

GLOBAL ASIA



Edited by Arndt Graf and Azirah Hashim

African-Asian Encounters

New Cooperations and
New Dependencies

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African-Asian Encounters



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Introduction

Arndt Graf and Azirah Hashim

Since the early 2000s, an increasing number of publications have focused on the new relations between China and Africa. Their research design has often been informed by political science or economics, and the more or less implied question of whether these new relations can be characterized as asymmetric. In this vein, the question of neo-colonialism has also been raised, or that of a continued structural dependency. One example of a study in this framework is Ian Taylor's *Africa Rising? BRICS – Diversifying Dependency* (2014). Taylor's main argument is that African exports to China almost exclusively consist of commodities, which experienced a super-cycle over more than a decade. In his argument, therefore, the basic pattern of dependency of heavily commodity-oriented African economies from the outside world did not change structurally, just because of the appearance of new customers of these commodities.

The current volume takes this sceptical perception seriously, as there is undoubtedly a strong empirical bias towards China and towards the kind of economic exchange patterns described by Taylor and others. At the same time, however, it has to be asked whether the China-Africa paradigm is suited to reflect the totality of the new interactions between Asia and Africa. Since the 1990s, not only has China been an important player in Africa, but other Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and India have also intensified relations with the continent. On the other hand, Africans are becoming increasingly visible in Asian countries. Adams Bodomo (2012), for instance, describes this new phenomenon in the case of Africans in China. Several hundred thousand Africans now live in China, constituting a new diaspora with various new patterns of intercultural encounters. Similarly, an increasing number of Africans now live in other Asian countries. This brings to attention the great variety of new interactions between the non-Chinese Asian countries and their African counterparts. In fact, focusing on interactions between 'countries' might obscure the fact that in China as well as in many other Asian and African countries, various players, and not only the government, are currently engaged in the new interactions between Africa and Asia. This observation casts doubt on the assumption that asymmetric relations between 'Asia' and 'Africa' are the general order.

The current volume thus examines a broader range of new interactions between Asia and Africa. China is covered in some respects, but the main emphasis of this book rests on smaller players from Asia, in particular, South Korea and the nations of South East Asia. In addition, in contrast to some classical studies in certain traditions of political economy, the current volume does not emphasize the great players and the grand strategic geopolitical landscape.

Rather, this book sees itself in a tradition of area studies where empirical work serves as the entry point into overarching narratives. Consequently, it begins with empirical case studies focusing in an exemplary way on Africa and some of its new interactions with Asia. Ute Röschenthaler's chapter on African youth in Malaysia deals not only with the experiences of African students and traders in Asia, but also looks at local African backgrounds for this outbound mobility. Locally, 'bushfalling', as this outbound mobility is called, has a cultural significance beyond the economic sphere. It also serves as a kind of initiation rite and improves the social and cultural capital of the entire family. Bushfalling as a local concept only came up in the 1990s and was historically preceded by outbound (student) mobility to Europe and North America. The new destinations in Asia, notably China and Malaysia, emerged in the 1990s due to economic challenges in the concerned African countries (Cameroon and Nigeria), and it was also supported, in the case of Malaysia, by the introduction of new laws on privately organized higher education. Push-and-pull factors thus played a role in the ensuing rapid increase in African student mobility to Malaysia. Undoubtedly, a number of these factors have very specific local causes. Others, however, are of a more general nature. This includes the move towards a partial privatization of higher education since the 1990s not only in Malaysia, but also in many other countries. As Ute Röschenthaler's anthropological case study demonstrates, the role of the Malaysian government in this unprecedented increase of students from Africa was sometimes limited to providing an attractive infrastructure in the country, while hearsay and rumour among those interested in migrating was also an important factor. In Cameroon, for instance, Malaysia does not even have an embassy, nevertheless, Ute Röschenthaler could interview quite a few Cameroonians in Malaysia who only had heard about the country from friends and communicative networks.

Röschenthaler's anthropological entry point is complemented by an empirical and geographical perspective on the Asian impact on the small-scale mining sector in East Cameroon, as reflected in local stakeholders' perceptions. As Diderot Nguempjou and Jürgen Runge point out, on the

ground it is visible that not only Chinese companies, but Korean and other foreign concerns as well, are active in this particular area. A research design that only focuses on 'China' without taking into account the other players would therefore not be able to gauge holistically the degree of African (or in this case: Cameroonian) dependency on China. Rather, it appears that the diversification of external business relations carries the potential of more 'African agency'. However, as Nguempjougou and Runge also demonstrate, a lot also depends on the role of the concerned African government (in this case the Cameroonian). Wider social and ecological impacts of Asian (and other) engagement in the mining industry require good governance in order to responsibly manage this sector of the economy.

The second part of this book focuses on two aspects of the 'Chinese' factor that are often overlooked in research designs that are mostly based on quantitative data of economic interactions. Chinese Confucius Institutes in Africa have multiplied since the turn of the millennium, as Falk Hartig points out in his contribution. The big question is whether the occurrence of these many Confucius Institutes in Africa can be interpreted as a part of a soft power strategy on behalf of China to demonstrate its presence and increase its influence in Africa. In particular, this chapter concerns itself with a systematic discussion of possible dependencies of African nation-states that can be attributed to China's cultural policy.

Rirhandu Mageza-Barthel's chapter on Sino-African civil society interactions covers a potentially related aspect of Chinese soft power in Africa. It is also demonstrated in her country comparison that in contrast to governmental relations these civil society interactions are much less developed and need to be sought at various political levels among different socio-political actors. This is in stark contrast to the threat that is sometimes assumed in certain Western media. If one were to add the abovementioned chapter on the mining sector in West Africa, the role of Chinese actors in Africa appears to be much less dramatic than anticipated.

In fact, it has to be questioned whether the perceived "Chinese" presence in Africa is also partly due to a mistaken attribution of other Asians as Chinese. The case study on the Vietnamese-Chinese migration industry in Angola by André Gröger and Rainer Klump brings to light an empirical phenomenon that would have remained undiscovered under a narrow China-Africa paradigm. In fact, in Angola, most of the Vietnamese migrants are incorrectly held to be Chinese, while in reality they mostly come from poor areas in northern Vietnam. The question is whether such mistaken assumptions about the 'Chinese' presence in Africa occur more frequently, due to the local lack of knowledge about the differences between various Asian languages and cultures.

In their case study, Gröger and Klump investigate the case of several thousand Vietnamese workers currently living in Angola and establish the existence of a whole range of Vietnamese-Angolan cultural and social interactions. Many of these Vietnamese workers work in the booming construction industry in Angola through Vietnamese subcompanies also cooperating with Chinese firms. These Vietnamese workers are apparently willing to work for salaries lower than Chinese workers would. In this case, we therefore have a pattern of trilateral interactions. The question is whether similar trilateral patterns also exist with other Asian countries in the periphery of China, e.g. North Korea, Mongolia, Myanmar, Laos, Nepal, etc. In order to broaden the often employed narrow focus on Chinese-African interactions, it might be also possible that other Asian companies (or countries) – from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, or Malaysia – work with such schemes of cross-national subcontracting. In any case, this contribution is heuristically very valuable since it extends considerably our empirical knowledge on the complex Asian-African interactions, not least since it focuses on lesser-known actors from South East Asia and lusophone Africa.

In fact, the narrow China-Africa narrative also poses the danger of overlooking the historical dimension of multilateral South-South relations. In her case study, Susan Engel departs from the Bandung Conference in Indonesia 1955 in her assessment of Indonesia's long-term stand on South-South cooperation. China also participated at the Bandung Conference, and much of the rhetoric of Chinese policies towards Africa and other 'Southern' countries in the 2000s and 2010s still reflects the spirit of Bandung.

