

Chapter 3

LOOKING FOR MONEY

Livelihood Trajectories in and out of Mobility



Having trained on agricultural fields, Sabi young men are ready to venture out and *hustle* in order to find money. In addition to traveling abroad, their *xalisi mundiye*, or quest for money, takes place in the Gambia and neighbouring regions. Also known as the ‘trade season’, the dry months that follow the end of agricultural activities around December have historically been an important part of the year for money making. During the dry season, the fathers and grandfathers of today’s young men used to travel to nearby regions and cities to find work and markets for buying and selling imported goods and indigenous products. Since the 1960s and 1970s, urban growth along the Gambia’s Atlantic coast has fuelled a demand for labour and commercial outlets, thus polarizing seasonal mobility. In the late 2000s, about one third of the men who ordinarily lived in Sabi headed to Serekunda to work as construction workers, shop assistants, petty traders or employees in the firm of a kinsman.¹ Many found accommodation with relatives in the city, whilst others stayed with friends or rented a room. All were eager to make and save money before the first rains fell in June, when the tide of rural immigrants progressively flowed back. Unless they found a stable and remunerative occupation that allowed them to send money home on a regular basis, young Sabinko thus returned to the fields and farmed. With the money, if any, they had saved, young men bought clothes, food items and presents and then bought a ticket on a passenger van heading for Sabi.

The ferment of mobility in and around Sabi during the dry season shows that the inability to travel to popular foreign destinations is not an absolute condition of stasis for young men. It further shows that in the age of international migration the interplay between mobility and immobility continues on other geographical scales. In spite of the importance attributed to Europe and other international destinations, in fact, West Africans participate in a number of other migratory circuits in their own or neighbouring countries (de Bruijn, van Dijk and Foeken 2001). Seasonal or circular migration has been, in this respect, a widespread and long-lived practice across the African continent, and one that has given rise to a number of studies and theoretical models (see Potts 2010: 2–13). In general, circular migration follows no teleology of movement and permanence, with migrants often straddling different livelihoods and places by crafting flexible, stepwise trajectories of mobility.² Rural–urban migration in Sabi shares many of these characteristics; yet, rather than as a ‘migration pattern’, a ‘migration strategy’ or a ‘migratory project’ (cf. Boyer 2005), I argue that this type of mobility is one possible *outcome* of *xalisi mundiye* or *hustling* as a general livelihood practice that largely cuts across moving and staying. From a livelihoods perspective, migration belongs to a wider portfolio of tactics and strategies for earning a living governed not by economic rationalities in any reductive sense, but by diverse culturally inflected motives and differential access to material and social resources (Scoones 1998; de Haan 1999; Ellis 2003). Although research on livelihoods has served especially to highlight responses to vulnerability and poverty, its holistic, cross-sectoral approach is useful for investigating the complexity of *xalisi mundiye*, which also pertains to wealth and accumulation. What connects different off-farm livelihoods in and away from Sabi is, I argue, the imperative to find, accumulate and distribute money so as to fully participate in social exchanges and to fulfil expectations of masculine worth. By further drawing on and adapting Vigh’s (2006, 2009a) notion of social navigation, I will show *xalisi mundiye* to be an open-ended trajectory unfolding on terrains rendered slippery by a capricious political economy as well as by an uncertain access to the social networks used to overcome politico-economic constraints on their monetary acquisitions.

Focusing on livelihoods rather than on migration per se ‘avoids problems of having to define a priori the topical units and forms of movement’ (Fog Olwig and Nyberg Sørensen 2002: 4), and specifically allows me to show that, given its explorative nature, the quest for money inherently envisages the possibility of ‘sitting’. Through the life-history of two age-mates, the chapter describes the twists and turns, the adaptations and recalibrations that being on a quest for money involves, eventually

leading young men to recast at any stage the geography and meaning of (im)mobility associated with *xalisi mundiye*. I argue that young men loathe not only becoming stranded in Sabi but also remaining stuck in what I call ‘spurious travel’, forms of mobility such as rural–urban migration similar to *terende* (travel) proper but which are not perceived to accrue them enough money to create social value. In addition to emigrating abroad, young men seek to step out of the perpetual motion between village and city by ‘sitting’ either in Serekunda or in Sabi in the sense of becoming established in a remunerative occupation. At a time when opportunities to travel to desirable foreign destinations are shrinking, I will show that young men are increasingly open to finding money in the Gambia, while at the same time migrant investors use their resources to create income-generating activities for their younger relatives to ‘sit’ at home. By highlighting livelihood trajectories that begin with mobility and eventually end up in ‘sitting’, this chapter demonstrates that emplacement may be the final destination, rather than the departure point, of a broadly conceived migration process.

The Social Currency of Money

The expression ‘*xalisi mundiye*’ consists of two elements: money and searching.³ *Mundiye* is used interchangeably with *hustling* and accordingly conjures up the bodily and ethical dispositions which young men cultivate in farms and villages. Equipped with such dispositions, young men are fit to bear the asperities of the (travel) bush in order to find and bring home valuable assets for their families and for themselves. Having dealt at length with the ‘searching’ element in the previous chapter, let me therefore concentrate here on money and the reasons why money is directly linked to young men’s productive potential.

Money is ubiquitous in everyday and ritual exchanges. As in the rest of Atlantic Africa, transactions along the Gambia valley have long been monetized and ideals of personal worth pegged to liquid wealth (Guyer 2004). Modern currencies gradually replaced other means of payment (cowries, textiles, salt bars, and others) in the second half of the nineteenth century, when commercial groundnut agriculture became integrated into the domestic economy (Swindell and Jeng 2006: 33). Colonial taxation later entrenched this need for liquidity. Eventually, ritual payments integrated cash and commodities that could be acquired in a cash economy. In today’s ceremonies, cash is also an appreciated gift to the ceremony holders, and women belonging to a ritual association carefully write down donors and amounts in a notebook. Women hosting

the ceremony can also be seen moving around distributing coins to other female attendants, while dancers and praise-singers collect banknotes from the hosts and participants as their performance moves the audience to 'open their hands' (Janson 2002). The uneasiness with which Westerners exchange money in intimate relationships is largely absent in the Gambia. Men are expected to support their lovers, cash being an appreciated present which can be laid directly onto their palms. By extension, husbands have financial obligations towards their wives, and not surprisingly money matters constitute the most frequent cause of conjugal conflicts (Skramstad 2008: 123). Similarly, an acquaintance is said to be a good and generous person when he or she can help with some cash in case of need. A young man who often pulls out money from his pocket to buy tea, cigarettes and other treats to entertain his friends is equally said to be a good friend. It goes without saying that a man who is respectable (*daroye*) and renowned (*daraja*) is someone who helps people mainly by handing out cash. When a wealthy migrant visits Sabi, his house often swarms with relatives, neighbours and customary clients (among *nyaxamalo* and *komo*) as well as other villagers, each coming with a problem to solve.

