

Bumster Subculture and Rastafari Identity in The Gambia: The Search for Survival and Social Mobility among Marginalised Male Youth

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Abstract: *The Rastafari Movement grew out of the obscurity from the Jamaican island homeland in the early 1930s, and with time metamorphosized into a leading and iconic socio religious and cultural movement with diverse global following using reggae music and other Rastafarian hallmarks as powerful means of transporting the vital messages of Rastafarianism. The movement has nevertheless, localized, and reinterpreted in different ways depending on where it has been appropriated. There is evidence of the profession of the Rasta tradition among young people in numerous places in The Gambia expressed through the sway along reggae music, dreadlocks, and many other paraphernalia. This article examines the evolution and diffusion of the Rastafari code of behavior and ideology, and argues that the beach boys in The Gambia locally known as bumsters have adopted the Rastafari identity as source of livelihood and a ticket to a more prosperous life and upward social mobility that involves tourist -related sexual - economic exchanges of power and control.*

Keywords: Bumsters, internalization, Rasta, Rastafari, Reggae, tourist, youth

Introduction

The youth in the West African country of The Gambia constitute the largest proportion of the population (36.7 per cent aged 13-30 years) and constitute the cohort experiencing excruciating living conditions brought about by poverty, deteriorating economic opportunities, widespread unemployment, fragile economy, limited skills, and globalism. Faced with the fact of bleak economic opportunities and constricting chances of securing a feature, many of the males among them as observed, embrace and experiment with cultural products and lifestyles inconsistent with Islamic tenets by meshing into a ghettoized urban male youth subculture of pseudo-Rastafarian and consequently appropriate the visual signifiers of Rastafarianism— listen to reggae music, braid or roll up their hair into dreadlocks, and smoke marijuana- as they simultaneously identify with the global Muslim community. But while they experiment with and assert dual identities, they are still confronted with the barriers of being able to secure a living. The seemingly feasible option for this set of young people is to take advantage of the opportunities in tourism for livelihood as beach boys or *bumsters* as they a called in The Gambia, and interact with White female tourists for material gains and invariably free themselves from the hegemony of the elders in their pursuit of survival and some future of stability

Background of Rastafari Roots and Ideology

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The Rastafari movement has its historical roots within the liberation struggles of the African diaspora. It developed in the slums of West Kingston, Jamaica's in response to slavery and colonialism of the country's past society, and by extension the exploitative and oppressive conditions of the Western World. King (2002) places this narrative within the context of three distinct historical timelines: (1) Marcus Garvey and Ethiopianism (1870-1930); (2) the coronation of Haile Selassie as emperor of Ethiopia and the formation of early Rastafarian churches (1930-1949); and (3) the emergence of the Youth Black Faith as a militant faction within the Rastafarian movement (1949-1958). A common strand implicit in the first and third narratives out of which the Rastafarian movement emerged were the manifest conditions of economic deprivation, political disfranchisement, and cultural alienation that prevailed among Afro- Jamaicans; reaching its nadir in the 1920s and 1930s. Though the hardships of the 1920s and 1930s might have been indeed part of the precipitant situations, Edmonds (2003, 32) submits that "the crowning of Ras Tafari (his original name) as Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia, was the main catalytic event that called the Rastafarian movement into existence". To understand why the coronation of took on such significance, we have to recognize that Haile Selassie audaciously resisted and confronted the ferocious forces of colonialism at a period in history when Africans were considered chattels of the invading European colonial powers. His utter disgust with the ravaging scourge of poverty borne out of inequality and exploitation, as well as his unequivocal condemnation of institutionalized racism triggered an avalanche of reactions that became one of the driving forces behind the decolonization and subsequent 'liberation' of Africans, Diaspora Africans, and other oppressed people of the world from the manacles of colonial oppression and servitude. Hence, those who founded the movement regarded the coronation of Haile Selassie, the last Emperor of Ethiopia, Elect of God, known as Jah as the fulfillment of a prophecy of deliverance and the downfall of *Babylon* (a reference to Western political and economic domination and cultural imperialism) and the deliverance of the black race. The Rastas adopted the term *Babylon* from the Christian scripture, a direct reference to its embodiment of the cultural ethos of the forces that worked against "the people of God", the Hebrew (Edmond 2003).