In the contribution by Wiebe Nauta and Tae-Joo Lee the focus of South-South cooperation shifts to Rwanda and South Korea. Besides the fact that these two governments successfully cooperate in various fields like Rural Development, ICT and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Korean civil society actors are also becoming increasingly involved. The authors take a close look at the way in which South Korean concepts of development, taken from the country's own experience as a formerly colonized country that developed successfully after independence, are translated and implemented by Korean NGO experts into the Rwandan social and political development contexts. On the one hand these Korean development experiences find a fertile ground in Rwanda, as they often contain elements of 'mental reform' that the Rwandan government also employs. On the other hand one may question the extent to which progressive Korean civil society actors are able to support an emerging Rwandan civil society. Analytically, not only companies and business links, or state and NGO organizations should be taken into account in assessing the new

interactions between Asia and Africa, but also individuals. Much of the new mobility of African students studying in Asian countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines is based on the decisions of individual students (and their parents) who are willing to pay tuition to be educated in Asia. Many of these students perceive that they will receive a better quality of education supplied by both government and private institutions of higher education in several Asian countries, as compared to education services in their home countries. Apart from the case of Malaysia, which attracted more than 20,000 African students in 2010 (cf. the contribution by Röschenthaler), the Philippines likewise benefits from this trend, as Satwinder S. Rehal points out in his contribution, where he also focuses on the role of African athletes in the Philippines.

In general, this volume clearly demonstrates through a variety of case studies the need to go beyond the popular China-Africa paradigm in assessing the whole breadth of the new interactions between Asia and Africa – and possibly beyond. Also, various countries in South America and the Middle East have intensified their relations with African partners in the recent wave of globalization since around 1990. In this regard, the current volume could serve as an interesting stepping stone for our future research agenda.

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Part I

Outbound and Inbound:
Observations from West Africa

1 In Constant Search of Money to Survive

African Youths in Malaysia

Ute Röschenthaler

Introduction

In the course of the past decades, the number of Africans in Malaysia has significantly increased. One reason for this is the privatization of education and the active recruitment of students by private colleges and universities who make it relatively easy for foreign students to obtain a visa (Lian 2011; Daniels 2014). The situation in which these Africans find themselves in Malaysia, however, is not at all easy due to the work policies in the country that create immense challenges and urge these Africans to begin all kinds of activities to be able to survive during their stay. Their often informal, if not illegal activities have led to a bad reputation that tends to be stereotypically projected upon Africans, particularly upon Nigerians who form the largest African group of students (Ministry of Higher Education n.d.). The conditions that these Africans face in Malaysia are a good example of the situations in which, through their legal categories, states legally produce the illegality of migration trajectories (De Genova 2002).

In such a situation, many Africans experience in their host country a reduction of their social status, encounters with racism, and stereotypical typecasting of them as criminals. This complicated situation has spurred African creativity and cultivated various forms of hustling, i.e. 'be ready to do any kind of work' (Alpes 2011: 14), among which are attempts at targeting the wealthy in the local and global community, to gain from them, what they feel is denied to them (see also Roitman 2005). Despite the multiple challenges Africans face in Malaysia, they have built up an entire infrastructure for fellow Africans, and some have amassed considerable wealth (Röschenthaler forthcoming).

The movement of Africans to Asian countries, especially China (Bredeloup 2012; Bodomo 2015; Haugen 2012) but also South East Asian countries such as Malaysia, redirects the attention of migratory studies that has until the 1980s focused on movements from 'developing countries' to Europe and North America (Sassen 1991). Such movement was understood as a

unidirectional procedure with the objective of integration and permanent settlement. Studies of transnationalism (Dunn 2005; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Vertovec 1999; Dunn 2005) in contrast acknowledge the linkage that remains between migrants and their home countries and the potential for their development. However, from the perspective of those who move, it seems less important that national spaces are bridged. More important are ideas of translocal networks that connect distant places with each other as members of families live in different cities in one or several countries and continents. First of all they are interested in these family networks and the development of the home place (far more than the country of origin as such) as they feel that the relation to their state of origin is often complicated as well. They do not see themselves as migrants but rather as travellers who disappear for some time from their home place to spend time abroad and later reinvest in their homeplace, what they have “harvested” abroad, from as far away as Malaysia.

My research has pursued the trajectories of some of these Africans in Malaysia. I analyse what makes Africans move to the country despite the difficulties they experience in finding work there, how they experience their situation, what strategies they develop to survive, and how some of them have built up businesses nevertheless. Most Africans in Malaysia live in what I call the wider Kuala Lumpur, which includes the capital of the country and the adjacent agglomeration of towns and cities in the Klang valley. I will first give some insights of how I got into the field, and continue with providing reasons why individuals in selected African countries (Cameroon, Nigeria) find it so important to move abroad or send their grown-up children abroad to study. Then I discuss their situation and experiences in Malaysia, look at some of the activities that they have developed to make a living, and outline the wide range of services and businesses that they have built up and the way they spend or reinvest the gains they have made.

Getting to the Field: From Africa to Malaysia

The situation in Cameroon and Nigeria and the discourses that people cultivate about travelling out are familiar to me from field research in both countries since 1987. My studies on cultural mobility in south-western Cameroon and south-eastern Nigeria included the question to which places migrants from the area I studied had travelled to work in their own and adjacent countries, and why they had made this choice (Röschenthaler 2011: 466-469). During several travels and research trips, I met individuals from

the area in various other countries, such as Mali, South Africa, China, the UK, Germany, Canada, the Emirates, and also Malaysia.

In Malaysia, my plan was to study activities and trade networks of Africans, particularly those of Cameroonians and Malians. Through internet research I knew that there was a Cameroonian student association in the capital, but that was next to all I had been able to make out beforehand. Indeed, I met many Cameroonians and also Nigerians and a number of people from other African countries, however, I did not encounter any Malians during my stay in Malaysia, as there were hardly any Malians there. Most of the Africans I met were young people between 20 and 40 years of age. In Kuala Lumpur, the first contact was through a friend of a Cameroonian friend in Berlin whose wife's son was now staying in Brussels and who knew a friend in Malaysia. Other contacts came through Cameroonians at the AADUN-AFRASO conference that I attended in Kuala Lumpur in March 2014.¹ Through them I got into contact with more Cameroonians and their mostly Nigerian friends. Some of them I present here for reasons of anonymity as professional figures. Among them is my first contact, whom I call the Allround Broker, a Cameroonian from the anglophone Grassfields who completed his studies in business management and offered services of transferring mobile phone credit, recruiting students, transferring money between Cameroon and Malaysia, and certain other things as well. Through him and through other friends I met the Student Agent, also from the anglophone Grassfields, who was enrolled as a student but mainly worked as an agent for several private Malaysian universities, profiting from his connections back home; the Event Organizer, a doctoral student from Nigeria who runs several night clubs and a magazine for Africans; the Money Doubler from the Cameroon Grassfields, who turned day into night; by using his various ventures, which included scamming, money doubling, cons, and using his verbal skills; the History Student from the Cameroonian South-West Region, who originally wanted to become a pastor but who went to Malaysia where he studied and ran an informal barbershop; the Business Student, who comes from the Littoral Region of Cameroon and works in a hotel. Then there was the female Restaurant Owner from the Grassfields who cooked African dishes in a private apartment; the Hairdresser from the North-West Region of Cameroon who studied at Limkokwing University; the Drone Constructor from eastern Nigeria who had studied electronic

¹ Research was carried out in the context of the AFRASO project 'Africa's Asian Options' at Goethe University Frankfurt in March 2014 and February/March 2017, and sponsored by the Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF) and Goethe University.

engineering and who owned a company with Malaysian friends; the Caretaker of a Cameroonian church; the Food Store Owner who sold African groceries; and the Apparel Seller, whose store had everything that Africans needed to look respectable, both from south-eastern Nigeria.

