'BEFORE WHITES WERE DEVILS, NOW WE ARE MARRYING THEM.'
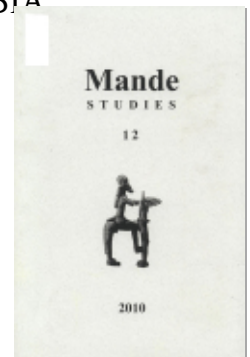# MORAL AND RACIAL DISCOURSES ON ROMANCE TOURISM IN THE GAMBIA

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'BEFORE WHITES WERE DEVILS, NOW WE ARE MARRYING THEM.' MORAL AND RACIAL DISCOURSES ON ROMANCE TOURISM IN THE GAMBIA

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INTRODUCTION

To marry an older white woman, health-wise is not good for the boy. Every time with sex you are feeding and refreshing the woman with new cells. This is worth a million to them. They will do whatever it takes to get the sex. Before, people thought a white person is the devil, now they are marrying them (informant).

Cross-cultural encounters present a fascinating view of the effects of globalization on a society. Gambia's coastal area is one of those places, where contact is made between Westerners and the 'exotic Other'. Especially women are attracted to the local youth and men they meet in their tourist locations and the latter seem to be happy to fulfill their wishes[1]. Many young Gambians apparently set aside local traditions and their masculine pride to openly court females of their mother's or even grandmother's age. The most conspicuous relationships are those of 'beachboys'[2] with female tourists, but the phenomenon is certainly not confined to the beach; especially in the larger coastal area, many boys and men give it a try. The ensuing – short or long term – relationships, frequently leading to marriage, at first glance contravene all conventions of gender roles and local traditions. This potential clash of local and Western values, as well as the disparity of gender roles, are issues that may produce resignation, resistance or repulsion in Gambian society. Focusing on 'ordinary' Gambians of various strata of the population, this article explores the moral and racial discourses caused by these relationships. I argue that – contrary to abounding interethnic marriages – the interracial relationships of young Gambians with white women are widely condemned, although explanations and extenuations diverge between people involved in or depending on such relationships and, conversely, those who look at it from the outside. Next to the obvious justifications of economic and social benefits, an intriguing discourse surfaces on witchcraft emanating from racialization and morality.

First, I briefly reflect on fieldwork and Gambia's societal context, and in the next section I discuss related theories. Then, since the analysis is positioned at the local level, authentic narratives disclose the popular discourses on local 'romance tourism'. Finally, I summarize the main strands and hypothesize on revelations from the discourses.

Fieldwork reflections, methods and ethical issues

Fieldwork put me in the midst of the matter, while at the same time causing confusion about my intentions[3]. My personal characteristics match the description of the beachboys' 'target', and at times I found myself betwixt and between the local community and the white female tourists[4]. On top of my outsider position with regard to Gambian society, I was excavating opinions about a specific 'Otherness' within Gambian society itself.

Next to participant-observation and interviews[5], I used two other qualitative methods: Focus group interviews[6] are very constructive as they allowed me to fade into the background, letting the participants control the conversation and have the kinds of discussion they might have in their daily lives, thereby disclosing more information about sensitive topics (cf. Hollander 2004:607−609). Furthermore, attending classes at the University of the Gambia enabled me to ask my co-students to write an essay on my subject. The data analysis finally led me to grasp the various dimensions of Gambian interpretations of 'romance tourism'[7].

Regarding ethical questions as to the role and power relations of the researcher versus the informants, two issues are worth mentioning. I decided not to use an informed consent letter, out of the perceived pressure that comes with 'official papers' in Gambian society[8]. Instead, to all informants I extensively explained my intentions, the purpose of the research, and asked permission to record the conversation, to which all but two agreed. Most locals are very poor, and money is always an issue in contact between Europeans and locals. Contrary to daily life situations, never a request for money was made before or after an interview[9].

Gambian societal context

In order to understand the impact of relationships between locals and white female tourists, I will briefly explain customary marriage arrangements and colonial heritage, and attempt to draft some characteristics of the European females.

In Gambia, the dichotomy of urban and rural systems creates great differences that impact mutually. The larger part of Gambia consists of rural society, which still mostly adheres to a traditional system of marriage. Here procreation, labor division and survival of the community still determine the selection of a marriage partner. The economic prospects of the groom are of great importance; for brides, reproductive potential and health are vital. Husbands – often in polygyny – have power over their wives and household. In contrast, in the urban areas a developing money economy makes people dependent on income, and the motivation to have large families becomes less.