From its conception, Rastafari Movement considers all Africans in the diaspora as exiles in *Babylon* "destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to *Zion*, that is, Africa, the land of our ancestors or Ethiopia, the seat of Jah, Ras Tafari himself...." (Chevannes 1994,1). Thus, the Rastafari movement provided hope to the disenfranchised, strengthening displaced Africans with the promise that Jah Rastafari is watching over them and that they will someday be restored to the promised land of Africa which they lost by being taken to the Caribbean by slave traders. This suggests why repatriation has been the cornerstone of Rastafari belief, although this has changed for many modern-day Rastafarians. Even at that, Edmonds admits that "Rastafari represents an attempt of the African soul to free itself from the alienating fetters of colonial domination and exploitation and to recreate itself in the image of Africa" (2003, 42).

Internationalization and Diffusion to Africa

The Rastafari movement has transitioned from obscurity to a cultural phenomenon with widespread local and international following. Hansing describes it “as one of the leading Afro-Caribbean religions as well as most popular cultural trends in the world” (2006, 62). The process of internalization culminating to the diffusion to Africa originated in the 1970s when reggae started the global spread it enjoys today (Elias; 2010; Savishinsky 1994b). Sashivinsky (1994b, 21) identifies a combination of factors that aided the spread and popularity of Rastafarian philosophy and culture in West Africa. They include: (1) the widespread appeal and penetration of reggae music and the religious and sociopolitical messages embodied therein, (2) the ritual/secular use of cannabis and its associated trade, (3) the appropriation of Rasta-inspired fashions and (4) the missionary work carried out by Jamaican and Anglo-Jamaican Rastas. However, Hansing isolates reggae music and other popular cultural media as the primary catalysts in the movement’s international spread. She goes on to point out that “it is the only contemporary socio religious movement whose world-wide diffusion is directly tied to a medium of popular culture; reggae music” (2006, 61). In Africa, Rastafarianism in all its manifestations has been popularised by the musical form of reggae with strong youth identification particularly and its role of giving voice to the voiceless. It is not surprising that it has become a popular vehicle for meaningful social evaluation, social engagement, and change. As Spencer (1998, 27) observes, “Africans have welcomed reggae and wedded it to their national concerns. Of all continents, Africa has explored reggae the most as a means to chant down colonial oppression”.

But then, the literature of the phenomenon on the continent has limited geographical range. Savishinsky traces one of the initial penetrations of the Rastafari cultural motif in Africa to the early 1970s when Jamaican Rastas began settling on land emperor Haile Selassie reserved for blacks in the New World seeking repatriation to Africa. Surprisingly, the Marxist government accommodated them with forbearance despite their veneration of Haile Selassie. Perhaps, it was the presence of Jamaican Rastas in Ethiopia that appears to have stimulated some interest in Rastafari among a small contingent of urban-based youth, as evidenced perhaps by the numerous reggae bands that surfaced in the capital Addis Ababa during the early to mid-1980s.

On the manifestations of Rastafarianism in West Africa, Sashivinsky (1994a) claims it derives directly from Jamaican predecessors. “West African manifestations of Rastafari as I was quick to discover (during fieldwork), largely derived from and mirror their Jamaican counterparts forebears in both form and function” (p.125). According to Bergman (cited in Savishinsky) the reggae and the Rasta mystique billowing across Africa had climaxed in West Africa in the mid 1980s and became a dominant factor within the sub regional cultural landscape.

