell the stories of the *toubabs* - both tourists and the ones online. I would also like to tell the stories of more female hustlers to illustrate the changing nature of family dynamics in the Gambia and the significance of local gender politics. Although I sought to include women’s voices in this study and to offer some descriptions about their economic activities as hustlers, I have not been able to deeply explore the link between their activities and gendered identities in as much depth as I would have liked. My access to them was limited by the cultural and social context in which they resided and they were mostly embarrassed to share their stories with me.

This ethnography tells the stories of a selection of urban youths in a certain period of time, and while I cannot claim that their accounts and lives reflect youths across the country, their life situations and aspirations are by no means unique. Moreover, although this study was, on the whole, with young Gambian men and women, their accounts and experiences echo and supplement literature on the ways that young West Africans experience ‘involuntary immobility’ (Gaibazzi, 2015; Jonsson, 2008; Carling, 2002). The study also provides theoretical insights that add to our understanding on how young people living on the margins of society respond to social and economic pressures within a context mired by political and economic uncertainties.

Whereas scholars have identified international migration as a primary means of adapting to their situations, my argument has been that the lack of possibilities to migrate have seen some young Gambians taking advantage of local possibilities to achieve social and economic advancement. Moreover, focus on how aspirations are formed and how they develop in response to and in relation to different environments, contexts and circumstances corresponds with aspiration formation among my

interlocutors. I found the hustlers in this study to be influenced by a strong sense of community, social support and social influences in general. Both the environment close to them and the broader societal context therefore influence their aspiration formation. This includes socio-cultural influences and the ‘degree of social-embeddedness’ (Leavy & Smith, 2010). Throughout the ethnographic chapters I have shown how my interlocutors voiced their aspirations of economic advancement and upward social movement in a state of relative ‘immobility’.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### List of interviews

In this section, I provide a comprehensive list of all the people that I interviewed throughout the course of my research. I have excluded informal conversations from the list due to their impromptu nature. Interviews appear in chronological order and the places where the interviews took place, dates, names and occupations of the people interviewed are noted.

#### **Interviews conducted during first phase of fieldwork-September-December 2013**

<b><u>Name/Occupation</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>
Alkali, Café Operator	25 September 2013	AON cybercafé
Dem, Cyber hustler	27 September 2013	Brikama
Dem, Cyber hustler	28 September 2013	My Residence
Mr Fatty, School Teacher/Cyber Hustler	29 September 2013	My Residence
Sait Matty Jaw, Research Assistant	29 September 2013	My Residence
Joseph Mendy, Café Operator	1 October 2013	A&B cybercafé
Buba, Cyber hustler	1 October 2013	My Residence
Mr Fatty, School Teacher/Cyber Hustler	2 October 2013	My Residence
Buba, Cyber Hustler	3 October 2013	My Residence
Ebrima Turay, Café Owner/Operator	3 October 2013	2Ray Kunda cybercafé

Dem, Student/Cyber Hustler	5 October 2013	My Residence
Buba, Cyber Hustler	5 October 2013	My Residence
Mr Barrow, Café Operator	5 October 2013	GAMTEL Cybercafé
Dem, Student/cyber hustler	6 October 2013	My Residence
Mr Turay/ GAMTEL Regional manager	6 October 2013	GAMTEL
Modou, QNET Worker	7 October 2013	Quantum Net, Kotu
Mai Bojang, Café Operator	7 October 2013	Global Links Cybercafé
Mighty Dre, Cyber hustler	10 October 2013	GAMTEL Cybercafé
Neneh Jawara, Café Operator	10 October 2013	GAMTEL Cybercafé
Mighty Dre, Cyber hustler	12 October 2013	My Residence
Max Jonga, ICT Manager, PURA	13 October 2013	PURA Office, Serekunda
Biran Manka, Café Operator	14 October 2013	Silla Kunda cybercafé
Mr Njie, Vice Principal	14 October 2013	Brikama Upper Basic school
Kaddy, Cyber Hustler	14 October 2013	My Residence
Kaddy, Cyber Hustler	15 October 2013	My Residence
Mighty Dre, Cyber hustler	15 October 2013	My Residence
Mr. Fatty	17 October 2013	My Residence
Lat, Student/Cyber Hustler	17 October 2013	My Residence
Buba, Cyber hustler	17 October 2013	My Residence
Alagie Sanneh, Café Operator	19 October 2013	GAMTEL Cybercafé



Mr Camara, Deputy Permanent Secretary 20 October 2013 Ministry of Information  
Technology, Kanifing