My research introduces one dimension of African activities in Malaysia. Altogether I carried out interviews with 26 individuals, with some several times and for more than an hour. Most of them were Cameroonians and Nigerians who shared with me their and their fellow Africans' experiences in the country. I also compared their narratives with those of other Africans and with Malaysians. I also accompanied my interview partners to places where Africans meet, to African shops, the university, and spent time with them. Doing research in a shady milieu was not always easy. The Allround Broker introduced me to a number of people, but he was always very careful about this because he was afraid that they might later blame him for allowing a white person who might be a spy (because she asks questions about their activities) into their midst. If something negative happened to them later on (which is always possible for people living in such precarious situations), then they might accuse him of being the cause of their trouble. When I once asked a Cameroonian woman what kind of business her husband carried out, he was immediately alarmed and interrupted me. Later on he begged me to never ask such questions because the businesses they were engaged in were mostly illegal. Others, such as the History and Business Students and the Money Doubler, however, freely told me about such activities.

The anthropological method of getting to know the concerns of people and taking their perspective seriously provides a glimpse into the lived realities of these travellers but also entails challenges as to determine which details to disclose in a publication. It can, however, offer some cause for thought in which direction the entrepreneurial and developmental potential of individuals in a society can be pushed by legal regulations and state policies.

The Decision to Travel Out

Why do so many African young people in their twenties or early thirties travel into a situation which is far from making their lives easy? In Cameroon and Nigeria – and not only there – many young people feel the urge to leave their country for a number of years in order to study or make money, never mind where. Even though Europe or North

America still are the first choice for those who want to study, because these countries have a high prestige as destinations, to which, according to the Event Manager, top government officials in Nigeria try to send their children. For many, however, travelling out is simply a matter of leaving for a distant country. In the late 1990s, families in almost every village in south-western Cameroon had a son or daughter in Europe, Russia, or North America. Most of these youths do not leave their country for another promising place with the objective to settle down, begin a new life, and remain there. They rather intend to explore such places to collect intellectual, symbolic, and financial capital, and then return to invest this at home, as Marfaing (2003) depicts for Senegalese in Germany. They want to become what anglophone Cameroonians since the 1990s call 'bushfallers', a pidgin word referring to somebody travelling abroad to make his or her fortune, as Alpes (2011, 2012) has aptly shown. The term relates not only to going to the forest for hunting or harvesting expeditions and return with prey and yield but also connotes a heroic image due to the dangerous experiences that the forest offers to travellers (Alpes 2011, 2012). In this imaginary, somebody who returns, comes back strengthened and in a different shape. In a more standardized form, such experiences form part of local knowledge and have been used in initiation rituals for the accomplishment of transforming the status of an individual. Initiation rituals normally are carried out in the forest and can take between a few days and several years during which the candidates pass tests of courage and have existential experiences. Not all candidates return from such rituals and so, from the local perspective it is considered an accepted fate that not all bushfallers return from their journey. As initiation rituals become rare at present, young people are no longer able to assume the status of adults in this way (Warnier 1993), and so bushfalling increasingly appears to replace the established experiences of becoming grown up during initiation rituals in the forest.

Often the parents encourage some of their children to leave and organize migration projects for them. Having a bushfaller in their family is considered an insurance policy for old age and enhances their prestige as such a child is expected to bring home riches from abroad. Some of these young travellers are still dependent on their parents for their living, while others have already worked but feel that by going somewhere else they will find it easier to make the money they need to be able to marry, build a house, and become somebody in their own society. As Alpes (2011) observed, and my research corroborates, the problem is – more than the money to travel – to obtain the documents needed to leave successfully.

Most people think that the appropriate way to get into the possession of travel documents is using the services of a broker. Bushfalling under this term emerged as a phenomenon only in the 1990s. At that time, youths or their families easily spent about 1.5 million FCFA (about €2300) for the brokerage services. Meanwhile the prices have risen to 1.8 million FCFA (about €2750) to get to China or Dubai and roughly 2.5 million FCFA (€3800) to Europe or Canada, which is more expensive because the documents are more difficult to obtain than for Asian countries (Alpes 2011: 45; see also Pelican and Tatah 2009), Malaysia included. The family of one young lady whom Alpes describes in her study of bushfalling even lost about 6 million FCFA (about €9200) in several unsuccessful attempts of the broker to bring the daughter to foreign places. People openly talk about how much they spent for this, which contrasts with the illegitimacy of many of the services the broker actually offers and the strategies by which he brings his customers abroad. This resonates with my own research in the region where discourses on spending form part of strategies to display wealth and generosity; by contrast, the amounts received for a service remain hidden because otherwise people would constantly nag to receive their share (Röschenthaler 2011).

Alpes (2011: 54) notes the strategy of the broker to dramatize the departure. He creates an atmosphere of tension between hope and uncertainty, like in a film, in which the tension rises with every minute. When only a few hours before departure, the broker buys the ticket, receives the papers, takes the money, and sends his customer in the company of his family to the airport where the aspiring migrant catches the plane at the last moment. This departure has almost a ritualistic character during which the traveller is transformed from a normal youth into a bushfaller. Such a drama, even if it happens to be unsuccessful, is so impressive that the broker's customers easily assume that he must have superhuman powers. They will narrate this experience to friends, which will raise their own and the broker's prestige and bring him new customers.

As powerful helpers in the realization of people's dreams, successful migration brokers are locally admired as 'new figures of success' (Banégas and Warnier 2001) and considered 'big men' who have the necessary powers to make things possible (Daloz 2002), and only rarely become the object of suspicion. For the migrants, the broker or agent – and not an embassy – is the logical contact person because in the social imaginary, it takes extraordinary powers or money to be able to overcome the closure of boundaries and make it 'to bush', i.e. abroad. Following Kyle and Siracusa (2005: 158), Alpes (2011: 51) concludes that migration services are commodities in high demand. The

scholarly literature, however, as Alpes (2011: 46) notes, considers migration brokers rather less favourably than as human traffickers and smugglers who are either law-breaking criminals (Finkenauer 2001; Aronowitz 2009) or merciless businessmen (Salt and Stein 1997) who instigate trajectories of migration.

The local conception of bushfalling and the precarious experience abroad can be understood as a way to live through a prolonged liminal phase during which these young people do not have an ascertained status. Seen from the local perspective, what Nieswand (2011) called the ‘status paradox’ – a migrant leaves their home country as a middle-class youth, arrives in a host country as a nobody, and experiences an increase in status after their return home – is not actually a paradox. Rather, it has all the characteristics of the well-known time period of absence from home. Upon their return, these young people and their families must celebrate with festivities to confirm their new status. In this logic, they cannot return home the same as or poorer than before.

Malaysia as a Travel Destination

How did Malaysia become a desired destination? Malaysia began to form part of the Nigerian and Cameroonian imagination as a promising destination when it became known that it was easy to get a study visa for the country. For example, the Hair Dresser opted for Malaysia instead of Europe or North America because ‘it was so easy to get the visa [...] In my country [Cameroon] [...] they want us to stay home but they don’t give us jobs’. She heard about Malaysia from a friend who studied there and told her that the country was nice. With the help of a broker, her parents paid her tuition fee for one year and sponsored her accommodation for six months. Cameroon does not even have a Malaysian embassy, but Nigeria has had diplomatic relations with Malaysia since 1991. (It was one of the first African countries to establish relations with Malaysia, even before Senegal [1992] and South Africa [1993].)