If this capillary circulation of money signals the extent to which Sabi is embedded in a cash economy, it does not necessarily reflect a deterioration of interpersonal relations and morality (cf. Maurer 2006: 19–22). Certainly, many people have mixed feelings about money and attribute corruptive powers to it (Riccio 2005). The strenuous, yet honourable, nature of agrarian life is often idealized and pitted against the current situation in which material abundance has led people to fight over resources. At the same time, money is precisely appreciated for its relational potential. Allison Truitt's (2007: 59) observation about Vietnamese monetary transactions seems to apply to the Gambia as well: 'In the right hands, cash is a token of ongoing relatedness, and expresses intimacy, friendship and trust'. Indeed, as Tone Sommerfelt aptly puts it, commenting on a specific monetized prestation that initiates complex marriage exchanges in lower Gambia, 'money makes people appear': '[the prestation] materializes both the relationships that produced it ... and the relationships that it brings forth when redistributed' (Sommerfelt 2013: 63–65).

There is therefore a morality of monetary exchange (Parry and Bloch 1989), but rather than through distinct mores and ambits of monetary exchange, the meaning and social value of money is negotiated during each transaction through gestures and words (see also Buggenhagen 2012). Thanks to its liquidity and convertibility as a means of payment, cash is suitable for a variety of social purposes. Whilst visiting a family, a person may spontaneously gift (*ku*) a small amount of money to an

elder sitting on a platform, by calling it a kola nut (*goron*), a typical token of respect for his or her seniority and wisdom. The same amount can be handed to a friend in need or a sister having problems paying a medical bill for her child. The giver may take out a fistful of money and grab the interlocutor's hand to deposit the cash into it by simply saying *hangu* (hold it) and sometimes adding *a ma gabo* (it is not much). This gift is understood to contribute to 'solving the problem' or 'taking care of the matter' (*na fi topoto*). Amounts and their value are not fixed. Even when the receiver makes an explicit request for help, it is left to the giver to estimate the appropriate amount according to his or her possibilities, understanding of the situation and consideration for the relationship with the receiver. People do often turn down requests, though they do so by carefully crafting credible excuses and showing regret for their inability to give. If believed, the intention (*ɲanniye*) to give, which ideally stems from a 'clean heart', may be sufficient to preserve the relationship.

While everybody gives and takes money, men are expected to *find* it in the first place. Men shoulder the financial obligations for their parents and households, and since households are in a chronic need of cash for basic consumption items, men are expected to go and find it. Unmarried men must find the money for their own bridewealth, and even when their elder brothers are willing to take care of marriage expenses, newly married men suddenly become responsible for their wife and children, which means having to spend money on a daily basis. Once all domestic obligations are fulfilled, personal needs and sociality also involve outlays. It is true that friends help one another, and that those who have may give away more than the have-nots do. But there is little dignity in just receiving; to continue participating in male circles of friends one has to occasionally share goods and paltry amounts of cash.

A successful man is someone who manages to keep money while circulating it (cf. Weiner 1992). As Mahamet Timera (2001a: 42) puts it, highlighting a more general principle of social exchange in the Western Sahel: 'Individual self-affirmation ensues from the act of having and giving at the same time' (my translation). While redistribution maintains social relationships, keeping and saving ensures self-reliance over time. Catherine Quiminal (1991: 142) has described Soninke migrants' savings as 'the money of autonomy', an emergency fund against the accidents and unpredictable events during one's life time – from failing crops to illness – which shields one from the shame of having to ask money from other people. Ideally, money consistently accumulated can be partly distributed, partly set aside. In the long run, this transforms the emergency fund into a more permanent financial security asset. While liquidity is important for 'solving problems', Gambians are also interested in illiquidity, indivisible

assets such as livestock and jewels that '[shelter] wealth from the daily demands of kin' (Shipton 1995: 250). Nowadays, most Soninke speakers secure their savings by investing in landed properties in the Serekunda area, whose market value continues to grow. It goes without saying that both liquid and illiquid wealth breed notoriety. As noted in Chapter 2, the name of Soninke moneymen (*xalisi gumu*) and the rich (*bannanu*) are widely known and talked about in Sabi. Among the most popular cassettes circulating in Sabi during my stay were those of the late Ganda Fadiga, an internationally famous Soninke praise-singer, who used to sing about the achievements of *diamantaires* and traders across Soninkaara; his clients gifted him cars, houses and thousands of Euros, so as to be featured in his lyrics.⁴

As this ethnography purports to demonstrate, migrant moneymen are not the only role model for young men. Nevertheless, the predicament of money is pervasive, not solely because it holds out the promise of enrichment, but because of its wide social currency. Money allows young men to perform manhood as caring sons, brothers and husbands, and to create economic and social security, thus protecting them from the danger of dependency. Conversely, the inability to distribute, let alone save, money is seen as a form of social immobility and invisibility. Young men constantly worry about *koriye* (poverty) or being *strand* (stranded). One often hears young men complain that 'if you don't have money, nobody respects you'.⁵ This is certainly an overstatement, but one that signals the gravity of being insolvent. It is in this sense that going to look for money becomes in itself a social imperative, a necessary demonstration of a masculine concern (*hanmi*) to fulfil social obligations and a necessary move towards participating in social exchange.

Locating the Bounty: Routes and Destinations

Although the search for money potentially takes place anywhere, *hustlers* 'prefer to go where money is plenty', as one young man put it. Money, in the form of a salary, is thought to be plentiful and secure in places like Europe and North America. Even more plentiful, though more volatile, is the money one can make as a trader in destinations like Angola and certain West and Central African cities, especially by importing commodities from the Middle East, China and the West. As money is mostly in the travel-bush, youth talk about looking for or 'seeing a route' (*nan kille mundu/wari*), which often revolves around finding the necessary travel documents, money and/or trade capital to reach their preferred destination.