In the last few decades, the linkage between the agrarian and urban areas created a discontinuity of the exclusive subsistence production in the rural areas. Instead, in order to send their children to school, pay taxes and buy household needs, farmers developed a demand for cash and started to sell their produce rather than just consume it. This dual economy prompted a rural–urban drift, since the booming tourist industry not only offers job opportunities but especially prospective contacts and relationships with tourists, preferably women. This contrasts with the attitude during and even long after the colonial period, where a local male-European female relationship was much disapproved[10]. After all, during the colonial period only male – rather than female – Europeans came to Gambia. These Europeans would often marry a local woman, while the opposite – European women marrying local men – rarely happened. After independence, the only Gambians that went to Europe were young men seeking higher education. If one came back married to a European woman, the family would be hostile, feeling that the person had abandoned them: "Your family would disown you, because they expected you to come back and save the family from poverty. A European woman is going to snatch the person from his family and instead of gain, they have lost him" (informant).

Ninety-five percent of the population adheres to Islam and there are various ethnic groups, of which Mandinka, Wolof and Fula are the main ones. Ethnicity is often regarded as an aspect of social and political – rather than cultural – relations, linked to the construction and preservation of boundaries. As Barth notes (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001:127), the fact that groups perceive themselves as different, and interact on that assumption, proving their difference to themselves and each other, is an indication of different ethnicities. This means that ethnic groups do not exist independently, but function in relation to each other (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001:127). While family relations remain a major concern, these do not prevent people to find a marriage partner in a different

ethnic group. Indeed, almost all groups have a history of interethnic marriage (Hernlund and Shell–Duncan 2007; Timmer 2000; Janson 2002), so much even that the relative peace, compared to other countries in the region, is said to derive from this: "There are no tribal tensions. We are able to bring it down to a joking level more so than to be antagonistic, so we can live together" (informant). Regarding this acceptance of interethnic marriage and marriages between European men to local women during and after colonialism, the ambivalent views on relationships and marriages between local youngsters and older European females are even more intriguing.

      To complete this context section, I will spend a few words on the western females. In the wake of the second feminist wave, women[11] gained sexual freedom and status , as well as increased financial freedom, affording them more possibilities to travel to exotic places. To sketch an average 'white female', is a venture that inevitably leads to stereotyping, as also occurs in the local narratives later on[12]. While roughly half of the females are characterized by variety, the other half shows a middle or working class woman in her forties to sixties, frequently obese, coming from the UK, Holland, Belgium or Scandinavian countries. Generally through a package tour, she stays at a hotel, goes to the beach, and spends the evening dining and in the disco. She dresses in bikini or topless beach wear (often displaying one or more tattoos) or revealing evening attire with gaudy jewelry. When not from the UK, her English is poor. She is sometimes accompanied by a European woman friend, who either also has a local boyfriend or is the odd-man-out, bored and unhappy while her cohort entertains herself with her lover, flaunting affectionate behavior. The woman friend obviously visits Gambia for the first time, and later in her holiday may or may not fall for one of the men that encircle her. And so the story continues, fulfilling white females' desire for the exotic (Africa) and the erotic (a lover), while the bystanders raise eyebrows. Whether or not these women have a relationship at home, remains unanswered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This essay's subject relates to two partly coinciding theoretical frames: Firstly, mass tourism as a product of the recent globalization has significant consequences for the identity construction of the local community. Secondly, the narratives of relationships between older European females and young locals intertwine with notions of gender, race, and witchcraft. To understand these discourses, they need to be contextualized theoretically.

Globalization and identity: 'Flux and fix'[13]

During the globalization of recent decades, the classic vision of cultural identity as an integral, authentic unity has changed, causing the concept of centre and periphery to become obsolescent. Everywhere, "people's awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows seems to trigger a search for fixed orientation points and action frames, as well as determined efforts to *affirm old and construct new boundaries*, (...) [causing] a tension between globalization and identity, between 'global flows' and 'cultural closure'" (Geschiere and Meyer 1998:602, emphasis added). Cultural identity of individuals and localities is preserved through a complex of factors, "whereby elements from distinct and separate local cultures, from the centre as well as the periphery, become mixed and integrated into meaningful local forms" (Staring et al. 1997:12). An upshot of globalization, tourism as a 'cultural border zone'[14] has been the focus of various researchers (e.g. Aitchison 2001; Appadurai 1996; Church and Coles 2007; Hannerz 1996; Urry 2011); this notion elaborates on Turner's 'liminal state' (Turner 1969: 359-363), in which conventional calculations of safety and risk are disrupted. Tourists tend to take more risks than they do at home, such as the willingness to risk illness through eating contaminated food, drinking unsafe water, or having sexual relationships with a complete stranger, because the exotic visual consumption places such activities in a different context from what is normal and everyday[15]. Therefore, tourism became a catalyst for the re-interpretation of identity, promoting self-consciousness and cohesion among members of the local community, who depend on or are affected by the tourist industry, at the same time producing categories of 'us' and 'them'.

Between the youths striving for or involved in affairs and the other locals, power relations can also be discerned, since the former, functioning as culture brokers, "in order to be successful in their role as mediator and innovator, must have their behavior sanctioned in some way by the resident community and must maintain some sort of acceptable identity within the community" (Brown 1992:361−369). Hence, the continuum of tourist impact on local society − from the romantic 'experience of the noble savage' to the 'fatal impact' on culture and social coherence − lacks the recognition that society is dynamic and will adapt to changes in time. To refer to the locals as one integrated category, therefore, is problematic.