As it was easy to get a visa to Malaysia, compared to Europe and North America, most Cameroonians and Nigerians entered the country with a student visa and the help of a migration broker. This was also the case of the Allround Broker, the Business and History Students. When he came to Kuala Lumpur, the History Student was already 31 years old and had worked in Douala, when he contacted a migration agent one day. He knew several offices of such agents in Douala and Buea: ‘You just tell them the country

you want to go'. His broker worked together with another agent in Malaysia, quite likely also a Cameroonian, who organized his university admission papers and other travel documents. Also, the Allround Broker was already working as a sales manager and an administrator in a cyber café where he found his Malaysian university online. He saved some money and managed, with the help of his mother, to travel and study in Malaysia. A migration agent in Cameroon organized his documents in collaboration with an agent in Malaysia. (Later on he became a migration agent himself.)

The Nigerian students told a similar story. The Drone Constructor at first studied botany in Nigeria; when he did not find a job he opened a snail farm with friends; his friends were involved in some dubious scamming business in which they lost all their money, so that he decided to begin anew and open a service company. To obtain the necessary capital for this, he decided to travel abroad. He went to Malaysia because it was easy to get a visa and began to study IT, and later with friends, opened a company with branches in Malaysia and Nigeria. The Event Organizer, as well, already held a BA diploma from a Nigerian university and was working as a consultant managing the projects of foreign expatriates in the country. I give his story in a bit more detail, because it shows how he came to take the decision to travel and realize his project. After two years in this job, he felt that

At my office, there are a lot of people who have masters, some are doing PhDs. Some are also pushing. So I saw a need to further my studies. If I really want to get to the top level, so [...] I was in desperate need for a school, and so if I look at it, my first degree was in Nigeria, so I needed to move to a different location because I need a foreign certificate that will be of help, you know, because in Africa, they value foreign certificates a lot [...] I was searching on the net, I was looking for where to go. I applied for schools online and I was communicating with my younger brother. (Interview, March 2014)

The brother at that time had already been in the UK for two years and invited him to come there, but he declined, saying 'two brothers cannot be in the same region, ya, because of [the] economic crisis [...] but if I am in another country, I can tell you something about where I am and you can tell me something about where you are, so there is a diversification of knowledge and ideas'. He also did not like the United States because he disliked the gangster movies he had watched and preferred a more peaceful country. Then friends told him that he could have a visa to study in Malaysia in four or five days only, and that the visa fee was cheap.

It was 1000 naira, which everybody can have. I told my dad I got the admission, I needed to travel; he was able to provide the funds, because my dad is an average man, at least, he is doing OK. He gave the funds for the school fees and I went to the embassy; I applied and I got the visa. My dad presently is a rural farmer somewhere, and he also has his palace [...] Within three weeks after matriculation I left Nigeria to Malaysia.

For most of these youths, this was their first time to travel abroad. When they arrived in Malaysia, many surprises waited for them. I asked them what the most surprising thing was. The Allround Broker said:

The roads, the roads [silence]. When I came here, I arrived in Malaysia the 19 of April at around 8.30 am. First of all, I went to my school. When I arrived there it was quite a different thing from what they were saying in the internet. That same night, my [Cameroonian] friends called me; I took a taxi and came to Puchong [...] Most of them are now back in Africa. From there we had to hang out, we went to the night club, and then we were retiring [getting back to the house], so the roads were really quiet by now, so serious, I have never seen a road like that [...] you see all the fly-overs, so many, and really complicated [...] When you come to Kuala Lumpur, there you have this [feeling]: [...] actually you are no longer in Africa [he laughs]. (Interview, March 2014)

Asked whether there was anything he found strange, he said:

The Indians, I never knew that there were black Indians. When I met them, their own black is like funny; that was really strange for me, and also the fact that there were no jobs as well. It was really difficult. It took me quite a while to see that Malaysians are like that, that I needed to ask for funds from Cameroon. I got too tired, but I think I paid my school fees, my tuition fee, for one year already before coming here. (Interview, March 2014)

Others mentioned similar things. The History Student – after his university had picked him up from the airport – was surprised that the climate ‘is so hot. And the food, they eat rice every day. We have more variety, fufu corn and many things’. He also complained that the agent had not told him how much he had to pay in school fees or that he was not allowed to work. Only after his arrival did he find out that this was not possible and that he had still to pay 52,000 MYR for his MBA programme for one and a half years of study. He only managed to talk to his agent in Malaysia once over the phone and then he never reached him again. He wondered: ‘I am 31 years old. Should

my parents still send money to their 31-year-old son?’ Not only was finding a job complicated, their universities were expensive and in many cases did not meet their expectations. The Event Manager was shocked by the criminal activities going on. He recalled: ‘Coming to Malaysia, to be honest, I was having the perspective that there were no Africans here. I was thinking, “I will be the only African”. It was in early 2009, until I realized that Malaysia [is full of Africans and ...] is [...] – How do I [put it]? – a drug country’.

These statements indicate that the experiences in Malaysia were often quite far from the Africans’ expectations and had a sobering effect. These Africans do not come from the poorest families (as these do not have the means to send their children abroad) (see also Şaul and Pelican 2014: 5) but nevertheless have travelled to ameliorate their situation at home, become responsible and care for their siblings (pay their school fees), invest and create a business for themselves. At home they are considered very fortunate, but they found themselves in Malaysia in an extremely complicated situation.

Living and Studying in the Wider Kuala Lumpur

Africans appear to have been living in Malaysia on an individual basis in earlier decades, but their presence in the country only began to grow in the 1990s and has greatly increased since the 2000s. Among the first to arrive were Sudanese and Nigerians. Muslims from anglophone African countries found it easier to get along than francophone students and non-Muslims. Accordingly, a number of Sudanese found employment as scholars at the International Islamic University of Gombak.² Larger numbers of Sub-Saharan students arrived after the privatization of the higher education sector. Private universities often form part of larger education businesses with branches in many countries. Inti College in Niela, for example, forms part of the American Laureate Group and has more than 500 branches worldwide (including some in the UK, and Singapore, and in Malaysia under the brand Inti in Kuala Lumpur, Subang, Sarawak, and Penang). Limkokwing, another private university, was founded in Malaysia and has branches in several southern African countries. Lian (2011) argues that this internationalization and globalization has created a market for active recruitment of international students to Malaysia (see also Yoshino 2010; Mulumba et al. 2008). They advertise student mobility with an easy move on to North America

2 In 2013, for example, most of the 50 Senegalese living in Malaysia studied Islamic finance. Nigeria-Malaysia relations: <http://www.nigeria.org.my/>.

and UK, but seen from the African perspective, this rather sounds like an euphemism as, when students actually wish to transfer, they realize that this promise comes true only when they again pay large sums of money.

Among the African students most of Africa's 53 nationalities are represented, the majority coming from anglophone countries, with the Nigerians making up the largest group (Lian 2011; Daniels 2014). An internet source mentions that, according to Malaysia's immigration department, in 2012 altogether 79,352 Africans entered the country and 25,467 student visas were issued to Africans.³ This means that the students described here only make up one part of the Africans arriving in Malaysia and contradicts the estimation of most of my student interview partners that the majority of Africans in Malaysia were students, at least officially. The much higher number of African entries is (most likely) due to frequent travellers, especially business people, moving in and out of the country. The majority of students are anglophone not only because of the language but because Malaysia has special agreements with some Commonwealth countries and provides fellowships of one to two years for obtaining a master's degree and of three years for a doctorate.⁴ Altogether, Malaysia has diplomatic relations with twelve Sub-Saharan countries in which it also has ambitions to invest.⁵ Despite their nations' having bilateral relations with Malaysia and Malaysia's interest in investing in Africa, African students complained that their opportunities in Malaysia were limited, the school fees were high, and that they were not expected to work but to leave the country quickly after completion of their studies.