If international travel is thought to provide an ‘enhanced relationship with money’ (Osella and Osella 2000: 122), staying home is by contrast associated with financial insecurity. Many young men simply say that ‘there is no money here’ (*xalisi nta yere*), in Sabi. Formerly, most farmers had the possibility of working and earning some money in groundnut agriculture, whereas now, farming and *xalisi mundiye* appear to be anti-theoretical activities. Where there are opportunities for off-farm work and trade, young men see other social and cultural constraints. One of the most apparent paradoxes in Sabi is that, while many villagers emigrate, a number of strangers move in to work in the farms and as shop-keepers. In the past, parties of young men would tour other villages offering their labour in return for a share of harvest or pay. These kinds of labour contract arrangements (*sassi*, also *dabowo*) are today practised mostly by *strange farmers* and other immigrant workers. In the dry season, some jobs in construction work are available in Sabi, but it is again strangers who do them, while the youth leave for the city to look for similar jobs. This is partly because such menial jobs are historically associated with low status origins and dependency.⁶ In contrast, Mamadou Diawara (2003: 77) observes that Mande people believe that ‘the foreign country ignores the social status’, recasting low status jobs because ‘Once abroad [the man] accepts the hard conditions of the adventure’ (my translation). Today, references to status are less explicit among youths,⁷ though doing odd jobs and becoming dirty embarrasses them, especially if companions sit nearby and act as ‘small patrons’, as some say. For those who do actually take up any available job, the problem of fair and timely retribution constitutes an additional deterrent. The employer may take advantage of the ambivalent nature of dependent work to postpone the payment and eventually pay the worker’s father instead.

Self-employed business removes the stigma of dependent work but exacerbates the tension between keeping and circulating money. Given that the Soninke enjoy a reputation for their entrepreneurial acumen, the number of stranger-owned businesses in Sabi is puzzling. I often posited this paradox to those interlocutors who complained about the lack of opportunities in the village. By far the most common response was to point out that ‘you can’t get money in your home place’. What surprised me most was that many elders shared this viewpoint, readily giving examples of stores forced to close down due to the incessant requests for help and credit from friends and family. The tightly knit social environment of the village thus constitutes a social liability for personal accumulation, to the extent that Bruce Whitehouse (2013: 22) has described it as a ‘push factor’ of emigration. Home-based entrepreneurs shoulder ‘the burden of social relations’: they are drawn into a web of solidarities and obligations

that they can hardly escape. As a Sabi man put it: ‘Everybody comes with his/her problem ... you would not know if they are telling the truth, but what can you do? You can’t refuse, they will say you’re a bad person [*sere bure*]’. If someone can consolidate his presence by giving out money, the redistributive pressures can be simply overwhelming for local pockets. It is difficult to hide profits and money, for people will know who has what and when he receives it. And they will know when someone refuses to help others. This is moreover a context in which people deliberately cultivate the virtue of empathy and sympathy. Being face to face with the hardship people face on a daily basis is often mentioned as a factor that forces one to take pity and do whatever one can to help a friend or a relative even without an explicit request. Travelling does not of course exempt the entrepreneur from fulfilling his financial obligations, but being far enough away from kith and kin allows him to deflect and postpone requests of help, thus buying time in order to reinvest profits and accumulate wealth. Therefore, much as strangers who run businesses in Sabi have no kinship obligations vis-à-vis their customers, the Sabinko leave their village in order to take advantage of being strangers in a foreign land.

It is important to stress that the belief that someone cannot find money in his home place does not merely result from social structure and culture but also condenses a specific historical consciousness. The burden of social capital has increased in the context of the collapsing rural economy, which, as shown in Chapter 1, was marked by declining agricultural outputs, the restructuring of the regional trade and the growing commercial immigration of Guineans and Mauritians in the Upper River that accelerated the exit of the locals from the retail trade. Deprived of local income, Sabi villagers have been forced to fall back on mutual aid networks in case of need, even for petty expenses.

Finally, located mid-way between home and exile, Serekunda enjoys a special status in the geography of *xalisi mundiye*. As a second home, Serekunda hosts a number of fellow villagers and family members. Young men who migrate to the city sometimes opt to stay with a friend or in a rented place in order to avoid having to share out the little they earn. On the other hand, urban relatives are normally in a better economic position than villagers, and the sparse settlement pattern of the urban Soninke community makes encounters with other relatives less frequent than in the village. Most important of all, there is a shared understanding that Sabi young men go to Serekunda to *hustle* and they can more legitimately turn down requests for help on that account.

Not only is Serekunda, as in the case of other commercial hubs in West Africa, a trade destination, but migrants’ investments have also made it both a seasonal and permanent labour market for Sabi young men. Since



Figure 3.1 Container Shoes: Second-hand ('Container') Shoes from the U.S. on Sale at the Gate of a Sabinke's Store in Serekunda, 2008

the 1970s, Soninke migrants and returnees have greatly contributed to boosting the commercial and real estate sector in Serekunda, in turn recruiting young relatives, fellow villagers and fellow ethnics as shop keepers, business partners or apprentices, and as menial workers (Figure 3.1). Transnational migrants also rely on local intermediaries to obtain official documents from the Gambian state, to find land for sale or to manage their businesses whilst they are away. This remittance economy is moreover adapting to the changing political economy of international migration. As would-be travellers currently face problems in securing visas for Western countries, migrants under pressure to help their younger brothers and nephews to 'try for themselves' sometimes set them up in business or employ them in their firms.

This function of the remittance economy is increasingly shaping Sabi as well. In 2008, some migrant villagers were constructing new stores in the market place (*lumo*), planning to entrust them with their younger brothers or some other relative. By 2012, more young Sabinko than I ever saw before had started commercial activities in the village. As chances to emigrate dwindled, news of economic strife from Spain and other Western destinations kept flowing in, and the job market in Serekunda stifled, some became convinced that business at home was better than nothing, at least until a better opportunity appeared on the horizon.

In sum, although in Sabi there exists a clear hierarchy of destinations and activities of *xalisi mundiye*, place-bound representations of opportunities and constraints are not static. They are on the contrary responsive to the shifting political economy of labour and trade mobility. This geography of *xalisi mundiye* provides the backdrop against which their perceived possibilities of finding money at home and away take shape. However, to fully understand how young men map out their options and actions at any step during their trajectories, it is necessary to turn to *hustling* as a livelihood practice. In the two life-stories that follow I focus on the interplay and disjuncture between the desirable and the available, and especially bring into focus the practical, situational considerations that shape decisions to move and stay in young men's quest for money.