Race and gender: who enchants whom?

After the Second World War the concept of 'race' was embraced by the Pan-Africanist movement as a central organizing principle inherited from the West,

and was reversed to a positive self-identity and a basis for political resistance: "It was the notion [of race] that had bound [Africans] together in the first place. The lesson the Africans drew from the Nazis (...) was not the danger of racism but the falsehood of the opposition between a humane European "modernity" and the barbarism" of the non-white world" (Appiah 1992:6). As Miles notes (Wodak and Reisigl 1999), "there is only a belief that there are such things (races – MN), (...) used by some social groups to construct an Other (and therefore the Self) in thought as a prelude to exclusion and domination, and by other social groups to define Self (and so to construct an Other) as means of resisting that exclusion" (Wodak and Reisigl 1999:179–180). Thus, the categorization by presumed biological traits and the claim of a shared African heritage through slavery, colonialism and exploitation, became a social construct (re)shaped by the new power dimensions of globalization, excluding outsiders on false grounds and creating problematic notions of Self and Other.

Based on Otherness, Gambian-western relationships are surely activated by 'visual consumption'. Various authors (Bhabha 1994; Douglas 2002; Saunders 2002; Stoler 1989; Ware 1997) show that foreignness is at the same time disgusting and fascinating, linked with "physical labor while exoticized by an association with carnal pleasures" (Saunders 2002:92). "The tropics provided a site of European pornographic fantasies", wherein "sexuality is the most salient marker of Otherness" (Stoler 1989:46). Precisely this appearance of mystifying physical orientation, the 'ultimately beautiful oversexed' body of the African man, may well be an enchantment for Western females. However, in the context of transnational space, gender and Otherness are ambiguous, since there must be "simultaneous attention to local contexts of power and meaning and to the translocal interchanges that both reaffirm and challenge locality" (Ebron 1997:228)[16]. Also, "women's erotic subjectivities are re-forged through travel where culturally situated discourses about gender and sex present both new 'opportunities' and old constraints" (Frohlick 2008:132). Thus, gendered manifestations are not universal but manipulated by cultural contexts, and race and gender cannot be investigated without situating them in mutual perspective. The white female tourists, empowered by national status, race and wealth, obtain a – momentary – dominance from male supremacy at home. And the local men do not perceive themselves as victims, but feel in control of the situation[17]. They use an intricate psychological game to lure the females into relationships; the economic discrepancy is skillfully neutralized by a self-confident and assertive approach in manipulating the female tourists for the purpose of financial gain. For instance, instead of emphatically discussing

the costs of their 'guiding', they find ways to naturally make the tourist pay for their consumption and entertainment. This power role reversal makes the women feel that they are in control, therefore they perceive less pressure to become sexually involved, while at the same time the youngsters do not feel exploited[18].

Apparently, for many white women ideal features of African manliness are associated with Rasta looks, symbolizing the exotic and erotic Other and the archetypal masculine. Especially beachboys adopt the outward appearance and behavior of the Rastafarian identity. On closer consideration, these externals are problematic, for – contrasting to Rastafarian religion – they pursue a wealthy life and their success in 'business' is displayed by luxury gadgets, like mobile phones, walkmans and jewelry[19]. Because of their 'feminine' behavior, such as holding hands with women and hugging in public, "[their] construction of gender in 'romance tourism' makes the beachboys successful in the emerging culture of tourism, but disqualifies them in the eyes of their own community" (Dahles 1997:124−132). Yet, far more local men, are (trying to get) involved in a relationship with older white females and their behavior also clashes with local society's values, as their gender constructions and agency are a reversal of local male–female provider–consumer roles. After all, these men also live on their European partners' expenses and offer subordinate chores to please them. Apparently, the local community often denounces their imprudent behavior, and occasionally they are not able – or allowed? – to support a local wife[20]. The men who fail to find a lasting relationship with a Western woman, remain unmarried and are regarded as a total failure (see Brown 1992; Dahles 1997; Herold et al. 2001).

Witchcraft

While the concepts of magic and witchcraft have been interwoven with African traditional life, since the 1990s studies have revealed their connection to globalization and 'modernity'[21]. Writing about witchcraft is 'tricky business'; to avoid the risk of exoticizing Africans, generalizing the phenomenon, or sensationalism, some aspects need consideration. Whether or not witchcraft is 'real' is a typical 'white man's' question; to Africans, witches and witchcraft are an urgent reality and all sorts of events are seen as direct consequences of human acts (Geschiere 1997: 22). Besides, while Western notions about witchcraft contain mainly evil, in Africa it is ambiguous because it can be used maliciously but also constructively to protect oneself, to reinforce authority or to

succeed in life. Accordingly, the terminology cannot be translated one-to-one, but since informants used the word 'witchcraft', I shall follow their practice.