Not all Africans who come into the country with a student visa and pay their school fees are actually studying. Some have chosen the student visa option only because it was easy to get. Others came with a 30-day tourist or business visa and upon realizing that finding work is difficult, sought the help of an agent who organized their admission at a university and a

3 African migrants aspire to a better life in Asia: <http://www.dw.de/african-migrants-aspire-to-a-better-life-in-asia/a-17014189>.

4 Malaysian citizenship: <http://www.justlanded.com/english/Malaysia/Malaysia-Guide/Visas-Permits/Malaysian-citizenship>.

5 Malaysia has diplomatic relations with Nigeria since 1991, with Senegal since 1992, and with South Africa since 1993, where Malaysia has massively invested since 2001. It also has diplomatic relations with Ghana, Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Namibia, Malawi, Mauritius, Tanzania, and Uganda in which Malaysia maintains trade relations and invests, especially in Ethiopia, Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghana. Cameroon has only two embassies in Asia (in China and Japan) and consulates in Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The consulate in Singapore is responsible for Cameroonians in Malaysia. http://www.cameroon-embassy.nl/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/cameroonian_embassies_asia.pdf. For visa issues at home, Cameroonians have to travel to Abuja, Nigeria.

longer-term visa. The Business Student noticed that as long as they pay their fees, the university did not care whether they were really studying or doing something else, so even elderly business men or prostitutes could officially be students. However, those who are actual students carry their student pass (student visa) to show to police in case they are questioned. The police would call the university to verify that they are attending school regularly.

Students normally live in what they call a condo (short for condominium). These are huge apartment complexes, often with several towers. Many live in Subang Jaya as numerous universities and colleges are situated there.⁶ Often several students share one apartment to reduce the costs of the rent, which in 2014 was between 200 and 500 Malaysian ringgit per month. Landlords do not always welcome African tenants, and there is a growing attitude among Malaysians that a condo with many African renters reduces the value of the building. Some owners have even banned Africans from renting apartments in their condominiums, which has led to protests of Africans, so far mainly online.⁷

As mentioned earlier, the students have to find the means to pay their rent. Only the lucky ones have parents who are able to sponsor their entire studies. Most of them, however, need to do more than just survive; they also need to send money to their families and save for their future return. Most students were ready to work and have tried but nearly always without success. The Allround Broker complained: 'They don't offer jobs to Africans in Malaysia'. He was not alone. All African students to whom I talked moaned about the working situation and that it was so difficult if not impossible to find a job.

There are contradictory answers as to the work policies for foreign students. According to a bill of 2002, international students are indeed allowed to work part-time in addition to studying full-time in Malaysia. This rule is subject to immigration requirements (under section 9 (1) (a) of the Immigration Act of 1959/1963, Amendment 2002). The procedure is far from uncomplicated. They need a valid student pass/student visa and the approval of their university for which they submit a copy of their passport, their address, a contact number, and a letter from the prospective employer; this application must be forwarded by the representative of

6 An example of such a condo in which mostly Africans live is Mentari Court in Subang Jaya, where the police are a regular presence as much criminal activity is supposed to be going on there.

7 See for example: <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/in-subang-condo-ban-against-african-tenants>.

the educational institution in the presence of the student at Immigration Department Headquarters Malaysia. If the application is approved, the student is interviewed. They are allowed to work a maximum of 20 hours per week during semester breaks or holidays of more than seven days in restaurants, petrol kiosks, mini-markets, and hotels, except in the following positions: cashier, singer, masseur, musician, guest relations officer, or any activity deemed to be immoral. The passport of a student whose application has been approved will be sanctioned accordingly. Extension of the work should only be given to students who maintain a good academic record.⁸ My interview partners stated that in all these different stages of the process, the processing of the documents can be delayed, and in any case Malaysian citizens received first preference when hiring was done. (The conditions have been ameliorated a little since then so that students are now allowed to work in a wider range of jobs.)

One of the more fortunate students is the Hair Dresser. Her parents had paid her accommodation for the first six months and her tuition fees for the first year at Limkokwing University, so the beginning of her first year was smooth. Soon, however, her life became difficult because it was hard for her to find a job. Since she was a good student, she was able find a part-time job at her university, which she did for two years. It was a stressful time, but she got through it. She also began to work informally as a hair dresser, and also gave manicures and pedicures. During her third year at the university, the year in which she intended to graduate, she began to look for another position that would enable her to combine work and study. At first she worked as a cashier in a small supermarket (which was allowed by then). This meant standing all day for 5 ringgit an hour, except when she went to classes. She was earning 45 ringgit a day, but when she got home she was too tired to study. Then a friend told her about a hair studio which was owned by a Nigerian who would pay her a monthly salary. She works whenever there is a client and in the down time she is able to study on her laptop. After graduation she hopes to get regular work at her university.

The Event Manager recalls that during the time he was studying for his master's degree that 'no matter how much your parents send to you, sometimes it's not enough because their money here has more value'. He began by distributing flyers with event announcements to students, and then organized events in night clubs himself. After he completed his master's

8 Malaysian Education: <http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/education.php?article=immigration>; and: <http://www.shiksha.com/can-students-work-in-malaysia-article-4737-1>; see also Legal Research Board (2014).

degree in one and a half years, he received a doctoral fellowship from the Malaysian government. When he came in 2009, students were hardly ever allowed to work, but he acknowledges that in the following years there were slight improvements. However,

the changes were still not a bit favourable, because you work for an hour, you have 5 ringgits [...] Most of the Africans in Malaysia come from an average home [...] as Malaysia is a developing country [...] and so when people were entitled to work in 2012 and 2013, it was still like 5 ringgit per hour [...] and the places you can work, as a waiter, you work like this [...] I can't do such work. (Interview, March 2014)

He found such work too exploitative and refused to work for 5 ringgit per hour, since a simple taxi ride from home to the university (which is often the only way to get there) easily costs 20 ringgit.

The situation illustrates that when Africans come to Malaysia, completely different expectations and imaginaries run into each other. Malaysians expect them to come with enough money, pay the fees, study, and subsequently leave the country. By contrast, the Africans come to increase not only their intellectual but also their social and economic capital before they return home. Accordingly, many Africans feel cheated and additionally have to endure the unfriendly attitude of the locals. The dilemma is that even if they succeed in completing their studies, their goal is not just to return with a diploma. 'You cannot come home empty-handed', the Event Manager explains:

Everybody has to come back to Africa with something. Back in Africa, they don't want to know whether you go to UK, to Canada, Australia, Malaysia, or Dubai. They think once you leave, you fly, you don't have to come back the same. So [we], the people in Malaysia, also want to meet up with the people in UK, in Canada, in Australia. My friend who returned from Canada, he came home and built a house. They see me spend two years in Malaysia, come back, build a house. You see how the mentality is. But in UK, Canada, Australia, America, there are more chances of working and making a living, because apart from the chances, their currency rate is more valuable. When you make a 100 Canadian dollars, compared to a 100 ringgit, there is a difference. (Interview, March 2014)

None of the Africans I talked to found Malaysia the ideal place to stay. Most of them wanted to leave earlier rather than later. Comparing their

situation in Malaysia to that of students in other countries such as North America, Europe, Australia, South Korea or Thailand, my informants were sure that everywhere else the work situation was much better elsewhere. The History Student knew that in Thailand, somebody with qualifications could find work as a teacher: 'There is no unknown local philosophy. They don't care where you come from. They are more flexible. As soon as you have an employment letter, you get a work permit and a visa'. One of his friends was in Thailand and presently decided to move to Dubai. Another was working in Dubai and was planning to move to South Korea because there, he expected to earn more.