Chawane (2012), admits that there is no recorded history of the rise of Rastafarianism in South Africa. However, he found in the work of Oosthuizen elements of individual Rastas in Soweto during the late 1970s. Like in other parts of the world Johnson-Hill (1996) attributes the large-scale transfer of Rastafarianism from Jamaica to South Africa, to reggae music, which preached Garveyism and Ethiopianism, the bedrock of the Rastafarian movement. Jimmy Cliff was the first reggae artist from

Jamaica to visit South Africa in 1976 at the height of apartheid and performed in Soweto, Cape Town and Durban (Chawane, 2012). Despite the controversies that dogged his presence—over what was perceived as a breach of the international cultural boycotts in protest against the apartheid system, Chawane believes that Cliff's performance did much to popularize reggae among black South Africans with reggae music which sings against oppression in such tracks such as *House of Exile*.

Subsequent visits by both reggae flag bearers, Peter Tosh, and Bob Marley (who did the most to promote Rastafarianism globally) to Southern Africa in the early 1980s eighties added vigour to the spread of Rastafarianism in South Africa. While Bob Marley performed at the independence celebration of Zimbabwe in 1980, Peter Tosh performed in Swaziland during Christmas of 1983. These two visits contributed greatly towards drawing the attention of youth in Southern Africa to the movement culminating in the rise of local reggae stars among whom was the late Lucky Dube (sometimes considered the “father” of reggae music in South Africa) who not only had the greatest impact but also happened to be one of the most successful, innovative, and internationally renowned African reggae artists to emerge on the continent in recent.

Moyer (2005) provides us with a compelling case of the rise of the Rastafari/ reggae phenomenon among poor youths in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in Tanzania linked in part to Bob Marley, and the mass production of sounds and images associated with Rastafari culture—a trend that has become increasingly common over the last several years. According to Barnett, it is estimated that the Rastafari movement exists today in some shapes forms, and structure throughout most African nations. Besides, reggae music and some of the outward aesthetics of Rastafari are swiftly on the rise within the African continent in general particularly among young men living at the margins of global capitalism.

At this point, there is need to understand the close association between the Rastafari movement and reggae music; a movement founded on resistance. As a matter of fact, music goes beyond an expressive effort. Music *is* culture, and “music is an incredibly powerful (emotional) force” (Garofalo 2011, 727). It is “a determinant of diverse communities and can serve as a bridge between different people and communities by offering an accessible form of communication across cultural boundaries” (Mattern 1998, 7). Eyerman and Jamison (1998) offered one of the initial significant and stimulating explanatory efforts in the reciprocal relationship between social movements and music. Accordingly, they argue that “Movement ideas, images, and feelings were disseminated in and through popular music, and at the same time, the movements of the times influenced developments, in both form and content, in popular music” (1998, 108). What is important to note is that reggae music delivers social and political commentary. It is important that any social revolution must first begin with an awakening of individual social consciousness. While the imperial capitalist authorities established many social structures, organizations, and institutions to groom the masses for consensual social control, the content of reggae music attacks these very structures. Thus music and song of any culture, from any era, can serve as a window into their history and perceived realities. Since political sentiments have often been expressed musically, “people with political commitments have certainly turned to music as

a means of expressing their ideals, often with the expectation that listeners might be persuaded by the lyrics. And movements have often embraced songs that crystallize their core beliefs” (Roy 2010, 1).