Two Hustlers

Like his father, Sigu was a *hustler* with little luck. Sigu's father was the first traveller in a small family positioned at the lower-status and poorer end of Sabi society. Between the 1960s and the early 1980s, he toured West Africa as a trader, and worked eventually for several years in Europe before returning to Sabi, unfortunately with only a few savings in his pocket. He shared his money with his two elder brothers and with his wife and children, among whom was Sigu, the second of five sons. Sigu grew up in Sabi as a farmer until, still a teenager, he was deemed mature enough to venture out in search of money. For a number of years, Sigu farmed in the rainy season and spent the dry season in Serekunda. Until the mid 2000s, odd jobs were relatively abundant in the city and with the money he earned he could still purchase a few bags of rice and other staples for his family. Albeit insufficient, this money was much needed back home, for in the meantime his father had broken away from the agnatic household following a dispute and founded a small household for his own family. The agnatic household was growing bigger and more prosperous, as some of Sigu's agnatic brothers managed to migrate to Europe and the United States. By contrast, neither Sigu nor his own brothers had succeeded in emigrating yet, and having become economically independent of the ancestral household, his family was now struggling to make ends meet. Sigu felt the responsibility to go and find money.

When I first met him in 2006, Sigu, aged twenty-six, was driving a passenger van between Sabi and Serekunda. With the collapse of public transportation in the 1990s, second-hand vans of different types had invaded the cities and the main routes of the country. For those who could afford to buy a good quality vehicle, it was a fast business. Sigu's

van belonged to a migrant villager who extracted a fee for each trip Sigu made. Sigu could then keep whatever he could make after deducting costs. This was a good period for him, as money flowed in generously and on a regular basis. But the old van soon started to have problems, and each visit to the mechanics cost money. Misunderstandings with the owner ensued, and according to Sigu, some other young men who aspired to replacing him at the steering wheel began to spread rumours that he mismanaged the money, or they simply undercut him by offering to pay a higher fee to the owner. Sigu lost his position.

During the 2007 rainy season, Sigu's hopes of a breakthrough rose again. When I returned to Sabi, Sigu had gone to Benin. In spite of frictions between their respective families, his agnatic brother (his father's brother's son) in Europe had promised to help him find a visa in Cotonou, where there were brokers who could help him. Sigu raised the money for the fare, and travelled south. Once in Benin, however, the promised money kept being delayed and eventually he realized that the agnatic brother had let him down. Hosted by a Gambian Soninke landlord, Sigu fortunately managed to keep his expenditure low. Other guests gave him some merchandise on credit for him to try and raise some money in the market. But without significant capital, petty trading turned out to be hard. As soon as he had saved some money for the return fare and a few presents, he boarded a vehicle and reached the Gambia before the harvest season was over.

Soon after thrashing his mother's groundnuts, however, Sigu was on the move again. A friend gave him a lift to Serekunda, where he joined a group of Sabi youths who were working on a construction site under the supervision of a friend of his. When I visited him some weeks later, we joked about the 'bachelor life' that he and his friends were leading. The young men shared a shack in the middle of the large construction site where a Sabinke based in the U.S. was building a number of commercial outlets. By lodging at the site, Sigu's friend supervised the workers and surveilled the supplies of building materials. Unlike many other youths staying at their relatives', the young men had to carry out domestic chores and pay for their meals out of their pockets. No mother or wife was around to wash their clothes and cook for them.

The site provided a natural setting for organizing a work team, which also toured the town in search of contracts for mixing cement, making blocks and digging foundations. The daily pay per person ranged from 75 to 125 Dalasi (about €2–5), depending on the task. When a team earned a contract, the margins of profit were slightly higher. However, by March, the inflow of young men from the provinces had swelled the pool of the available workforce, fuelling competition and lowering the rates. The

2008 dry season was at least better than the previous one, when I had seen young men coming back from the city because no job was available.

Apart from earning contracts, Sigu and some friends looked for land available for sale while they worked on construction sites on the frontiers of urban expansion. In April, Sigu was excited about a deal he was trying to mediate between a local chief (who also took part in the land transactions) and a migrant from Sabi. An opportunity to mediate a land sale would yield him a commission of thousands of Dalasi. The deal unfortunately fell through, and the buyer turned to other, more experienced land dealers in town.

I flew back to Europe in May, leaving Sigu at the construction site surrounded by scaffolding and immersed in thoughts of travelling to Europe. His morale was low, jobs were scarce, and in moments of frustration he toyed with the idea of leaving on a boat to Europe. 'I have no helper', he sighed, an indispensable resource to apply for a visa. When I returned to the Gambia in 2012, Sigu's brothers told me that he had found a good job in a foreign construction company operating in the Central River Region. I also learned that Sigu had married and settled down with his wife in Serekunda. That year, I only met him twice and was unable to hear more about him. The last time I saw him, I met him by chance in the Serekunda market. We greeted each other and then I congratulated him on getting married. 'Ah, you know', he laughed, 'I did not manage to travel, so I got married'. I left Sigu and went my way, as he was heading somewhere to look for a job. The company had finished building in the area for the time being, and Sigu had to find money elsewhere.

When in February 2008 I left Sabi to follow young men like Sigu looking for work in Serekunda, his friend Mohamed had just returned from the Atlantic coast. He was asked to supervise the mansion that his brothers were building in their family compound. The last son of an elderly man who never left Sabi but came from a prominent extended family with a long-standing history of emigration, Mohamed was the only adult male left in his household. His own brother had migrated to the United States, while the two brothers from his father's other wife were in Europe and Serekunda respectively.

From the year when Mohamed graduated from the village *maisi*, an upper Quranic school, in his early twenties, he became concerned with money rather than knowledge. He began to spend the dry season in Serekunda, where he looked for work as well as for an opportunity to travel abroad. Over the years, his expectations of migration continued to grow. So compelling was his urge to go *hustling* that one night in late 2007, as he received a call from his brother amidst his group of friends, he became vexed and vehemently threatened his brother that he would no

longer talk to him unless he helped him to travel. His brother did indeed try to help him with a visa for Europe; less than a year later, however, Mohamed received bad news: the deal for a work contract visa had been called off.

It was at this time that he began to think about starting a business: 'Because Europe is so difficult, many people have opened businesses [in Sabi]'. Mohamed's responsibilities had meanwhile increased. He married and his wife became pregnant; even though his brothers had paid for the marriage, and every now and then sent money to him, he now had to take care of his own family. 'At night, I was thinking', Mohamed recalled, 'I have a wife now, I have a son. I was thinking ... until I started a business'. Around 2009, Mohamed opened a shop in the Sabi *lumo*, the market place, where most major stores are located. With savings accumulated during his trips to Serekunda (around 10,000 Dalasi, c. €270), Mohamed bought clothes and plastic slippers in Serekunda and rented a vacant store. Things went smoothly: each week he saved some money and invested the rest of the profits into goods and other improvements, such as a fridge for selling cold drinks.