African Creativity in the Invisible Ghetto

In the almost complete absence of decent jobs for African students, they had to become entrepreneurial. The Student Agent stated: 'They are all only looking for money', but for the time being the capital for a real business was lacking. The consequence was hustling. The Allround Broker explained: 'Seriously, everybody in Malaysia is hustling [...] We are all hustling, you know [...] trying to make cash and finding a possibility to make ends meet'. He continued:

[Hustling] is a good thing because it makes you [...] to be smart, you have to be like you don't sleep enough because you will think of how will you pay your bills, how will you go to school, how will you get to renew your visa, because you constantly mingle around people, ask: 'What do you need? How can I help? What does that other person need?' You are trying to connect two people, try to be a middleman in many things, ya? If somebody has something he wants to buy and he does not know the location, like when we came here, there were still people who had difficulties trying to call back [to] Africa [...] or this person wants to renew a visa. He does not know the school that will give the visa very fast; this one wants to go back to Africa, he has overstayed his visa maybe for one, two years, [so] he is afraid to go to the migration. Maybe you link him to a migration agent who will help him facilitate his departure. (Interview, March 2014)

This form of hustling is basically networking, mediating, and finding opportunities to sell a service to another who needs it. The Allround Broker stated that he personally knew about 150 Cameroonians – about the estimated half of all Cameroonian students in the country – to whom he tried to sell his services.

The most important tool of the broker is the mobile phone. It is his capital, his office, and provides access to his social network. The broker receives a fee or a certain percentage of the money involved for his mediating services. All this follows unwritten rules and is based on trust among the two partners involved. Such hustling activities can hardly be sanctioned by official means. They are informal in the sense that they are beyond the reach of the state. They include different activities that are situated somewhere in the grey zone between informal, legitimate, illegitimate, and illegal. They include teaching younger African students, selling cheap telephone credit, transferring money between Malaysia and Africa (usually to their home country), or recruiting students for a university. Some definitely exploit the plight of their fellow Africans when they encourage them to come to study in Malaysia without telling them that the situation will be difficult and they will lose their money. The African agents with whom they come to the country might not even know, and the African agents in Malaysia cannot tell them without taking the risk that the migrant will back out because they will not be able to pay the school fees. Only after they have paid the fees does the agent receive a commission of 3000 ringgit per student. As stated earlier, and as Alpes (2011) has illustrated, however, there is a market for these brokerage activities and people in Africa accept the risk as part of the game in the hope that they will be one of the lucky ones who will be successful.

The services of a hustler may also include the organization of events and parties at night clubs, as the Event Manager is doing. Event organization is an example where brokerage service merges into a more sustainable business with fixed structures that are no longer out of the reach of the state (as will be described further below). Other forms of hustling include prostitution, the drug trade, counterfeiting money and documents, human trafficking, and, more rarely, stealing, burglary, and kidnapping. Among these hustling activities, the drug trade is the most dangerous, as the punishment for convicted drug criminals includes the death penalty. Notwithstanding the possible penalty and the warnings stamped on the visa inside the passports of immigrants, many of them continue to be involved in the drug trade.

Human trafficking is mostly carried out by female bosses who lure young women to Malaysia. They tell them that they have jobs in a restaurant that will enable them to study. When they reach the country, their boss confiscates their passports and tells them to repay their travel expenses in instalments of 1000 ringgit per month. Prostitution is the only way to come into the possession of the money. So around midnight, these women leave for the night clubs where they find customers. These young women mainly come from Nigeria, especially from Benin city from where young women

also reach many other destinations through firmly established networks (see Kastner 2014) and from Uganda, as the regulations allow Ugandans to come to Malaysia for 30 days without a visa.⁹

Not all women who engage in prostitution are victims of trafficking. Some come to Malaysia with this intention, but most women take up this activity after discovering how difficult it is to find regular work. These are the women whom the Allround Broker would call 'lazy girls' because they are 'only trying to get money from men'. The Business Student described the prevalence of prostitution. When he returns from university in the evening, from 6 pm onward, he sees these women sitting in the garden of the condo: 'They dress so sexy [and] they sit in the garden. If you come by, you just approach them. You go with them in your apartment, or you just take their number, and call them, or give them your apartment number.' He explained that African girls preferred African men as customers because Africans pay them well, whereas local men only pay half price.¹⁰

Other common forms of hustling include confidence tricks and advance-fee fraud, such as internet scamming, money doubling, and various methods to extract money from potential victims. The Allround Broker confirms in a low voice: 'If you really want to be the hustler who drives in big cars or whatsoever, you have to be doing something illegal'. The Business Student stated that Africans would among themselves talk very openly about this, and would even ridicule those like him who refused to participate. He recalls, that when he was recently invited by one of his Nigerian friends to come to his birthday party, one of them asked him where he came from and what he was doing. He said he was studying and working on Sundays in a hotel. The guy said:

But why are you killing yourself, you are suffering? Don't you know how to press the computer to do what they are doing here?' I said: 'I know how to do it.' He said, 'How do you know?' I said: 'I am with you Nigerians; you guys do it, so they do it in front of you, so you will know, but I am not interested.' He said: 'You have to do it. You see the government here is bad, and so on. You want to go back empty-handed?' (Interview, March 2014)

9 See conditions to qualify as a student: <http://www.mohe.gov.my/educationmsia/education.php?article=immigration>.

10 According to the Business Student, for time spent with an African prostitute a customer has to pay a minimum of 400 to 500 ringgit. Girls from Indonesia or Philippines accept 150 to 200 ringgit. An African girl might accept 200 ringgit only if it is for less than 30 minutes, for which an Asian girl would accept 50 ringgit.

Such conversations might easily convince people to join in illegal activities since they see how these guys have a more luxurious life. Hustling was, of course, not invented in Malaysia. Forms of hustling were first described by scholars of the Chicago School in Black urban ghettos in American cities (Lindner 2004) as an informal way of making money, and often involved drug dealing.

In Africa, hustling has been studied in Nigeria (Chernoff 2003; Apter 1999; Smith 2001) and Cameroon (Ndjio 2008; Malaquais 2001; Frei 2012; Hibou 2004). Hustling activities are a form of negative reciprocity which Ndjio (2008) calls an 'economy of breach of trust'. In it, the hustler feels entitled to engage in his activities because of his own situation, which denies him access to opportunities of employment and social mobility. In these countries, hustling and the need to travel to make money can be seen as a direct result of the structural adjustment programmes and the privatization of state enterprises, which greatly reduced the job opportunities of youth in the public sector (Banégas and Warnier 2001). Since the 1990s, these activities also have taken a more global dimension. Some of these hustlers work on the internet. They use dating websites to find potential partners, contact large companies to propose business deals, and engage in hacking, bank fraud, email scamming, or money doubling, i.e. convincing people to give them cash on the promise that they can double it for them. In Malaysia, some propose money doubling to Africans or other foreigners who are new in the country and in need of means. Others fall in love or pretend to fall in love with a local woman. When a lot of money is involved, there are always rumours of how this individual was able to achieve his success. The Business Student is convinced that some use magical items that they get from Africa or from an Indian and which they place 'under their computer so that those with whom they communicate on the net will send them the money', while others use 'black magic to destroy their victims' will power to make them accept everything they propose'. Other hustlers constantly walk around in town, get to know very important people, and try to involve them in business. The Money Doubler knew the story of a hustler who proposed to the manager of an international hotel chain interesting business deals to the point that the manager handed him over 18 million ringgit. Subsequently, the hustler disappeared with the money to his home country. The Money Doubler said I should look at the websites of all these huge shopping malls at Berjaya Times Square – it was all foreign investment managed by people with lots of money and whom he considered his 'potential clients'. While he told me this, his phone was ringing every second minute and in between he received a number of text

messages. Hustlers usually have several mobile phones with changing phone numbers for different customers.