As an instrument of oppressed and marginalized people, reggae music is critical of Babylon, capitalism, and the status quo, and is empowering at various levels. Today, the Rastafari Movement has become a ubiquitous popular culture deeply entrenched, and observable in the visual arts, performing arts, literature, ritual smoking of ganja (marijuana), the symbolism surrounding Emperor Haile Selassie I, and reggae. In many ways it was reggae music that brought the Rastas into the limelight. Reggae resonates with Rastafari, a spiritual resistance nucleus and Back-to-Africa identity which has been a triggering factor for the music, and has become an element of this culture on which the Rastafari Movement has made its boldest mark. To Murrell (1998, 1) ‘The long, natty dreads on the heads of Rastafarians, who fearlessly chant down Babylon with the help of reggae music, make Rastafari a highly visible movement and a globally powerful cultural force’. Echoing this, rock critics Davis and Peter Simon, (cited in King 2005, 90) believe that reggae propelled “the Rasta cosmology into the middle of the planet’s cultural arenas, and suddenly people want to know what all the chanting and praying and obsessive smoking of herb [marijuana] are all about”. Savishinsky places the interaction between Rastafari and reggae into one of its best perspectives when he argued that “for whereas many who have written about Rastafari claim it to have acted as a major source, inspiration, and catalyst in the creation of reggae”, and concluded that “nearly *all* acknowledge the fact that reggae has functioned, and in many instances continues to function, as the principal medium through which people the world over have acquired their knowledge and awareness of Rastafari (the lyrics of Jamaican reggae songs having been dominated since the early 1970s by Rastafarian themes, imagery, and symbolism)” (Savishinsky 1994a, 260). Today, the terms ‘reggae’ and ‘Rasta’ have become so closely linked in minds of many that they are frequently accorded the status of synonyms. But this popular perception of the movement is by no means an accurate one. Nevertheless, the framing processes used in reggae as a platform for political and social commentary has undoubtedly serve a critical role in sustaining the Rastafarian movement.

Rasta in The Gambia: Appropriation and Reinterpretation

The Gambia is the smallest country in the West African sub-region with a predominantly youthful population that is urbanizing rapidly. The adherence to the Rasta philosophy and culture remain a strong current among a conspicuous number of urban youth some of whom are migrants from within the West African sub-region. This resonates with the findings of Savishinky that Rastafari has in the course of its history drawn its largest and most committed international following from mainly from both disenfranchised, poor, and marginalized youth, as well as from among people whose autochthonous culture has been suppressed or supplanted by western modes, imposed during centuries of colonial and neo-colonial expansion. (Hansing 2005). In other ways, while reggae music not only holds a prominent place in the hearts and minds of this segment of the population it continues to serve as a major force in the urban pop music scene and to some extent appears to represent the ongoing assimilation by urban-based youth of the culture of the Diaspora.

Almost everything in any society has a potential for profit and the Rastafarian movement and reggae are no exception. The popularity of reggae in The Gambia has resulted in the development a ghettoized urban male youth subculture of pseudo-Rastafarian groups who appropriate the cultural trappings of Rastafarianism—listen to reggae music, braid or roll up their hair into dreadlocks, smoke marijuana, and imitate the dialect, without embracing its religious and ideological doctrines. The reasons, significance and potential implications for this have a lot to do with economic opportunism. The Gambia economy depends largely on agriculture, tourism and services but social mobility and successful livelihoods among youths are challenged by a number of barriers including unemployment, underemployment, poverty, drop-out from school, employability due to limited skills, and in some cases lack of all relevant connections to strategically positioned kin or patrons. In their attempt to beat looming poverty, many youths in The Gambia aspire to migrate to 'Babylon', a name for the West; perceived to be a dream destination and land flowing with numerous economic opportunities. The 'Babylon syndrome' in which young men yearn for, dream about, discuss, devote long evenings wishfully planning, and aspire towards travelling to the West in order to escape the misery encapsulated in Gambian existence, is a widespread ambition among this subculture.

Broadly speaking, being a *semester* (local word for Gambian youth who lives in the West visits the country on vacation) is a status symbol and as such this forms the core of their fantasies and aspirations since such an opportunity is perceived as the only sure and steady source of regular remittances back home, acquisition of local assets, investments, and self-fulfillment. Many options are explored in attempt to achieve this ambition including formal visa application at respective Western embassies of their choice, or, risking their lives in illegal trafficking scams, going through the 'back way'- attempting risky long sea trips all of which are fraught with high failure rate. The 'back way' option is usually a back-up exit strategy in the quest for better life overseas. In the neighbouring Senegal, Mbaye (2012) links this phenomenon with the following driving forces: i) willingness on the part of the potential illegal migrant to accept a substantial risk of death, ii) biased and erroneous expectations of potential migrants, highlighting the fact that people may base a risky decision on incorrect information, iii) the existence of a positive relationship between migrant networks and illegal migration motivations; which is attributable to the fact that that friends and relatives (FARs) who have already migrated help reduce the costs associated with illegal migration. In this case as he further argued, FARs can sometimes provide less than accurate information about their living conditions abroad, thus increasing the desire of potential migrants to undertake the move, iv) the fact that host countries' stricter immigration policies might not be effective and may backfire. For him, while they may deter potential legal migrants from migrating, they may not halt illegal migration. Such reasons may well explain the desperation for illegal migration from the Gambia in search of improved standard and quality of life in the West, after all the majority of the youth in both countries share similar socio cultural and economic experience due to geopolitical and historical links.