Trying to make sense of changes in society, especially related to wealth and 'modern' life, explanations of witchcraft fill the gaps in a chain of occurrences. Moore and Sanders (2001) suggest that "witchcraft is perhaps best understood as a matter of social diagnostics rather than belief" and "witchcraft and the occult in Africa are a set of discourses on morality, sociality and humanity: on human frailty" (Moore and Sanders 2001:20). Witchcraft discourses articulate a deep-seated ambiguity of repulsion and attraction, for "anybody can be a witch, especially those who are involved with new ways of life" (Ciekawy and Geschiere 1998:817). In egalitarian societies, the focus is on collective objectives and any ambition or divergence adds an element of tension. This environment of intense relationships strongly favors the belief in magic, sorcery, witchcraft and all the fears, practices and concepts that go with it. Consequently, the vast majority of accusations and rituals involve relations between peers, kin, and co-wives: "Witchcraft is the dark side of kinship: it is the frightening realization that there is jealousy and therefore aggression within the family, where there should be only trust and solidarity" (Geschiere 1997:11). Also, money is strongly associated with power and popular comments link the (im)morality of power with occult sources of wealth. There is an ambivalent stance toward prosperity and power; while money can bring prestige and esteem, there is also suspicion about its origins and hence a possible link with occult forces. Witchcraft therefore can be interpreted as a form of human agency (Ciekawy and Geschiere 1998; Meyer 1998; Taussig 1977).

POPULAR VIEWS

In the following, I introduce a selection of interview fragments. These authentic narratives[22] on the occurrence of Gambian–Western relationships are divided into two categories: morality and religion, and racialization, the latter sometimes linked to the phenomenon of witchcraft.

Morality and religion

At the Ministry of Justice marriages take place every day, but unfortunately, there are no data. The marriage registrar I spoke with estimates that 98 percent of these concern marriages of Gambians to Europeans[23]. "The last ten years it has been boosting. Love is the bracket they use, but if you look at it honestly, you cannot say that a 70-year-old lady, who is getting married to a twenty-something boy, is in love." I tell her about my encounters with 'ordinary' locals

– desk clerks, policemen, virtually everybody – copying the *bumster* habits. "Yes, all the lower cadre, they are looking for additional opportunities. They are using them (the European women), and those marriages don't last more than two or three years. (..) But it doesn't prevent the wife of coming back and marrying another African guy. Are we going to stop people getting married? No. It's their legal right. They can marry whoever they want. It's nobody's business" (Aminata, marriage registrar).

"The phenomenon is not constricted to the category of beachboys, but this group is used as scapegoats for a trend in society. The term *bumster* has become derogatory, utilized to stereotype a group of young people, unemployed, for simply looking for greener pastures. It is a reflection of a society where there is 'civilized begging'. Rather than going in the street wearing all these ragged clothes and saying 'do you have some butut[24] for me', now it takes another form: 'can I help you? I'm a trustworthy person. I can save you from people who may harass you. (...).' The tourists started interaction with the young males; expectations were created and relationships became a commodity. Culturally, it changes the occurrence of polygamy, since Europeans will not want that kind of relationship. So, in order to get children, the men will either develop relationships with younger local women in secret, or anticipate that this relationship is going to come to an end by his wife's death. Eventually, families involved become more tolerant to the age gap. They tend to see these marriages as an asset, and the youths gain status and high esteem. This creates a gap between the poor and the well-to-do, as the latter can easily criticize" (Basiro, social scientist).

In an essay, a student of the University of The Gambia reveals: "Considering Gambia's economic situation compared to Europe, coupled with sexual desire of old European women, many believe that sharing a romantic relationship can be the only way out in the realization of their objectives. Therefore, images and age difference are not the problem, hence their economic conditions could be improved and sexual desires met" (Mohammed, student). Another student questions poverty as a drive for the relationship: "Greed and that insatiable materialistic desire [incite to] have a share of the partner's wealth. It is not uncommon to see the beneficiaries of such a relationship driving in flashy cars and living in well-constructed houses. Most youths in developing countries like Gambia perceive Europe and America as a land of perfection, a utopia characterized as abundant economic opportunities and comfort. I personally will never marry an aged and wrinkled face European woman just because of economic gains. That would be a misrepresentation of my intellectual

status[25]. Often those involved are either illiterate opportunists or school dropouts who spend their lives along the beach hunting for an opportunity to grab any foolish grandmother as a so-called wife. It is considered a taboo to marry a person of one's grandparent's age. Society seems to be gradually endorsing these ungodly activities as most people here live below the poverty line" (Alhaji, student).

"I am counseling an English lady. She just had her divorce last week. I told her: 'Madame, you are the one who threw yourself into the well of your own pollution. What is an old woman like you looking for sex in Africa? That boy does not love you!' I cannot understand this stupidity of Europeans. But that woman was trying to convince herself that the boy was in love" (Lamin, newspaper director).