The Event Manager explained the situation of these people:

[They are here and say to themselves], I am here, I have already spent my money for school fees, I have already paid this, paid that, something must come out from this country. Like some people, it's so bad, they came here with just 500 dollars, and after that 500 dollars, they have nothing forever, and if they don't have anything back home, they don't have anything here [...] It's a challenging world, they must survive [it] [...] [They say to themselves:] I have to do this because I have no choice. (Interview, March 2014)

The History Student confirms: 'Those students here, the Nigerians, they are not bad people, they need to survive. It is often not their fault, but they are forced into it. You need to help yourself if no one else helps you.' This situation of a lack of acceptable jobs that leads to illegal activities, refusal of social acceptance, and racism pushes them into what remains of the concept of the 'ghetto', which is a term that has been coined in the context of US cities where black people are territorially relegated to certain neighbourhoods that become disadvantaged places ridden with crime. Lindner (2004: 188) quotes Wacquant who, arguing against the ubiquitous use of the term, specified the basic meaning of the ghetto as the forced relegation of a stigmatized social group into a closed area with distinctive institutions, which form a parallel universe to the dominant society (1997). There is no territorially delimited ghetto in Kuala Lumpur, except for some of the condos, but as a matter of fact, Africans are socially and economically segregated into an invisible ghetto. Even those who have the proper documents are not encouraged to develop any sense of normality in their lives, not to mention to feel like a citizen with equal rights. In relation to the Malays, who are the dominant social group in the Malaysian social fabric, the Chinese and Indians already feel like second- and third-class citizens, along with other recognized Malaysian indigenous minorities (Barlocco 2014; Hefner 2001; Khoo 2014; see also Manickam 2012), and the many other Asian legal and illegal labour immigrants (Pillai 1995; Sadiq 2005), among whom in the Malaysian social imaginary Africans are situated at the far end of society. All of these do not make Africans' cooperation with these groups any easier.

When the Malaysian government realized that the many African students were not following the law, despite its minor ameliorations of the labour conditions, it attempted to regulate migration and restrict the extension of

students' visas (see also Malkki 2002: 353) with the argument that students who are there for a shorter time can do less crime, as the Event Manager noticed. Students are finding it increasingly difficult to renew their visas because the policies are changing so frequently. As a consequence, but different from official expectations, Africans evade the migration officers and prefer to bribe the police. Even in this unfavourable situation, there is an instance of what Wong refers to as 'self-control over the migration project' (Wong 2005: 87).

Despite the fact that Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmed Badawi won a landslide victory in 2003 with the promise to establish greater transparency and shake up the corrupt and inefficient police force (Sani 2010: 47), apparently not much has happened so far (Welsh 2008; see also Case 1993; Heryanto and Mandal 2003). The Event Manager explains it that way:

Some of the officials, like [he laughs] they need to survive, you know, they are paid, but not too good, just an average payment. They think, 'Oh, I don't want to use the normal Proton car. I want to use a BMW.' And those people are corrupt officials who want to penetrate the Africans and make the renewal of visas no longer easy. But if you look at it, it is creating creativity. (Interview, March 2014)

However, the readiness of the authorities to take money makes the situation for Africans more complicated, especially for those who do not have the cash to pay each time they encounter the police. Students told me that the police regularly search houses in which Africans live for illegal residents. When somebody has no money, they take his belongings, his jeans or television. When there is nothing they can take, they say, 'Call your friend and tell him to bring money.' They can be in plain clothes or in the uniform of security officers. I was advised not to visit Africans at home in their condos. If drugs are found in an apartment, the authorities arrest everyone present. The Business Student explains: 'If you share your apartment with other Africans, as most of us do, you have to trust your fellow residents.' I was told the story of three students who shared an apartment. One was a serious student, one a scammer, and one had begun to deal drugs, which the others did not know. One day the dealer came home with a prostitute, and later in the night the police arrived, found the drugs, and arrested all four, who were later sentenced to death. In many cases, such a problem can be dealt with by paying a bribe. If a drug dealer, for example, is caught on the street by the police, he might be able to negotiate his way out of the arrest, but once the arrest becomes official, escape is impossible. When Africans are arrested,

even on minor charges, they stay incarcerated until somebody finds the money to pay the bail. As a result, the prisons are full of Africans. The History Student visited a prison and was shocked by the conditions there. He also met friends there who he did not know had been arrested. They had not been visited by anyone for a long time and they had no idea whether they would ever get out again, as they did not have lawyers to help them.

The movement of people to other countries generally presents opportunities but also challenges to both parties. Often, the challenges are predominant and do not foster cosmopolitanism but rather lead to non-assimilative cultural differentiation (Kearney 1995: 552). As I will argue here, the Malaysian state does not generally perceive foreign students as candidates who could contribute with their creative ideas to the development of the country but with its migration and labour policies rather directs these creative potentials towards informal ends and into what I have called the invisible ghetto. Policies will not easily change the objectives of why people came into a country.

The Successful Hustler and Entrepreneur: Display, Reinvestment, and Philanthropy

The unfortunate Africans ended in prison, were deported, or were executed when they were caught with drugs, but the more fortunate hustlers either disappeared quickly with their money or reinvested it in more sustainable ventures. Engaging in dangerous hustling activities increased one's prestige, as successful hunting proved a hunter's talents, powers, and cleverness. The Money Doubler reasoned: 'If you are clever, you make money in Malaysia [...] [and] if you have money you can survive here [...] You just have to be smart.' Part of the 'prey' has to be redistributed among their friends. Once a hustling activity was successful, the lucky one first of all invited his friends to generous feasting. This materializes their talents, places their friends in their debt, and serves to elevate their social status. He also displayed his success by wearing expensive clothes, acquiring a respectable car, and consuming dishes made from expensive imported African ingredients. The Money Doubler told me about his and his friends' frequent drinking sessions in Bukit Bintang, where they consumed great quantities of beer and whisky at large tables until the morning hours. Of course, the police often disturbed them, although in this business district there were no people sleeping in houses nearby. If the amount was high enough, the next step would be to send some of the money home as remittances and/or reinvest

it in a business. Several of my interview partners were convinced that those who had a larger business or a shop in Malaysia initially obtained the start-up capital from some illegal hustling activity, or would still engage in hustling and use the shop to demonstrate that they had a legitimate source of income.

In addition to their brokerage services and small-scale businesses which did not need much start-up capital, Africans have built up an entire infrastructure for their fellow Africans. They have set up businesses such as hair salons, bars, restaurants, night clubs, clinics, banks, cargo agencies, African churches, and shops where they sell groceries, shoes, apparel, and accessories. Most of the foods they are selling are imported from Nigeria, while other commodities are from Europe or China. Some of the Africans, women included, travel regularly to China to return with clothes, bags, and shoes which better suit African tastes and sizes and which are hard to find in Malaysia. They also send part of the goods to Africa.