As in most shops in the Gambia, Mohamed sold a wide range of products, from drinks to shoes. The Sabinko however mainly knew Mohamed's as a fashion shop. When I first visited it in 2012, Mohamed showed me around, pointing to shirts, slippers, garments and other objects hanging from the counter and the wall or simply lying on a mat, and he indicated for each product both the cost price and the profit he scraped. There was no secret in this kind of business; shop-keepers like him bought goods in bulk at a set price in Basse or Serekunda, and resold them retail in Sabi, applying a mark-up for transport and profit. Second-hand clothes and shoes were, however, a different bargain. Almost every month, Mohamed's brother in the U.S. sent him boxes of used clothes through a friend who ran a shipping company. The brother told Mohamed the amount he wished to achieve with the sales, money which he used for repaying transportation costs as well as for buying staples for the family in Sabi. Any profit above that threshold was for Mohamed to keep. Occasionally, the brother also bought bags of rice and sugar wholesale in Serekunda, which Mohamed resold on his behalf in Sabi. Mohamed pointed to the corner behind the bench on which I was sitting, where the bags of rice were usually piled up. At that time, none were lying on the floor: food prices were too high to make any significant profit. At that time, a bag of average quality rice cost between 900 and 950 Dalasi, fetching a profit of less than 15 Dalasi.

In 2011, Mohamed took over another shop from a trader who had gone bankrupt. The shop, in which a student from his neighbourhood worked

part-time as a keeper, was a typical *bitiki*, a small general store where anything from cigarettes to bread are sold. Mohamed's rationale for this investment was that a *bitiki* generates small but regular money: 'Everyday people buy food, cigarettes and *ataya* [tea]'. That was a tough time for the villagers, with remittances from abroad dwindling due to economic recession and unemployment. Rather than a brand-new T-shirt, many bought essential food items, or simply spent the few extra coins in their pockets on sweets, cigarettes and *ataya*. Small but regular quantities of money allowed Mohamed to keep up with everyday expenses and requests for cash from his wife and relatives, so that 'I don't have to touch the money I make here [at the fashion shop]'.

I asked Mohamed about credit and debts. Like any other trader, he had many debtors in town. He did not estimate the total amount, which I reckon must have not been very high. This was a time when shopkeepers were adamant about making cash-in-hand sales or gave out goods only on short-term credit arrangements. When the debts were not cleared on time, Mohamed would approach the debtor and try to persuade him or her; if sweet talk did not work, he resorted to customary authority: 'There are elders in this village...'. It is likely, nonetheless, that Mohamed, like other shopkeepers, wrote off some of the debts in the name of friendship, kinship or religion. Few petty traders report insolvent debtors to the state authorities.

Some losses notwithstanding, Mohamed's business was going fairly well. Europe was no longer so present in his thoughts. Should he be able to amass enough capital, he reasoned, he would set up a store in Serekunda. He would go to China to buy clothes, and perhaps tiles – which was becoming a popular housing improvement even in the rural areas. Or perhaps he could go to the U.S. or to Dubai to buy blue jeans. For now, however, he contented himself with going to Serekunda every one or two months to buy stocks at a lower price than in Basse. He still did not have enough money, however, and he had a family to take care of at home. As Mohamed was telling me about his worldwide commercial dreams, a child entered his shop to buy a pouch of cool water. Mohamed stretched to the fridge and handed over the drink to the young customer. The child landed two one-Dalasi coins on Mohamed's palm, bit a corner of the water bag and slowly made his way out. Mohamed looked down at the hexagonal metal pieces, and then spread his hand open in my direction to show me the meagre bounty: 'You see', he chuckled, 'two Dalasi'.

Sigu and Mohamed shared much in their lives. Born in the same year and brought up in the same neighbourhood, they learned to *hustle* in the fields of their families and Quranic teachers. Mohamed had a better religious education, but he eventually followed Sigu on a search for money

for his family and for himself. Both young men used to hang out at the same meeting point in a mutual friend's house, where they talked about money, travel and farms. In their youth, going to Serekunda was almost an extension of the agrarian training. They worked at odd jobs, and they came back with presents and money to show they were able *hustlers*. Away from the village, they also enjoyed more freedom and sexual licence. Upon return, with the money they had earned in the city, they would invite friends to tea and cigarettes, they bought batteries for playing music and chatted until late at night in their meeting place. Yet, around 2007, although Mohamed and Sigu were still leading a boy's life, they were fully aware that, at their age, 'playing around' (*sange*) was over. They had to 'look for money now', as a friend of theirs put it. Sigu had to raise the money for the bridewealth and wedding expenses before he could even approach a girl for marriage. Mohamed, by contrast, had already made arrangements for marriage with a relative, since his brothers abroad would take care of the marriage expenses; nevertheless, he had to think of supporting his wife after the wedding. Indeed, that was when he began thinking of opening a business.

United in friendship and aspiration, Mohamed and Sigu parted ways in their livelihood trajectories. As neither of the two had yet found a route for travelling abroad, they resolved to making a living in the Gambia. After a number of peregrinations, Sigu eventually found a remunerative job in the formal sector, thanks to which he was able to marry and settle down in Serekunda. Unemployment might eventually push him to transfer his own family back to Sabi, where he would not have to pay rent and bills. Mohamed hoped to move in the opposite direction, but for the time being he stayed in Sabi as a trader and a family man. Convergent as they might be in purpose, Sigu's and Mohamed's quests for money were shaped by different demands and situations. Sigu's family was not only much poorer than Mohamed's; it was also especially ridden with internal frictions that had cut it off from networks of redistribution and help from abroad. None of his brothers were abroad, and albeit living on marginal gains, he was the main remitter for his family in the late 2000s. For food as well as for emergencies, Sigu was the one to approach. The opposite was true for Mohamed. His brothers took care of most of the household expenses, from extra food to housing, and although Mohamed took pride in contributing to the general budget by farming and buying meat on market days, he was freer to dedicate his resources to his own wife and child. As he was the only man staying in the Sabi household, his brothers were reportedly eager to keep him there and created the conditions for him to stay and look after the family (a point to which I will return in Chapter 5). No doubt this helped him to raise the start-up capital for

his store. In addition, every few months Mohamed received money from his brothers, around €50 or more. As Mohamed remarked, this money came on an irregular basis, and in any case he was unwilling to rely on his brothers' handouts: he wanted to find 'my own money'. One is nevertheless led to think that he managed to top up his capital with these remittances. Moreover, his brother helped him set up the business, and continued to send him goods to 'try for himself'.