The Qadi represents the Islamic Court where justice is spoken and marriages are registered according to Sharia. Since marrying in this court is only possible for Muslims, a European non-Muslim must convert to Islam and apparently, many do so, although – as in the Ministry of Justice – there are no data. "Old women in Europe either never married or they are a widow. There is no hope for marrying in Europe. Therefore we need to help. They come here to look for a husband whom they can persuade to marry by offering money and facilities. It is to the benefit of the woman. There is a problem though: marriage is for offspring, and the youth cannot expect it from this marriage. That is contrary to religion. So youths marrying without another woman for offspring, are somehow lost in life. In religion, a man age twenty-five can get married to a woman age thirty-five, because the Prophet also married his first wife when he was twenty-five and she was forty. It's not prohibited but it is not good." He then explains about power and agency in marriage: "If the married couple has an agreement on not taking a second wife, you should stick to that. You discuss it, and if she agrees (to a second wife - MN) that is o.k.. In Sharia law, the husband is responsible for clothing, feeding, and shelter. Sometimes the woman is wealthy; then she can help him, but she is free to choose. Even the Prophet, his first wife was wealthier and she helped him" (Ebrima, qadi). An official from the same court supplies: "If one of the parties fails to fulfill the obligations, this will lead to the other party loosing interest in the marriage. These women marry for sex, and if the boy cannot fulfill sex, the marriage can be ended. To marry an older white woman, health-wise is not good for the boy. Every time with sex you are feeding and refreshing the woman with new cells. This is worth a million to them (the white women – MN). To buy land or a compound is only a small thing; they will do whatever it takes to get the sex. Before, people thought

a white person is the devil, now they are marrying them. We do not support it. We even preach this in the mosque. Old white women get pride from marrying a young African. They come to Africa to have sex. If you stop them from doing that, they will die there (in Europe – MN). It's for the security of the old women; the only disadvantage is that the boys will only have one wife. If Europe will stop their women from marrying Gambians, they will harm their own people. For us there will be no difference, because the youths will marry anyway." When asked how these youngsters cope with that role reversal in Gambian–European marriages, he answers: "It might not create a problem. It's just temporarily; they are just looking for their income. Anything else is pushed aside for the time being, until they have got their way. It's definitely prostitution, because the boys go after the white ladies to have sex with them, because when they have sex with them, they get money" (Famara, court official).

"Morally, it is unreligious being in love prior to a formal contract presided by an elderly or a religious leader. This is seen as a violation of our cultural rites equal to an omen" (Saja, student). "Such pre-marital romantic relationships are contrary to the teachings of both Christianity and Islam. Adultery and fornication – often the characteristics of such relationships – are very sinful in the eye of God. People of different sex do not go kissing or hugging openly. This is embarrassing behavior; even when they are married it is not done!" (Alhaji, student). The changing values of Gambians are allegedly caused by the morality and behavior of Westerners: "We must not lose sight of the fact that Europeans trigger to some extent these romantic relationships. One of the objectives of some tourists visiting Africa is to satisfy their sexual desires. Most often than not, you see tourists using their gifts and money to entice innocent and poor African boys into romantic relationships which subsequently lead into marriages" (Alhaji). "Most tourists, especially the uneducated ones, visit Gambia just to satisfy their sexual desire, which they cannot get at home" (Foroyaa[26]:23–26 February 2006, my emphasis).

In a focus group interview with students, one of the youths mused over a relationship he had had with a Western woman: "I found it very hard. Because every time you had to kiss, it does not matter where. And every time she wants it, you have to do it, understand? But that is not African! We Africans we believe in private. African culture is beginning to lose its value to European culture. In traditional African society this act or relationship is been frowned upon. Such a person looses respect or is outcast by the society. This is beginning to fade away" (Nyanamang, student). "The sight of a lady dressed almost to

nakedness, parading the street holding hands with a man is seen as European way of doing things, but a threat to the Gambian Code of Conduct" (Saja).

A different issue comprises "health implications attributed to such relationships. In a world of sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV/AIDS, it is indeed very risky behavior to marry a person whose long years of sexual history are not known to you. In fact, there is that common but unproven belief among many conservative Gambian elders that STDs and HIV/AIDS penetrated Gambia as a result of tourism" (Alhaji).

Racialization

Alternative interpretations draw on African culture as antithetic to European culture: Prevalent topics are slavery, colonialism, and dilapidation and alienation of culture. "The shame of slavery infected all perceptions of the 'African', thereby leaving us with a crisis of confidence, which expresses itself in the haughty postures of the 'other', and the inferiority complex that seems to have surreptitiously crept into our collective unconscious. Hence our uncritical high regard for most things 'white'; we equate 'white people' with the concept of modernity" (Daily Observer[27]:26 March 2007). "In Africa one can dearly see the drastic effects of alienation, a by-product of capitalism. Africans are being colonized and assimilated so much that they look down on their culture or their ancestors, while uncritically adopting the Western way of life. This imitation of foreign lifestyle is taking us nowhere" (Foroyaa: 22–24 May 2006).