Not all African business people, of course, acquired their capital by hustling. Some brought capital from abroad or worked hard to create it. Some Africans have created their own company together with local partners, construct and produce commodities and technical instruments. The Drone Constructor, for example, has a company together with his Malaysian friends (two Indians and a Chinese) where they supervise online students for an Indian university and work on the construction of the civil drones that are fabricated in China.¹¹ If they want to open a business, a shop, a nightclub, or a restaurant, foreigners have to work together with a local partner in whose name the business is registered and who has the right to receive 30% of the income created from the venture. They also have to employ Malaysians to work in the shop. These local partners can be local business people, study friends, or their Malaysian wife. But the money, the strategy, and the initiative comes from the Africans (according to my informants).

Nigerians are especially successful entrepreneurs who have created employment and contributed to development in Malaysia. The Drone Constructor mentioned that there are a number of Nigerians in responsible positions in Malaysian society and are owners of palm oil plantations. One of them runs a car restoration business with a Chinese friend. In 2013, he handed over financial donations to less privileged Malaysians in an orphanage. The ceremony was featured in the magazine *Black Legacy*,

11 The businesses of Africans will be discussed in another article: Rösenthaler (forthcoming).

produced in Malaysia by a Nigerian. Another initiative inaugurated the African Social Awards Malaysia (ASAM). At these annual events, which began in 2011, the favourite stars of the African community are honoured. The venues indicate that considerable amounts of money are involved. The events were organized by the Nigerian company Play Entertainment and have been a huge success with the objective to recognize Africans and work towards 'a homogenous society in Malaysia' (Black Legacy 2013: 47-50). The luxurious magazine *Black Legacy* intends to portray successful African individuals with the objective to re-brand the image of Africa. All these activities confirm that the projects of African expatriates involve serious businesses that not only enhance the situation of individuals and their families but also entire national economies (Tilley 2007), be it the home or the host country.

Conclusion

With this chapter, I have illustrated, with examples mainly of Cameroonians and Nigerians, how in the past decades growing numbers of Africans have travelled to Malaysia, despite – or, better, in ignorance of – the fact that Malaysia does not welcome migrants with economic aspirations but only paying students who quickly leave the country after graduation. Accordingly, the state makes it easy to receive a study visa and complicated to find work for students and migrants, not to mention citizenship. In this situation, which denies them reasonable access to making a living or even business opportunities – except for big business and investment – Africans develop creativity by offering services to fellow Africans and tapping global capitalism from below (Ndjio 2008) in order to complete their project of accumulating intellectual, social, and economic capital. The larger part of their illegal activities and networks can be attributed to this situation, and the comparison, for example, with Dubai, where many Cameroonians and Nigerians are also found, and the rate of illegal activities is low and the migrants' trust in the local police to protect them is high, corroborates this conclusion.

Upon arrival in Malaysia, they have to begin with less than they had before, resist the negative stereotypes of Africans, and make huge efforts to survive in order to make a fortune despite rules and regulations and the challenges presented by authorities and society at large. The state regulations force them, at least at the beginning of their stay, to assume often unwanted identities when they have to become victims of trafficking,

criminals, illegal migrants, hustlers, or sometimes husbands of local women to be able to open a business, and often also the student identity is only assumed. The situation forces them to assume these roles if they do not want to return home empty-handed.

In constant search for money to survive, Africans have built up an entire infrastructure mainly but not exclusively for fellow Africans which is partly informal in the case of brokerage services and partly formal when physical structures are necessary and local partners have to come in. Paradoxically, with their activities they lure more Africans to come to Malaysia, who find themselves in the same awkward situation as those who now make a living from their plight and their needs, and make the shadow economy grow, instead of sparing the newcomers such situations. The outcome of their adventure is uncertain. Many of the more successful hustlers indeed return home quickly and invest at home, as their families expect them to do. The more unsuccessful ones continue to try their luck and remain illegally or as captives in the country. Those who have married a local woman or made enough capital to work with partners, often continue to stay and reinvest in the Malaysian economy. It is an existential experience from which, as often in initiation rituals as well, not all candidates reappear again – some die in the dangers of the wilderness. The analogy of the temporary migration experience with an initiation ritual, during which young people remain for months or years in the forest, where life is different or even reversed, without – from the home perspective – a specified social status, fits best for those who return home after graduation.

These more lucky ones emerge strengthened from the journey. This is what many interview partners suggested (without being asked particularly for that). They experienced this existential and complicated situation, as anthropologists know from initiation rituals, not necessarily as purely negative. The hairdresser, for example, was convinced that she appreciated Malaysia if only for fact that

It has helped me a lot because I faced a lot of difficulties, and through these difficulties it has helped me to have strength, to know how to live an independent life without my parents though they always call and encourage me. It has seriously helped me because I have become strong, different from back home. Back home they used to do everything for me but now, I have to take care of myself, I have to save something, all these things. (Interview, March 2014)

In a similar vein the Allround Broker reasoned that he somehow

gets along with the country, even though there have been hard times, but not as hard as compared to [home, where they remain dependent] [...] I cannot call that really hardship, because even here if you feel hardship sometimes, it is better than being in Africa [...] Because here, at least you know you may have a prospect, you may easily do something. But in Africa [...] everybody is dependent. In Africa there is nobody over 40 years who is no more dependent. But here, when you are here, you are your mother, you are your father, you are your sister, you are your brother, all in one because you are alone. (Interview, March 2014)

In recent times and in the urban context in Africa, where there are hardly any initiation rituals any longer, these travels abroad can be compared to the experience of growing up, becoming responsible, and being able to care for oneself and others. For some this experience never ends in the way they or their relatives at home expected. They remain in the country because they have founded a family, even though they regularly have to renew their visa because, to my knowledge, no African (i.e. no one with two African parents) has ever received a Malaysian passport since the creation of Malaysia. Or, if the opportunity arises, they move on and try their luck in another country.

My research leads me to three tentative conclusions: First, Africans who mostly come as students to Malaysia have in their home countries a certain standing; many come from well-to-do families, some have already studied or worked and earned their own money. They reach Malaysia and nearly all of them experience – the extent of this varies with the viability of their families – a reduction of their social status to mere paying customers of a school. They are confronted with racism and, worse, are often typecast as criminals. With whatever means available, the luckier and more clever ones among them make immense efforts to reverse this situation and regain status (at least among their own African community and at home), make money, and establish a business. From an outsider's perspective, this resonates with what Boris Nieswand (2011) called the status paradox of African migrants. From an insider's perspective, the experience might be compared with the liminal phase of an initiation ritual in the forest.

Second, the labour laws and immigration policies of Malaysia determine to a great extent the situation and activities of migrants. They are confronted with a 'legal production of their illegality' (De Genova 2002) in which they have to arrange themselves. Third, Africans have built up an entire infrastructure for Africans, sell African commodities or those which

appeal to Africans, create service enterprises and offer all kinds of informal brokerage services. In doing this, however, they also often exploit the plight of their fellow Africans to whom they offer services against payment and in these activities legal and illegitimate methods often melt into each other when they take what they feel the wealthy and powerful deny them.

In many cases it is hard to neatly distinguish a legitimate service from the more exploitative or illegitimate and illegal character of other brokerage services, all called hustling. As such, most Africans live in a constant and routinized situation of crisis and stress (Mbembe and Roitman 1995) which necessitates social associations of mutual help, mostly with their fellow expatriates from the same countries. These relationships, however, are not free from distrust and suspicion of each other's activities. The successful entrepreneurs largely overcome this stage and invest their capital in the infrastructure they build primarily for Africans but with growing success, reinvest their capital either in Africa or create employment in Malaysia, or both, and extend their activities with philanthropic acts to society at large. In short, there are many different trajectories for Africans in Malaysia, which are situated between hustling, legal business, and acts of philanthropy. They depend on the good luck, as well as the seriousness, intelligence, and talent of individuals to surmount the almost insurmountable challenges of migration to a country that only sees them as paying clients.

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