



Andrew's story: An African tale of Youth, work and digital technologies

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Background and the wider study

- Multidimensional livelihood pathways across space: the Mastercard Foundation scholarship tracer study
- Mastercard Foundation sponsors secondary and tertiary scholarships for young Africans
- Talented young people from disadvantaged backgrounds

- 5-year tracer study
- Survey administered in years 1, 3 and 5 (n=1008)
- Qualitative annual in-depth interviews (n=117) in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, Rwanda and the diaspora

Background

2 elements of **my** involvement in the wider study relevant to this story:

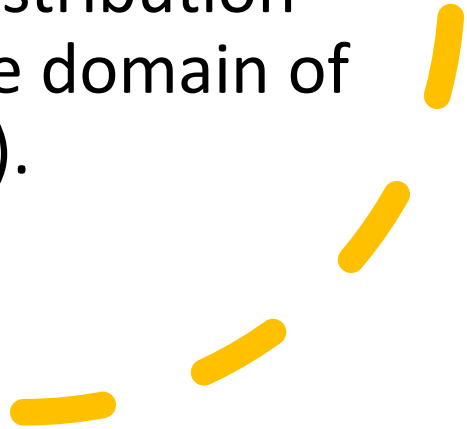
- Kenyan cohort (n=18)
- Young African Research Fellows programme:
8 Alumni hosted at the HSRC
 - Structural barriers to youth livelihoods
 - Podcast series: Hustling the African dream and Virtual Museum

Andrew's story: why Andrew?

- Theoretical framing of youth in Africa:
 - Waithood
 - The hustle, Kukiya-kiya, non-standard work
 - “beyond the wage” (Monteith, Vicol and Williams, 2021)
 - An African employment problem not an unemployment problem (Field)



My theoretical framing of youth in Africa: How do Precarity and Capital(s) intersect?

- Precarity: a relative concept
 - Capital(s): as value (production) and endowments (circulation)
(the production of value systemically through capitalism and the endowments to which people have access that may be put to work in a social field, contested through distribution and relative value, belonging in the domain of circulation rather than production).
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Andrew's story

- Raised in Naivasha: +-90km North-West of Nairobi
- Kenya_2019_M25_Par1_2020: “when I was a kid, I was this kind of a person who like, tried to fix stuff or fix the tv I’ll go and check things there and everything, so, I became so interested in those technical things...”
- Studied computer engineering
 - Discontinued university in Kenya and went to AIMS Ghana (Mastercard scholarship)
 - Returned to Kenya after university: internship at government funded power company



1. Internship:
Electrical
company...but
no job

Despite not earning income or securing permanent work during/after this internship Andrew described it as a wonderful experience:

Kenya_2019_M25_Par1_2020: [d] it was one of my best experiences of my professional life, because it's good when you meet people... who you can speak the same language. ... whenever you talk to somebody who is the same field... a topic go can go deep together...it feels good.

Internships

Exploitation of youth common in the USA...and amongst skilled youth in Africa

Some graduates in the study described having up to 10 internships

Generally negative experiences of internships and frustration...but also described getting work experience and skills post university

2. Shocks: Kinship networks as forms of social security for multiple intersecting crises

- Part-time Lecturing in Nairobi
- Covid hits
- Returns to Naivasha:
- Father's construction site, saves money

3. Mixed livelihoods: Game shop and academic writing

- “I do academic writing... give it three hours in the morning...that can gimme some, some small amount of money for that day. Then I come and open the shop”
- Kenya_2019_M25_Par1_2020: So, okay that academic writing is more of a, I don't know if you have heard of it, you know schools in, abroad, including like England, UK, And then US school, like, those students in those universities...Most of them sometimes don't have the time to do all their work. So, they will send the work... and then they will pay you.

New York Times article:

- "academic writing is a lucrative business for college graduates from Kenya, India and Ukraine, with a facebook group for academic writers having 50 000 members. Kenya is a country with a per capita income of \$1700 but academic writers earn up to \$2000 a month."

Andrew's shop

“The wine business wasn't bad...but the problem with that was, uh, uh, the police would always be on your neck... they want some money every day... I've paid for license... They need something small from you.. Sauce... they'll say you're selling to people without wearing a mask...”

“I was, downloading movies and selling the movies to people. It was a movie shop.. and offering cyber services. So that includes like applying (for) like our health services, like (the) card that you need if you need a job.”