Navigating the Political Economy

Contextual factors aside, any attempt to reduce Sigu's and Mohamed's trajectories to neat patterns and models of mobility would fail to do justice to the spatial complexity and lived dimension of *hustling*. The two young men certainly did not proceed haphazardly; their trajectories of labour and trade took place in the geography of *xalisi mundiye* outlined above. Without a doubt, Mohamed carefully studied a business plan, particularly for his second store. At the same time, what I want to underline in these stories is Sigu's and Mohamed's capacity to recombine possibilities, sense opportunities and react to failures. Typically by West African standards, their livelihoods follow non-linear trajectories punctuated by discontinuities, complex circulations and auspicious breakthroughs, as well as by dead ends. *Xalisi mundiye* is the thread that connects these fragmented trajectories. However, its practical logic cannot be thought of solely as a 'livelihood strategy' (Scoones 1998): much as they are strategic about their plans and decisions, *hustlers* often proceed through tactical practice which 'operates in isolated actions, blow by blow' (de Certeau 1984: 37). *Hustling* rarely presumes total control and fixed positions; in its most magnified form, venturing into the travel-bush is inherently fraught with uncertainty and danger. It involves continuous adaptation, reassessment and correction in fields of activities that social actors do not often construct and master. The unfolding of Sigu's livelihood, in particular, shows a continuous movement between aspirations and possibilities, emerging opportunities and constraints, over an economic terrain marked by precarious work, marginal gains and unstable relationships. Not unlike his father, Sigu crafted a livelihood with goals in mind, but with an attitude of flexibility and openness towards reshuffling his options. Goals themselves, as Mohamed shows, may also readjust in consequence of this process of making do.

The quest for money presupposes a capacity to navigate economic grounds that are markedly unstable. Tactics, as conceived by Michel de Certeau (1984), still presume a degree of stability of social fields as

structured by higher powers. West African realities are, however, considerably more fluid. As Henrik Vigh (2006, 2009a) has argued, social environments are rarely stable and governed by fixed rules; in places like contemporary Guinea Bissau, where he conducted his fieldwork, the extremely volatile political and economic situation of the country requires of people to continuously decipher and anticipate the evolution of their social environments. To capture this ‘motion within motion’, Vigh (2009a: 425) offers the concept of social navigation, which ‘encompasses both the assessment of the dangers and possibilities of one’s present position as well as the process of plotting and attempting to actualize routes into an uncertain and changeable future’. Certain environments, as Vigh (2009a: 430) admits, are less fluid and changeable than others. Sigu and Mohamed, not unlike the Bissauan young men featuring in Vigh’s (2006) ethnography, are driven by norms of masculinity (supporting the family, the wife, etc.) which seem to endure despite the volatile present. In order to actualize them, however, they have to navigate political economies that are highly unequal and capricious.

Following Vigh, I view *hustling* or *xalisi mundiye* as a form of socioeconomic navigation. It is a strategic tendency towards a goal (money), but also a process of recalibration in constant interaction with the changing environment. As in Bissau, so in Sabi and Serekunda, young men constantly discuss shifting horizons of (im)possibility. Rumours about visas being issued in or given for particular countries circulate transnationally to Serekunda and then to Sabi. Juxtaposed with these rumours are news of losses, scams, frauds and misunderstandings like those in Mohamed’s and Sigu’s cases, which circulate as quickly and widely. Job and trade opportunities in the Gambia are no less subject to uncertainty and discretion. For unskilled occupations, contracts are usually temporary and competition for even strenuous and underpaid jobs is severe.

Hustling is a social skill. I agree with Vigh (2009a: 427) that Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* and social fields are too static for making sense of shifting grounds and rules of social engagement because they build on ‘the underlying idea of relatively stable class-structured states’. At the same time, although social navigation may well describe a general principle of social action, it should not be assumed, as sometimes transpires from Vigh’s analysis, that it is simply there, a matter of contingency. I think we cannot solely understand Sigu’s and Mohamed’s livelihoods as tactical practices taking place in an uncertain political economy of work, trade and travel. It is worth recalling that *hustling* is a gendered social skill which young rural men cultivate in the farms of Sabi, and which then gathers purpose (*hanmi*) from the social currency of money. This is not to say that agrarian worlds are stable and static; on the contrary, the agrarian

ethos of *hustling* and migration recognizes the inherent unpredictability of livelihoods on which Soninke men have been thriving for decades. It is an apprenticeship in potentially erratic livelihoods through which young men employ not ready-made maps but specific dispositions to navigate changing geographies of opportunity and constraint. Agrarian upbringing does not predetermine the actualization of *hustling*; young men like Sigu and Mohamed embark on rural–urban migration in their youths also to train in finding money outside the village. It is through these experiences that young men become *hustlers*. In other words, in the Upper River social navigation builds on a certain habituation to changeable situations, a cumulative, practical knowledge of how to ‘feel the way’ (Ingold 2000: 155) towards survival and accumulation.

Stranded in Circulation: From Spurious Travel to ‘Sitting’

If the metaphor of navigation aims to capture the social motion of agents and environments, it actually involves mobility too. Having shed light on the dynamic unfolding of livelihoods on the ground, I would like to consider the scales and meanings of *xalisi mundiye* or *hustling* as a spatial category of navigation. Taking my cue from Sigu’s and Mohamed’s trajectories, I wish to show that navigation can guide young men not only to further mobility but towards ‘sitting’ in a safer mooring.

Over the past three decades, economic hardship and restrictive migration policies have compressed the navigable spaces and prolonged the temporality of mobility itself. In the 1970s and 1980s, while international migration was rapidly expanding, young men could proceed step by step, for example by going to Serekunda for a few seasons to raise the money to go to West and Central Africa, and sometimes even to European and American destinations. Progressively, however, it has become increasingly difficult to follow such a trajectory. The most recent instance of this stepwise migration that I could record was that of a man who, in the second half of the 1990s, did construction work in Serekunda for some seasons, then moved to Ibadan (Nigeria) to join the gemstone trade, thereby amassing enough money to pay for a visa dealer and reach Spain at the beginning of the 2000s.

Nowadays, young men leaving Sabi for Serekunda are likely to keep circulating between village and city without accumulating sufficient funds for leaping onto transnational circuits of labour and commerce. In addition to smaller scales of travel, in fact, navigation takes place within economic circuits that are highly stratified and relegate young men to the lower rungs of the informal economy. *Hustling* in the Gambia

is often described as *managing* or doing *taf taf*, that is, a way of getting by or navigating, which includes anything from working irregular jobs, petty trading and borrowing or begging from friends and relatives. This earns them ‘hand to mouth’ money rather than money that is good for building houses and futures: ‘As soon as you get it, it is finished – you pay back your debts and you eat [spend on food] the rest’ (Ablay, 28).