"The problem of Gambia is globalization, Westernization, and the position of values. I have a very critical view upon this phenomenon. Is it something wanted by the tourists, is it something imposed? Tourism can promote racial antagonism and racial peace. But many Gambians idolize the tourist; it is all about 'boss lady' and 'boss man'. European men become less interested [in sex] as civilization becomes more sophisticated to the point that the housewife in Western Europe transfers her needs in terms of the toys she has. Now we have come to the point that the European woman says 'I have all these gadgets, but I lack my exciting life'. Then you drop the woman into Africa. She finds a youth who says, 'I'll be yours, I am going to make life for you acceptable again'. This woman had never smoked cannabis in her life. He says 'have a test of cannabis'. Takes her to his household, into the ghetto. 'Talk to my aunties and see the poverty around you.' And she becomes an economic source for the family. Then she goes back. The boy follows four months later and sends back a secondhand Mercedes, and the family who had never had a push cart, says 'our bank [sic] eh, our boy has made it. Anita is a very good

wife'. Whom are you kidding? Anita cannot bear a child anymore! I think the European women are the ones who are trying to provoke them. So why do you come to Africa and look for someone looking like he is pulled out of the gutter? I can't understand that. When I see them coming from Banjul with their more power Landrovers[28], I always say 'another one bites the dust'. The middle-aged white women have a very utopian view of love, of African love. I think it is unhealthy, it is unnatural. I can understand a young woman, but I cannot understand an old woman that has passed her menopause a long time ago, coming to Africa, to people that are 23! It's a sickness. It's a cultural revolution!" (Lamin). He seems to be of two minds about the *bumster* phenomenon. He understands the drive of poor people to take advantage of the tourists, but – a descendant from a high caste himself – he acknowledges the 'higher caste' of Europeans in society and remains puzzled about European women being attracted to the boys, given their appearance and low birth.

This narrative is furthered in a student's essay: "Why are old wrinkled face grandmas desperate to have as husbands young African boys? Is there any scarcity of men in Europe or are they impotent such that their aged women have to come to Africa hunting for youthful and energetic husbands?" (Alhaji). This observation is advanced in the focus group interview with university students: "Black people are stronger than white people. That is why the whites come here to look for a marriage partner. That is because the white man has serious problems. The white man is going crazy, you know, getting weak. It means that African man is very, very strong. Are you getting the point now?" (Group laughs knowingly). MN: "Why then would a strong and attractive black man choose a white woman? Then he chooses a weak marriage partner!" Student: "Sometimes the black man is pulled by the white old woman. Maybe the white lady is having money, something like that." But another student refutes this: "I am sorry! Muslims cannot do that practice, because a lot of Muslims will loose their life in such a relationship and then trying to have a black woman over here; many people die because of that. The white woman will kill you. She will give poison in your tea. Because she gets to know the local wives, because she cannot have kids. I see so many things like that happen. Would I want to suffer for it and then die? No! Most people don't have that heart" (focus group male students).

The consequences can be serious. Various people refer to 'the nerves', an illness contracted by boys who did not succeed in conquering a white female or failed in Europe. One of the characters in a local author's book[29] returns from England in a 'psychiatric condition' and ends up in a clinic. The author explains:

"As a social worker, I saw a lot of youths end up in the psychiatric clinic. It is not being successful [in getting a white wife]. There are many *bumsters* who suffer from depression" (Ramatoulie, author).

Several people draw a link with colonialism and cultural dominance: "There is that inferiority complex among most black people when they compare themselves to the whites, dating back to the colonial period. For most blacks, especially the illiterate majority, white is a superior race and therefore they befriend a white. To have a white lover is a source of pride and modernity. It is perceived by many as fashionable to walk hand in hand with a *toubab*[30] lady while the onlookers watch with envy and admiration. It appears to include part of the modernization package in the African context; some people believe that anything that is American or European is the best. If we are to follow such a principle, then for most African boys it is fashionable to marry old Europeans instead of fresh and beautiful African girls" (Alhaji). Intriguingly, sometimes the morality in local marriages is also questioned: "There are people that have that wrong notion that indigenous are not faithful, so they fear divorce. Some think that foreigners are more trustworthy than local people" (Benjamin, Catholic priest).

"Rumors of riches have always induced people into making the journey which they hope will improve their economic lot; but in our case, it is difficult to assess whether the current scale of exodus is a direct symptom of our economic under-development, or an excrescence of the psychological morbidities that have been detected in the postcolonial mind. Most of us, especially our youths, seem haunted on our own soil, and the Western world is believed to offer the only possibility of an exorcism" (The Daily Observer[31], my emphasis).