But...Andrew wants a “proper job”

4. The search for the proper job continues: Application to study abroad

- I was checking the opportunities... I have an engineering degree, one of the most marketable...(but) a job is an issue. But when you check a city, like uh, Arizona... I have majored into data analysis... data analysts are a hot cake there. Like you didn't take even two months before you get a job.. I was thinking is I have to shift somewhere. Maybe my skills are more valued, you know?

Andrew sells his shop after being accepted at Arizona State and securing a bank loan, but:

- “the next interview that I can get is 2024... The embassy operates as a different entity. Yeah. Yeah. Like they don't want to know wherever you're going. Like they don't care even, you know, yeah. You have all the documents, but they don't care.”



5. Gig work continued: Cloud surfing and bidding time

“So right now I'm using a platform called Clouds Surf...at level three. So I can be able to do full text review. So other people will, will transcribe an audio and I'll review the audio for them... It's paid per minute. Like most of the task maybe go for \$1, \$2.”

“The crowds surf I'm using right now, I paid \$600 for it to get that...I bought an account... this crowd surf company won't accept me.. we have Canadians who like, create the accounts for us and they sell it to us.”

How do we understand Andrew's story?

1. Mixed livelihoods rather than a proper job: even for “highly-skilled” young Africans
2. Few “proper jobs” and many hard borders
3. The global contradictions of gig work

1. Mixed livelihoods rather than a “proper job”: academic writing and a shop

- African youth: less than 15% formal jobs
- “Livelihoods”, rather than “employment in labour markets”: diverse resources youth use for income generation across various spaces; household activities, capitals and resources that exceed employment.
- “Livelihoods”: regularly combine wages and informal labour, trade, grants, illegal activities, begging and making claims on the resources of family and friends.
- Distributed livelihoods (Ferguson, 2015), a heterogenous mix of income streams (Neves & du Toit, 2013), multiple livelihoods (Murray, 2002), and in South Africa, ‘skarrel’ (Webb, 2021)



Andrew's livelihood

- Waithood and the hustle: Africans in informal settings beyond institutional support
 - This is a slightly more middle-class hustle: some institutional support secured through education
 - Secured the game shop through returning to kinship-based home: Social security has always been partial in Africa, embedded in kinship relations

2. Few “proper jobs” and many hard borders

- The continued mirage and gold standard of “the proper job”
- Why Andrew’s skills not valued in Africa: no jobs?
Ubiquitous discourse of entrepreneurship;
- Urbanisation without industrialisation:
“Limited industrialisation and wage work did happen in parts of India, South-East Asia, Latin America and Southern Africa, the 1980s and 1990s saw these diminish significantly, leading some to suggest that we have reached a period “after development” (Cooper & Dubbeld)
- International labour markets have real borders
- Capital mobile but labour less so
- While the rules of the game often fluid for Andrew, visas, embassies, borders not



3. Global contradictions of Gig work

- Gig work: Online platforms create a service triangle between employees, employer and customers, adapting elements of markets, hierarchies and networks (Woodcock & Graham, 2020; Vallas & Schor, 2020).
- Platforms relinquish aspects of control but evaluate employees through algorithms that determine future work opportunities, enforcing compliance through digital infrastructure (Vallas & Schor, 2020).
- Massive oversupply of casual labour globally.
- Pits people against one another, reorganised international division of labour, aided by new ICT, searches for cheaper and less regulated workers, aggravating precarious livelihoods.
- Gig work as an infringement to workers' rights vs some policymakers in low- and middle-income countries saying potential for financial inclusion, economic development and growth (Wood et al, 2019; CGAP, 2022)

Andrew and gig work

- The exploitation of Andrew's labour is two-fold, once by capital and once by peers in the global north: selling gig work accounts and to complete their degrees, often to get the kinds of jobs Andrew cannot because of his citizenship

...but gives him some income to bide his time, wait for next opportunity

How do Precarity and Capital(s) intersect?

- The example of Andrew's gig work illustrates the relational nature of precarity, connected through global circuits of value and the social statuses used to tap into them.
- Youth-centred concepts, like waithood, the hustle and kukiya-kiya point to precarious futures where all people, but especially (global south) youth, are forced to live off diverse and distributed capital(s), including wages, small informal businesses, handouts from the state and kin, criminal activities and forms of reciprocal exchange
- Understanding livelihoods like Andrew's require interpretations of the intersection of precarity and capital(s) as they play out globally