Few young men manage to step out of the perpetual motion within these geo-economic bounds, and indeed few see circulation as a stable and desirable solution to solve their being *strand* (stranded without money). Indeed, few describe rural–urban mobility as *terende*, which is largely synonymous with international migration. For them, it is a spurious form of travel: spatial movement neither generating value nor leading to social or individual upward mobility in the same way that international migration is perceived to do. Describing internal migration as spurious travel is perhaps an exaggeration; after all, Mohamed was able to raise start-up capital by going to work in the city, and once he opened his shop, he continued going to Serekunda to buy cheap merchandise in order to realize a greater profit at home. Yet my aim here is to single out an aspect or a tendency, rather than an absolute condition, that characterizes young men’s *perception* and *expectation* vis-à-vis movement linked to *hustling*.

Sigu was compelled to search for money outside the village, but in a number of ways he became stuck in circulation. He went to and from Serekunda, and as a driver he even made a profession out of this rural–urban mobility. Yet though he managed to navigate several difficulties and impasses, this motion did not significantly improve his socioeconomic situation until he actually found a good job that enabled him to marry and make a home in Serekunda. Culturally speaking, going to the city counts as *hustling*, but not quite the same as *terende* to a foreign country. Whereas his father was poor but respected by Sabi villagers for he had ‘seen the world’ and learned several languages, Sigu’s peregrination between homely places was not much of a discovery. He did, of course, learn Wolof – the lingua franca of Serekunda – and became familiar with urban life; but this urban cosmopolitanism was by then assumed to be default knowledge for young rural men like him growing up in translocal Sabi.

Spurious travel is not confined to internal migration. Sigu’s brief journey to Benin counted as *terende*. When he came back, he shared with his mates several anecdotes about Beninese habits and culture. As far as money was concerned, however, the Cotonou journey was remarkably similar to the Serekunda ones. As noted in Chapter 1, the Gambia and Benin have had similar import/export policies. Although Soninke traders have been successful in both countries, young men without any

start-up capital struggle to succeed. During my fieldwork in Sabi, I met a number of young men who had tried to leave the village on an adventure like their fathers before them, but returned to the village empty handed, unable to make a living in the competitive niches of petty trade swelled by the mass of the local unemployed turning to the informal economy (Beuving 2004). Like Sigu, most young men only go to places like Accra, Lomé and Cotonou when they have a prospect of either applying for a Schengen or U.S. visa at local embassies or of joining a relative's firm there. While they wait for their paperwork to be ready, they raise some money by petty trading in the local markets. When visa deals eventually fall through, young men navigate their possibilities, sometimes going back home, sometimes staying abroad or moving on to another country. The difficulties of *hustling* without a solid start-up are such that many end up staying abroad for many years in pursuit of some money to return with. Parents or spouses sometimes place pressure on them to return and even send money for them to buy a return ticket. In the current period of economic recession, travelling to many European places can be said to be increasingly spurious, for migrants fail to find work and money; but young men still perceive labour migration to Europe and North America as auspicious.

The spurious character of circular migration in the Gambia has (re)created the possibility of 'sitting' in Sabi. For Sigu and Mohamed, who had not yet had any opportunities to travel, the next step in their trajectory was to become established in either Serekunda or Sabi. As Mohamed noted, since going to (and staying in) Europe was so hard he considered doing business at home. In addition, in 2012, young men openly discussed the difficulties of finding work and meeting the rising living costs in Serekunda. Some young men calculated the costs and gains: even when living on a meagre two meals a day, margins of gain were narrow. According to his father, Sigu himself was thinking of moving his household to Sabi. Although in Sabi people were hard pressed too, it did not seem as improbable as a few years earlier to open a business in the village (Figure 3.2). It became generally accepted by the villagers that some of the village youths *hustled* at home, and that they should be paid like other traders. Paradoxically, in a context where money was short, norms of redistribution shifted, the supply of credit was reduced and businesses that depended on small cash-in-hand purchases like a small store were solvent. Mohamed set up a *bitiki* precisely to have enough liquidity for everyday expenses and handouts and to spare his trade capital from redistributive pressures. Like some other local traders, he aspired to travel and move away from the village, but he also shared an understanding that doing a business preserved his reputation as a *hustler*: 'It is better than



Figure 3.2 Business at Home? Testing a Satellite Dish Connection in Preparation for Starting a ‘Video Club’ at Sumbunu-kunda, 2007

sitting [idly]’. As another trader added: ‘You won’t get a lot of money, but at least you can take care of your *dimbaya* [‘nuclear family]’.

Wind in the Sails: The Economy of Support

Stepping out of the perpetual motion between village and city and between hand-to-mouth jobs usually requires external help. Young men may wish to have a visa to travel to a foreign country or they may want to obtain a sizeable amount of business capital to be able keep long-term investments separate from everyday profits and expenses. Either way, they need to find a helper (*demandaana*) or *supporter* among their relatives or, more rarely, their close friends. To ask how someone has managed to emigrate is to ask the question ‘*ko da a denge* [who took him there]?’ In a similar vein, whereas Mohamed stressed that he took the initiative and his brother only helped after he had set up the business, many young men in town were convinced that the opposite was true. For them, it was hard to believe that his brother had not set him up in business. This interplay between support and self-help characterizes the majority of businesses in Sabi and in Serekunda, in which help from abroad or well-off relatives

is involved at some point in the process. Many youths see the help to emigrate or set up a business as a *precondition* to begin *hustling* at all. They say they need to be put in a condition or a place to ‘try for themselves’. At the same time, young men may be expected to find their own route or ways of *hustling* before receiving help. In order to persuade a potential supporter to help them, they may have to demonstrate that they are good householders and farmers, and also that they make an effort to *hustle* at home. Indeed, even though men like Mohamed were offered help with a visa application, they often have to wait a long time before their papers are ready, and in the meantime they cannot sit idly on a promise of support.