Invariably from impoverished families, unskilled, have little or no education, and are sometimes illiterate, poor and vulnerable; the seemingly feasible option for this set of young people is to take advantage of the opportunities in tourism for livelihood as beach boys or bumsters as they are called locally. What actually appears to be the attraction to the tourism industry as a soft-landing spot for survival is the seeming earnings made from it despite their lack of skills, training, and education. According to Nyanza et al (2005) such earnings for some were much better than most salaries and wages and were used to provide support for their friends and extended family.

Tourism is a very vibrant and productive sector second to agriculture in its place in the economy of The Gambia. It is an important foreign exchange earner and major source of both formal and informal employment. Indeed, while the sector's generated employment is projected to increase from an estimated 16,000 jobs in 2004 to around 35,000 jobs in 2020, its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product is targeted to increase from an estimated 13 percent in 2004 to around 18 percent by 2020 (See The Gambia Tourism Development Master Plan Final Report 2006). The tourism industry is geographically stretched along a 10 kilometre strip along the Atlantic coast, constituting the Tourism Development Area (TDA). It has attracted heavy investments in tourism development by foreign investors resulting in many foreign-owned tourist resorts and facilities. The country is primarily, a winter-sun packaged holiday destination that utilizes both formal and informal operational intermediaries. Among the core formal intermediaries are restrictive official tourist guides, tour operators, local shops and restaurants and other formalized and tourist services. Informal tourist sector intermediaries include the unlicensed guest houses, all those individuals and micro enterprises which engage with tourists and the tourism industry, but are not members of the Gambian Hotel Association or the Tourism and Travel Association, and bumsters who by the fluidity of their activities act as informal guides and culture brokers provide opportunities for the tourists to meet the local community outside the official tourist space. Perhaps, it is within the context of the structure of both intermediaries as well as the infrastructure surrounding this package tourism that creates the permeable boundary that creates the need for the bumster (McCombes, 2012).

Fashioning themselves as Rastafarians; they wear dreads, listen almost exclusively to reggae, and smoke marijuana. As a predominantly Muslim country it makes sense to perceive them as embracing and experimenting with products and lifestyles that are un-Islamic. However, it could be argued that for some Gambian youth the choice of 'Rasta' identity is borne out of the desire either for a lifestyle or subculture which to them provides an alternative to the traditional world of their parents and elders which not only marginalizes them but has become irrelevant to their needs. Along this line of thinking, Beyat and Herrera (2010) see the Muslim youth in both the global North and South as navigating between asserting their youthfulness and often times their Muslimness within a threshold mediated by a host of social, economic and political settings within which they operate. In this respect, "the Muslim youth, located in the process of globalization ... share many significant points of convergence with their global generational counterparts, especially when it comes to concerns about livelihood (Beyat and Herrerer 2010: 362). It thus becomes a fact that "many individuals observe the cultural aspect of religion

without necessarily adhering to the entire doctrinal ethos, moralities and spirituality (Nyanza and Bah 2010:112). For most of these Rastas, there is more money to be made offering services to tourists than any other form of options. After all it is only a matter of time before they meet the European or American benefactor who will make their dreams come through.