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter was to provide an insight into the moral and racial discourses in Gambian society on relationships of young locals with older white women, and into the way locals give these relationships a place in the social context, thereby constructing their identity within globalization. While many studies[32] restrict romance tourism to a specific category of sex tourism[33], in which relationships occur between white females and the self-styled beach boys exclusively, based on empirical data I conclude that far more boys and young men aim at finding a relationship with a white woman, wherein gender is rearticulated through travel vis-à-vis local and European standards.

Contrasting society's proverbially liberal attitude toward interethnic marriage and the marriages of local women to European men in colonial times, to marry an older white female at first sight is strongly disapproved, but deconstruction of the discourses reveals a more nuanced picture. For the next of kin, the youths' behavior, copied from Western tourists, may be seen as inappropriate, and not providing a living clashes with his responsibilities as the 'head of the house', but the economic benefits of the marriage compensate for that; nothing indicates that the boy 'is lost' for the family as in earlier days. Consequentially, those who capitalize seem rather receptive to Western impact. In contrast, people who do not gain directly from the marriages strongly denounce the relationships on moral and religious grounds. For them, the explicit physical and sexual aspects of the relationships combined with the inverted age disparity of the couples utterly transgress local conventions. These marriages will not produce children, and both partners taking sexual and/or financial advantage of each other is perceived as one-sided or mutual exploitation. Thus I argue that under the effects of globalization – female tourists intermingling with local boys and men – , those who benefit personally welcome the 'flux' of globalization, while the non-involved tend to 'fix' their cultural boundaries out of fear of losing their authenticity, and this causes a dichotomy in society.

Ensuing from morality, a racialization discourse emerges with several intertwining dimensions. Firstly, references are made to an inferiority complex of Africans, which is linked to slavery and colonization, while in contrast Europeans are idolized as coming from the 'modern' world, representing success and wealth[34]. This brings about a disdain for Gambia's own culture. People remain puzzled, though, as to the motives of European women to start relationships with poor and barely educated youngsters. Secondly, equally based on colonial discourses, European women are linked to the devil, with inexplicable powers, and their sexual gratification is a matter of life and death. Speculation arises about the weakness of European men compared to the Gambians' own sexual strength[35]. Quite to my surprise, a discourse of wealth and witchcraft[36] surfaces, that goes somewhat like this: Following the 'devil discourse', locals who engage in relationships with European women are 'haunted' and the Western world is believed to offer the only possibility of 'exorcism'. Hypothesizing about the rationale of this narrative, I argue that the inverted age disparity of Gambian–European couples, combined with the women's barrenness and relative wealth, leave people perplexed about the women's attraction, and this mystification materializes in a witchcraft discourse.

On the surface, the women are perceived to open doors to a better life, but there is an underlying – almost Freudian – sense of guilt and grief, producing a narrative of the white females' evil power to rob the youngsters of their vitality. The highly ambivalent perception of European women as deities or devils constructs Europe as the solution to find peace of mind for some, and the cause of problems for others. This corroborates the view that witchcraft is not a conservative force confined to small-scale parochial groups, but – quite the opposite – is part and parcel of contemporary African imagination triggered by globalization[37], and its connection with 'sweat and blood' could well be extended to semen, making this discourse a powerful means of mediating new, external influences, and offering a local response to the enchantments of modernity. Moreover, provoking disquiet and disgust, promiscuous and premarital sex could well be associated with 'matter out of place' (Ashforth 2005:161; Douglas 2002). Obviously, this hypothesis needs to be grounded in further research.

In conclusion, Gambia's beaches act as a cultural borderland, much like Turner's (1969:359-363) liminal space, in which relationships between the South and the North partly evoke a hybridization of the respective cultures, while simultaneously causing a cultural closure for other locals. In the imagination of Gambia's 'ordinary' people, the beach is a dangerous, maybe even bewitched place. As a response to 'modernity' impinging upon society, they actively construct their identity by adhering to their traditional moral and religious values and dismissing the culture that is thrust upon them by tourism.

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[1] While sexual contacts between Western men and local women do take place, they were not the focus of my research.

[2] Beachboys – also called *bumsters* or 'professional friends'– are youths hanging out at the beach, earning their living by contacting tourists and offering services.

[3] My stay in the Gambia consisted of three months in 2006 and one month in 2007.

[4] "Any stranger may bring about an unnatural situation, but one who stands out as I do seems to freeze up the bystanders. Or to swing them into action, as on the beach" (field notes, 15 September 2006).

[5] I carried out some twenty interviews. Among others, my informants were male and female university students, an editor and a director of local newspapers, an author of a novel on the subject, Islamic officials and a Catholic priest.

[6] I performed two focus group interviews with male and female students separately.

[7] The research led to my Master thesis "' In search of greener pastures'. Social and cultural discourses on romance tourism in the Gambia'"(2007).