Support is predicated on the economy of kinship and other affective and moral ties. Young men expect their elder brothers to help them when it is in their powers, so that they too can contribute a share to the household economy. Support across generations is less frequent but it often starts off chains of migration within a cohort of siblings. As we saw in Chapter 1, some of the former international migrants helped their sons to migrate to Europe and the U.S. in order to diversify their routes and sources of income. Sisters of migrants and businessmen tend to channel the help to migrate or trade to their own sons (the brothers’ nephews). As Mohamed and Sigu clearly show, however, even solid norms of solidarity in kinship relationships are fraught with ambivalence (cf. Bledsoe 2002: 21–22). As the Soninke say, relatives are rarely straightforward (*telengo*). Sigu’s friends explained that he returned from Cotonou because his agnatic brother ‘betrayed him’ (*a da a jamba*). Tense relationships between their fathers had driven a wedge between the two agnatic brothers, probably leading Sigu’s supporter to be unable to help without incurring his own family’s criticism. Mohamed’s household was more united and he could count on several supporters. In his case, it was the complexity and arbitrariness of visa procedures that rendered the kinship relations of support opaque and uncertain (see Gaibazzi 2014). The heated telephone conversation with his brother revealed, on the one hand, the extent to which Mohamed was frustrated about staying in Sabi, and on the other, the doubts and acrimony that the prolonged wait for support can generate between young men and their relatives.

Given the uncertainty of support, young men navigate not only shifting economic and political realities, but also fluid economies of morality and affection.⁸ A considerable portion of *hustling* consists of networking. Young men often borrow money to make international calls or try to have a word with a migrant or affluent relative, crying for help. When asked about their attempts to find potential supporters, others reply instead that there is no need to insist because, as one man

remarked, '[that relative] knows my situation; he knows the *tanpiye* [suffering, hardship] I am in'. Refraining from bedevilling relatives can be a way of exhibiting a proclivity towards hard work and self-reliance. As mentioned above, looking for money in the Gambia can improve one's reputation as a *hustler* in the eyes of a potential supporter. People in a position to help with visas and money receive many requests from their younger relatives. Urban and international migrants face the dilemma of whom to choose among the many candidates, and this is where what young men do at home and how they approach 'sitting' can make a difference.

Networking often extends beyond kinship. Sigu had admittedly no helper among his relatives. Betrayed by his agnatic brother, and his maternal uncles being too poor to support him, he navigated his way through other social networks. Investments and remittance-related economies provided a milieu in which he could find employment and opportunities. As a driver, he was entrusted with a vehicle by a fellow villager who chose to invest in the transportation business. Through friends he found a job and accommodation in a construction site owned by an expatriate Sabinke. His attempt at realizing a profit as a real estate broker between the latter and a chief also shows that networks extend beyond ties of locality and ethnicity.

Serekunda is a good place to look for a supporter within or without kinship networks, and that is why many young men decide to go to the city during the dry season even if it is, economically speaking, a spurious travel destination. News about visa opportunities in the Gambia or elsewhere in West Africa circulate more quickly in the urban circles, which are crisscrossed by Soninke migrants from all over the world. The several shops run by Soninke men throughout Banjul and Serekunda are information crossroads and meeting points for different people and several types of business transactions. One must not be deceived by the number of men sitting at these shops and stores; while many people are surely jobless, sitting is also an active participation, a way of keeping one's ears tuned to the travel or business news and observing transactions, perhaps seizing the opportunity to jump into a deal as well. Spending time at the shop, they may earn the trust of the shop owner, who may then give the young men some merchandise on credit as a way of helping them to try and do business, or may entrust them with tasks. Sitting and socializing is also a way of making one's situation known to others, seeking empathy and help. In the flow of money, businessmen, migrants and investments which interconnect in the urban Soninke circles, one hopes to make contacts, visiting old friends and relatives living in the city or on a holiday from abroad, and thereby seeking a chance to

speak to them in private and elicit help to migrate or start a business, or simply to get by.

* * *

In this chapter I have shown that men's livelihoods are highly flexible and adaptable to a changing, turbulent horizon of opportunities and constraints. The open-ended nature of looking for money defies any teleology of migration and already contains the possibility of staying put. The uncertain and devalued character of *some* mobility may, moreover, lift Sabi up from the bottom of the hierarchy of desirable destinations. As exemplified by Sigu and Mohamed, the wealth, migratory history and social status of young men's households and kinship networks shape the latter's capacity to both travel and create immobility in Sabi. At the same time, the uncertainty of the political economy and of kinship solidarities is such that young men's socioeconomic background hardly determines how their livelihoods unfold on the ground. Even when they receive help, young men must actively construct ways of becoming established as 'sitters' by creating a mooring in the remittance economy of support and investment. Fixity amidst mobility must be, in other words, actively produced (McMorran 2015). What I emphasized in this chapter is, therefore, a propensity shared by all young men to tactically adjust to changing circumstances and hone their navigational skills geared to pursuing financial gain.

In fact, while destinations and activities vary, the imperative to look for money remains. Money is at the heart of social exchange and codes of male respectability. In everyday life, it enables young men, like other people, to participate, or simply to be, socially; in the longer term, wealth invested in social relations and stored in assets such as land enables men to preserve value against the odds of global volatility (Buggenhagen 2012). Nonetheless, circulating money requires men to acquire it first. Thus young men unable to migrate internationally must nevertheless look for 'marginal gains' (Guyer 2004) – small profits made at the periphery of transnational circuits of accumulation – as vividly epitomized by the two Dalasi coins lying on Mohamed's palm. The quest for money is not, in fact, all about the outcome. Even when they find little money, young men achieve some respectability. Already coming from the margins of Sabi's society, and being marginalized by his potential supporters, Sigu nonetheless stood out among his kith and kin as a hard-working *hustler*. 'Trying hard' to find money is thus important, albeit perhaps not as important as actually finding it. While navigating the capricious political economy, therefore, young men must avoid not simply sailing into turbulent waters and winds, but also running into the doldrums of unemployment, or worse still, losing

sight of the goal and courage in finding an auspicious route to a much-longed-for bounty.

Notes

1. Figure based on the author's household survey conducted in 2006/7 (see Chapter 1). Other minor destinations include the Jahaly Madina area, where some young men find work in the rice fields.
2. Similar patterns are found in other migration movements, in particular among migrants en route to Europe (Pian 2005).
3. *Xalisi* also means silver, a precious metal used in the past to store wealth.
4. Ganda Fadiga came to the Gambia to perform and record tapes for the Banjul-based businessman Musa Njay. I was told by a young man that he received U.S. \$30,000 for his performance, though I could not verify this.
5. This is a widespread belief among women as well as elders (cf. van der Geest 1997; Buggenhagen 2012: 104).
6. Some recollections of the 1950s and 1960s suggest that there was a continuity between servile and free labour: when day labourers were recruited among the villagers, these were mostly *kome* (interview with Bafula Kamara, 15 December 2008, Sabi).
7. When I posed this hypothesis to a young man, he did not fully endorse the issue of status; he drew my attention to a *hoore* (noble) young man working as a labourer for a *kome* (former slave).
8. In Vigh's (2006: 106–8) ethnography, young men navigate primarily networks of kinship and patron-client relations.