Kaddy, Cyber hustler	21 October 2013	My Residence
Mighty Dre, Cyber Hustler	21 October 2013	My Residence
Papa Jobs, Cyber hustler	22 October 2013	My Residence
Bas, café owner/Operator	25 October 2013	Bas Cybercafé
MP, Youth Leader	25 October 2013	My Residence
Kebba Ceesay, Café Operator	26 October 2013	Millennium Cybercafé
BJ, Youth Leader	27 October 2013	My Residence
Boy Sere, Former Cyber hustler	27 October 2013	His Shop
Omar, Cyber Hustler	30 October 2013	Outside GAMTEL
Cham, Cyber Hustler	31 October 2013	My Residence
Mr Fatty	2 November 2013	My Residence
Mighty Dre	2 November 2013	My Residence
Kaddy	3 November 2013	My Residence
Foday Barrow, Café Operator	3 November 2013	Light Cybercafé
Musa Secka, Café Operator	3 November 2013	Montego Bay Cybercafé
Buba Jallow, Café Operator	4 November 2013	Net Solutions Cybercafé
Papis Konateh, Unemployed Parent	14 November 2013	His Residence
Karamo Jabbi, Local Imam	16 November 2013	His Residence

Babu, Cyber Hustler	16 November 2013	Outside GAMTEL
Yassine Manneh, A Parent	16 November 2013	Her Residence
Aunty Khaddy, A Parent	18 November 2013	Her Residence
Ajaratou Binta Bojang, Mother of Cyber hustler	20 November 2013	Her Residence
Alhaji Dambele, A Pensioner	19 November 2013	His Residence
Young B, Cyber hustler	22 November 2013	My Residence
Zill, Cyber Hustler	22 November 2013	My Residence
David, Cyber Hustler/Beach Hustler	24 November 2013	My Residence
Mighty Dre, Cyber Hustler	27 November 2013	My Residence
Lamin Kargbo, Student	27 November 2013	My Residence
Dem, Student/cyber Hustler	28 November 2013	My Residence
Mustapha Dampha, Police Officer/Cyber Hustler	29 November 2013	GAMTEL
Bakary Ndow, Mechanic/Cyber Hustler	30 November 2013	Outside GAMTEL
Lamin Jammeh, Café User	4 December 2013	Outside AON cybercafé
Kaddy, Cyber Hustler	4 December 2013	My Residence
Yankuba Njie, Parent of cyber Hustler	4 December 2013	His Residence
Foday Jaiteh, Parent of Cyber Hustler	7 December 2013	His Shop
Mighty Dre, Cyber Hustler	8 December 2013	My Residence
Buba, Cyber Hustler	8 December 2013	My Residence
Rahman, Café Operator	10 December 2013	GAMTEL
Mr Fatty, School Teacher/Cyber Hustler	12 December 2013	My Residence

Alakali, Café Operator	12 December 2013	AON cybercafé
Mbasi Sanneh, Parent of Cyber hustler	13 December 2013	Her Residence
Lanky, Cyber Hustler	13 December 2013	My Residence
Bob, Cyber Hustler	13 December 2013	Outside GAMTEL

\* All interviews, except where specifically stated, took place in Brikama

**Interviews conducted during second phase of fieldwork-April-July 2014**

<b><u>Name/Occupation</u></b>	<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Location</u></b>
David, beach hustler	2 April 2014	My Residence
Demba, art & craft boutique owner	2 April 2014	Kololi
Simon, bar and restaurant owner	2 April 2014	Kololi
Dickson, souvenir seller	2 April 2014	Kololi
David, beach hustler	3 April 2014	My Residence
Robby, local tour guide	3 April 2014	Bakau
Buju, fisherman	4 April 2014	Kololi
Longs, hotel worker	4 April 2014	Senegambia
Jacki, taxi driver	6 April 2014	Palma Junction
Andy, local tour guide	6 April 2014	Kololi
Stanley man, taxi driver	12 April 2014	Kololi
Ricki, juice presser	12 April 2014	Kololi
Gregory, juice presser	12 April 2014	Senegambia
Ahmad, grocery shop owner	17 April 2014	Kololi