As such, the Rasta identity gives them access to tourist space and time to explore and court friendship with female tourists, preferably middle-aged and elderly single and unaccompanied white female tourists or 'toubab' (as Westerners are locally called) believing that they are all rich. This identity is also used to signal the wearer's availability as escorts for female foreign tourists. Consciously or otherwise these tourists reinforce this image of affluence in the way they display and flash money around; with some women doing so deliberately for the purpose of seducing the men into a relationship with them. For some of these females, tourism provides requisite latitude for unhindered behavioural and sexual expression that is constrained by the home environment (Van Wijk 2007). Perhaps, it not impossible that as Pruitt and LaFont (1995) suggest that "while some of them want to redefine confining gender roles or engage in "forbidden" interracial relationships; others simply desire a new "cultural experience" (425-8). In these tourist zones, these bumsters advertise their carefully constructed Rastafarian identity by shaking their dreadlocks dry on beaches and further employ a range of seductive technique to establish ambiguous relationships as a prelude to initiating conducive climate for the provision of romantic and sexual services. From the point of view of McCombes (2012) this attitude is "not through personal desire but in order implicitly or explicitly to obtain money or goods of some sort and the possibility of upward social mobility" (2012: 300), and in other cases in exchange for possibility of foreign travel, a Western work permit, permanent residence or citizenship overseas (Nyanzi et al., 2005). Given these antecedents, the biggest accusation levelled against bumsters by other segments of the society is that 'they sleep their way out of The Gambia with old White women'. Pattison (2012 1995: 304) places them into one or more of the following compartments: "(1) Mr. Friendly; (2) Mr. Businessman /Entrepreneur; (3) Mr. Casanova; (4) Mr. Criminal/Scammer; (5) Mr. Disguised/Sophisticated bumster, and (6) Mr. Sympathy Seeker". Nevertheless, in the eyes of the female tourist, these bumsters seemingly possess many favorable qualities waiting to be explored. From the perspective of Pruitt and Lafonte (1995: 431). "The penchant foreign women have for men with dreadlocks is fueled by the mystique associated with the dreadlock singers of the international reggae music culture who project an image of the Rastaman as a confident, naturally powerful, and especially virile man". In fact, a study by Sociologist Joane Nagel in the Caribbean found that given the stereotypes of black men as a highly sexual and masculine local, dark-skinned black men with dread locks receive a greater degree of attention from foreign women than those without. . The Rastaman is thus constructed as the exotic Other, more passionate, more natural, and most important more sexually tempting. So, why these female tourists arrive with their finances alongside their preconceived ideas of sexual desire and exoticism stemming from their ideas about race, sexuality, class, difference; the Caribbean men capitalize on Rastafarian motifs in order ally themselves with the conceptions of the visitors. Such reason may well explain why some bumsters adopt the Rasta identity in The Gambia.

Policy makers, youth advocates, and the media are critical of this trending youth subculture and describe it as not only a dangerous pastime but a dissipation of potentials and resources. Even the leadership of the country has severally assailed this attitude and blames the youth for choosing the way of illusion and day dreaming of migrating to the West at all costs rather than taking advantage of the emerging educational opportunities as well as important policy frameworks including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), The Gambia Priority Employment Programme (GAMJOBS) and Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE). By way of elaboration, the PRSP was implemented in two phases (2003-2005, and 2007-2011) as a medium term planning framework for reducing poverty in the country. The latter was developed around five cardinal pillars in attempt to improve on the gaps and lapses identified in the former as follows: i) Creating an enabling policy environment for rapid economic growth and poverty reduction ii) Enhancing the capacity and output of productive sector iii) Improve coverage of basic social services and social protection needs of the poor and vulnerable iv) Enhance governance systems and build the capacity of local communities and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to play an active role in Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction v) Cross-cutting Issues (IMF Country Report, 2011). To further address the growing unemployment and poverty situation, the Government of The Gambia, with assistance from ILO and UNDP, launched the GAMJOBS. The overall objective of the programme was to demonstrate the centrality of employment creation for poverty reduction with particular focus on the youth and women. Its priority action plan consists of four key areas: i) Mainstreaming employment in macroeconomic sector and social policies. ii) Strengthen labour market policies and institutional reforms. iii) Establish a Gambia Enterprise and Skill Development and Training Fund (GETFUND) for employment and job creation). iv) Promotion of labour intensive technologies in public works/programme to create employment and sustainable livelihoods (The National Employment Policy and Strategies 2010-2014). PAGE was developed to be will be implemented during the period 2012 to 2015 as a successor to The Gambia's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper II. Its main thrust is mainly to improve among other things employment levels, per capita income, social services, gender equity and The Gambia's economic competitiveness. To do this the national priorities revolved around sustainably exploiting agriculture, tourism, infrastructure and other natural resources, and producing conducive environment for a private sector led economic development as well as and partnering with civil society organizations to provide relevant social services and protection for all (PAGE 2012-1015). A common strand that runs across these policy framework packages is the provision for training and vocational skill acquisition for sustainable livelihood among the youth.