[8] Besides, Malone (2003) notes that the notion of 'informed consent' and qualitative research are incompatible, because the researcher cannot anticipate the events in the field that her subjects need to be informed about (Malone 2003:800).

[9] In only one situation, I offered payment for attendance. This concerned the two focus group interviews with university students, which were on short-term notice. In order to obtain enough students, I decided to compensate them for their time and transportation.

[10] Appiah suggests that in rural areas the colonial system could easily be ignored. Also the colonizers over-rated their cultural penetration, although local elites made them think otherwise (Appiah 1993:6-8 and 173-174).

[11] Next to this new phenomenon (married) couples also encounter beach boys, and there are myriad stories about married women leaving their husbands for a local youngster (see also Ware 1997).

[12] Moreover, the females were not the object of my fieldwork gaze, although I frequently met them in restaurants. I must admit to have felt vicarious shame over the sometimes transgressive behavior of white women. Regarding myself, African dress and decent behavior helped to transmit a different message.

[13] 'Flux and fix' is borrowed from Geschiere and Meyer (1998).

[14] This term was used by Edward Bruner (1996) in discussing touristic settings, where identity-articulating dialogues between cultures transpire.

[15] Being away from day-to-day social control by family, colleagues and friends is also plausible for indulging in splurges.

[16] See also Ebron 2006.

[17] For an analysis of the views of this Gambian phenomenon constructed by British media, see Ware (1997).

[18] The narratives later on reveal that while European men are scrutinized in this respect, the fourth party – black women – is totally absent.

[19] Building on fieldwork in Indonesia, Dahles compares the local guides to small-scale businessmen, labeling them 'new gigolo's': "They prostitute their body and cultural heritage to participate in the very lifestyles they seem to resent by their adherence to the Rastafarian movement" (Dahles 1997:129).

[20] This is refuted by Heemskerk in her Gambian research, reporting of several disillusioned European women who had discovered that even during the relationship their self-declared 'true lovers' supported one or more local wives with their (the European wives') money (Heemskerk 2004:45-52).

[21] Cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1998; Geschiere 1997; Geschiere and Ciekawy 1998; Moore and Sanders 2001; Meyer and Pels 2003.

[22] Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of informants.

[23] With a number of three to four a day, that would add up to an estimate of 700 to 800 per year.

[24] 100 Bututs makes 1 Dallasi, the local currency (about € 0,03).

[25] The University of The Gambia was founded in 2002 and its still small number of students is obviously very much aware of their privileged position as the future intellectuals and management class of the country.

[26] Forooya is the leading opposition newspaper, with three issues of 2,000 copies per week.

[27] The Daily Observer is a newspaper printed daily in 2,500 copies; strong affiliation with the government.

[28] This is a reference to the boisterous wedding processions coming from the Ministry of Justice.

[29] 'Costly Prices', by Ramatoulie Othman (2005). The story is about three beachboys, one of whom marries an older English woman and is kept hostage in her house in the UK. Meanwhile, his parents convince him to marry a Gambian wife as well, which he does in secret. After many mishaps, he returns home and becomes a social welfare officer, who helps beachboys to find a better way in life. "The burning issues of *bumsters*, sex tourism, interracial marriages, gossip, infidelity and so on are all explored in the story" (synopsis of the book, p. v).

[30] The word 'toubab' stems from Arabic and originally meant 'gentleman', but it transformed to 'white person', 'tourist' in many West-African countries. To respond to it with 'nit ku ñuul' ('black person' in Wolof) or 'xale bu ñuul' (black child) proved quite effective to make clear that I was not a regular tourist. The expression 'nit ku ñuul' is not derogatory, as it is used as a synonym for African person.

[31] Daily Observer, accessed 5 May 2007, http://observer.gm/enews/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7296&Itemid=26.

[32] See, among others Brown 1992; Dahles 2002; Herold et al. 2001; Jeffreys 2003; Kempadoo 2001.

[33] This romance tourism cannot be compared to the exploiting sex tourism of white men to Thailand or Indonesia,

[34] Occasionally, this idolization is questioned in the media.

[35] The human race originating in Africa, and consequentially a perception of Africans' stronger link with nature, is a powerful narrative, contributing to the attractiveness of Africans as sexual partners.

[36] For my bachelor's thesis, I researched the linkage between wealth and witchcraft among Nigerians in the Netherlands, and found that witchcraft is discursively connected with unaccountable wealth, drawing on the conceptions of African tradition as well as dubious wealth in modernity (see also Geschiere 1997). Affluent people are viewed with suspicion, and witchcraft and criminality are put on a par – just as evil and mysterious – because they take people's 'sweat and blood'. Sweat represents (hard) work and blood can be perceived as a metaphor for the life force of humans.

[37] See, among others, Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997, 2006; Moore and Sanders 2001. Also, the recent flood of popular Nigerian movies in modern urban settings, containing witchcraft stories, may well serve as one of many evidences of the subject being translated to modernity.

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