Peter, beach hustler	17 April 2014	Senegambia
Luke, guest house owner	17 April 2014	Keur Serign
Alex, beach hustler	19 April 2014	Palma Junction
Dan, bird watcher	21 April 2014	Bakau
Andy, local tour guide	21 April 2014	Kololi
ML, fruit seller	24 April 2014	Bakau
Anti Jon, Gambia Hotel Association (GHA)	28 April 2014	Senegambia
Buju, fisherman	28 April 2014	Kololi
Steve, fisherman,	28 April 2014	Kololi
Mr Bah, GTB officer	30 April 2014	Senegambia
Kejau Kambi, life guard	4 May 2014	Bakau
David, beach hustler	4 May 2014	His Residence
Dobs, back way aspirant	5 May 2014	My Resident
Chat Singhateh, former migrant	8 May 2014	His Residence
Lamin Saidu, Bird Watcher	13 May 2014	Kololi
Stanley Man, taxi driver	14 May 2014	Kololi
Fish, beach hustler	14 May 2014	Kololi
Mariama, fruit seller	14 May 2014	Bakau
Sarjo, horse rider	16 May 2014	Kololi
Buju, fisherman	19 May 2014	Kololi
Kenny, beach hustler	20 May 2014	Kololi

Andy, local tour guide	20 May 2014	Kololi
Danny, Stanley Man's friend, beach hustler	20 May 2014	Bijilo
Basiru Manka, a parent	23 May 2014	My Residence
Nyimatou, beach hustler	25 May 2014	Kololi
Matilda, Swedish tourist	25 May 2014	Senegambia
Captain Danso, commander of TDA security	25 May 2014	Senegambia
Isatou Conteh, parent of beach hustler	28 May 2014	Her Residence
Nyimatou, beach hustler	30 May 2014	Kololi
Fish, beach hustler	1 June 2014	Kololi
Jabbi, Operation No Back Way	4 June 2014	Kololi
Pa Kujabi, parent	7 June 2014	His Residence
Ebrima, hotel receptionist	11 June 2014	His Residence
Mikey spice, tourist entertainer	11 June 2014	Senegambia
Stanley Man, taxi driver	11 June 2014	Kololi
Andy, local tour guide	15 June 2014	Kololi
Alagie Sillah, parent	23 June 2014	His Residence
Mr Jobarte, GTB worker	27 June 2014	GTB Office
Penda, fruit seller and parent	29 June 2014	Senegambia
Joko Sarr, mother of beach hustler	29 June 2014	Bakau
Buju, fisherman	5 July 2014	Kololi
Stanley Man, taxi driver	5 July 2014	Kololi

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Selected List of Themes/Topics Covered in Interviews with Hustlers**

#### **Interviews with cyber hustler**

Personal background information

Occupation

Family and household situation

When they start using the Internet and what for?

How they started using Internet and who introduced them?

Where they started using Internet?

When/Where/ how they started hustling?

Who introduced them to hustling?

Why they started hustling?

Do they use the internet for anything else other than hustling?

Do they interact among themselves?

What were they expecting to achieve?

What are their hustling strategies?

How do they learn and improvise these strategies?

What are their aspirations?

What factors shape these aspirations?

What opportunities did cyber hustling provide for them?

What is the view of their family members, neighbours and wider community on their hustling activities?

How does cyber hustling take place?

Have they met any *toubabs* online?

How many *toubab* friends do they have?

How many real contacts do they have?

What have did the *toubabs* do for them?

Do they have aspirations to migrate to the West?

What prevents them from migrating to the West?

Will they migrate to the West if they have the opportunity to do so?

How do they view returning migrants or 'semester'?

How do they spend the money they make from hustling?

Why only engage in cyber hustling and not other economic activities?

What particular strategy of hustling do they use?

Has hustling helped them achieve their aspirations?

Work background and employment history

### **Interviews with beach hustlers**

Personal background information

Occupation

Family and household situation

Work background and employment history

Reasons for moving to the tourism industry

What type of economic activity they engage in

Are they registered or unregistered?

Why did they register or failed to do so?

What is their relationship with GTB?

When/Where/ how they started beach hustling?

Who introduced them to beach hustling?

Why they started beach hustling?

What were they expecting to achieve?

What are their hustling strategies?

How do they learn and improvise these strategies?

What are their aspirations?

What factors shape these aspirations?

What opportunities did beach hustling provide for them?

What is the view of their family members, neighbours and wider community on their hustling activities?

How does beach hustling take place?

How many *toubab* friends and contacts do they have?

Do they receive any help form the *toubabs* they meet on the beach?



Do they have aspirations to migrate to the West?

What prevents them from migrating to the West?

Will they migrate to the West if they have the opportunity to do so?

How do they view returning migrants or 'semester'?

How do they spend the money they make from hustling?

Why only engage in beach hustling and not other economic activities?

What particular strategy of hustling do they use?

How do they market their businesses?

How do they tout for customers?

How do they interact among themselves?

What is their relationship with the hotels?

Has hustling helped them achieve their aspirations?