Harassment of tourist by bumsters in The Gambia is well documented (Gregg and Trillo, 2003; Master Plan Study, 2005; Carlisle, 2010). During the beginning of the 2002-2003 tourist season, the Gambian government established a tourist Police Force which, in collaboration with the national tourism authority, launched an 'anti-bumster' campaign during to control and regulate the menace of the group. Further effort on the part of the government was to round up obvious-looking bumsters, shaved off their dreadlocks, and routinely mounted surveillance within the Tourism Development Area (TDA). Bumsters were outraged by the action. While some permanently fled the business others operated covertly, and

those willing were offered an opportunity to train for various vocational The anti-bumster operation was viewed with mixed-feelings by some groups including human rights activists, tourists, investors and proprietors in the tourism industry, independent economic analysts and journalists. According to Nyanzi et al. (2005) proprietors in the tourist industry were vocal in welcoming the initiative as a solution to the 'threat' that bumsters posed to profits earned from tourists and toubabs or White foreigners. Despite the general negative perception of bumsters, Carlisle (2010) finds that they arguably justify their actions as wanting a share in the tourist expenditure as they may find it difficult to secure alternative means of sustenance.

Thus as the economic fangs bite harder, hanging around middle-aged, and elderly white female tourists as a prelude to marry their way out of poverty to a perceived comfortable life in the West offers an alternative space to refashion meanings to success among these male youths. This mindset is further reinforced by the success stories of other youths whom they consider to have gained some measurable sense of accomplishment in this enterprise; hence their desire to build their pathways to success however unconventional.

It must be recognized that analyzing the encounter and relationship between the bumster and the female tourist is not a straight forward task because they hold contradictory images concerning the nature of the relationship. It is a material encounter for the 'Rasta'; given the desire for Western materialism and a Western lifestyle, as noted previously, and an emotional encounter of love and companionship for the female tourist because she want to become more exotic, carefree and sexy (Pattison 1995). Besides, "travel allows some Western women to sexualize their bodies in ways that would be difficult to achieve while maintaining their honour back home (Taylor 2000, 46). While this may be indeed be an exaggerated description, power and control remain essential component of this encounter, especially when it involves a relationship that take place in developing countries. If that is the case, the core question becomes who exploits who in this relation, and to an extent, whether it is a mutually beneficial arrangement. In The Gambia scenario it is argued that the 'Rastas' are exploited by female tourists (the same way men exploit female prostitutes) since the economic power and idiosyncrasies of the female tourists dictates the gamut of the relationship with them. (McCombe 2012). In The Gambia, as in other destinations, these female tourists rediscover their sense of womanliness and sexuality by being sexually desired by their partner. Women who are either on the shelf or who feel shunned by men in the West over issues of height, , weight, and not being attractive find that in The Gambia all this is reversed. If that is the case, the idea of control on the part of middle-aged, and elderly white female tourists from Europe and North America holds true in so far as these white female tourists can use their greater economic power and or racialized identities to exert control over the relationship. Such control means that these women can secure compliance in the relationship and also forestall the risk of being jilted, abandoned or humiliated by the bumster. But in other ways, power could be relational. For instance, "the wearing of dreadlocks also signifies sexual prowess, marijuana, naturalness, erotic-exoticness, and liberation from all forms of oppression" (Kibicho 2009, 117). Driven

by this notion, Pattison rejects the claim of uneven power locus and argues that the Gambian male equally has reciprocal power, and writes:

“The male Gambians use their bodies as a form of power to attain the aspiration of a Western lifestyle and to take control of their livelihood. Appearance is important in terms of the construction of identity of the Gambians. The boys’ deliberately grow long dreadlocks to fit the image of the Rasta, in the belief that women find them exotic, ‘rugged’, and masculine. They wear tight shirts to show off their muscular bodies” (2012: 224).

Bumsters feel empowered when they win the affection of the rich Western women who are in most cases considerably older than themselves. From their perspective, power comes not necessarily through sex but what the seduction of the Western women represents. Power and control also emerges in the way the boys treat the women: seduce them for their sex and money and then abandon them when opportunity knocks. Paradoxically, Kibicho finds the bumsters’ male-assertiveness a momentary posturing since they quickly condescend to the feminine subject position in their encounter with the Western female tourists. Perhaps, from a cultural standpoint “it is sickeningly un-macho for a man in traditional in traditional African patriarchal culture to giggle and flirt, and to walk down the streets holding hands with a woman” (Mwangi 1995, p.2 cited in Kibicho p, 117). Further to this aberration as Backwesegha (1982) argues is that “all the things a beach boy must do to get a Western woman to go out with him demeans his masculinity in local cultural terms,” (Backwesegha, p. 17 cited in Kibicho p, 117). With this in mind, he see the whole idea of going out with a elderly Western female tourist for material and pecuniary reasons a loss of self-control and negation of local social norms. But even at that, Pattison believes that in The Gambia, the bumsters employ sex as a form of power and resistance to the exclusionary nature of the tourism industry perceived to suppress and exclude them. The material, sexual encounter gives the Gambian power over his peers; through the conquering of the rich Western foreigner; through acquisition of wealth and through image. There are high expectations and peer pressure for a young local male to get into a relationship with a white foreign female. Many Gambian males use White, Western women as symbols of wealth, respect and power. For the Gambians the older the older and richer the female is, the greater the respect for the male amongst his peers. There is a certain respect or social standing given to those local people in a relationship the richer, older women is likely to take the bumster overseas. Kibicho found in Kenya a similar defense mechanism the bumsters employ different guises to mask their subservient feminine roles; often stressing and asserting their masculinity to their audience; extraordinarily emphasizing on their sexual prowess, stressing their ability to control their Western women lovers, and consuming alcohol in unwise quantity to free them from social rules and responsibility for their actions.

From the perspective of Kibicho, it could be said that that the bumster female tourist relationship serves dual purpose in that it provides the former with an opportunity to escape from economic hardship while at the same time creating a situation in which they can at least pretend to control the Western female tourist who is in a structurally more powerful position.

Conclusion

Although the Rastafari influence is visibly present in the Gambia its symbolism has been adopted by the bumster subculture many of whom possess little or no insight into the deeper historical, religious and sociopolitical significance of the movement. To them, it more of a survival strategy and a means to become part of a global life to which otherwise they have no access; through encounters and relationships formed with Western female tourists in the tourism space for financial and material gains. Although this encounter is characterized by a complex web of negotiations of power and control on both parties, the Western female tourists exercise a greater degree of dominance since they use their greater economic resources to exercise power and control over the relationship into which they enter with the bumsters. It is very clear that the bumsters' desire for economic gains in such encounters is in direct opposition to authentic Rastafari ideology. For many of the women seduced by romance encounters, the actual experience can unmask the projected fantasies/myths as some of the men abandon their women they moment they arrive the West. In this sense, the bumsters are only pseudo-Rastas that commodify Rasta motifs; they utilize Rasta imagery to capitalize off of the exotic expectations of tourists.

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