Anette Eva Fasang, Noella Binda Niati, Mariéme Ciss, Assa Kamara, and Nancy Ndour

High Hopes and Broken Promises (HIBO): A Decolonial Qualitative Life Course Study with Young Adults in Senegal

Description of Study Design and Data Collection

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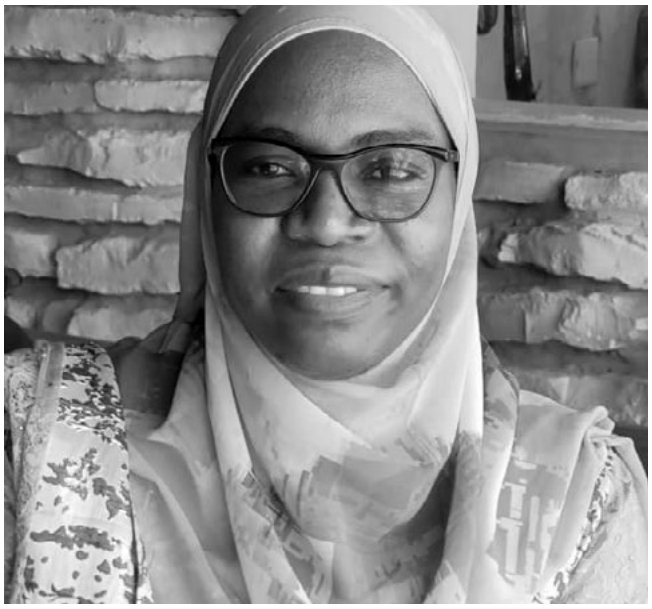

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ABSTRACT

Senegal experienced rapid population growth and educational expansion in recent decades, while labour market prospects stagnated amid high informality. Growing cohorts of educated youth struggle to find work. The "High Hopes and Broken Promises" (HIBO) project combines the life course paradigm with epistemic disobedience discourse informed by Négritude, emphasising African diasporic awareness and agency. Our study amplifies young adults' narratives of their life experiences, aspirations, and social-political engagement as they navigate social adulthood amid adverse economic conditions. We conducted three waves of semi-structured thematic interviews with biographical components with young adults born in Senegal between 1977 and 1997 in early 2021, late 2021, and 2024. Data collection occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and youth protests against President Macky Sall's unconstitutional third-term attempt. This paper describes the motivation, study design, and data collection, summarising challenges and opportunities encountered by an international research team producing decolonial knowledge on respondents' life courses.

1 INTRODUCTION[1][2]

In Senegal, as in many post-colonial, low-income countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), growing cohorts of educated young adults struggle to find jobs commensurate with their qualifications in stagnant labour markets, contributing to stalled processes of adulthood (Lorenceau et al. 2021). SSA is home to some of the poorest countries of the world, most of which experienced colonial histories, urbanisation without industrialisation, and show persistently high rates of labour market informality, ranging between 80 and 90 percent in many regions (Cooper/Dubbeld 2024; Fasang et al. 2025). At the same time, educational expansion has been remarkable across the continent, although absolute levels of secondary and tertiary education remain low, access to education is uneven, and school completion is partial in many regions (ANSD 2023a; Lewin 2009; Ndiaye 2022) Nonetheless, educational expansion is linked to

1 We thank Erdmute Alber, Madlen Beck, Iris Clemens, Andreas Eckert, Babacar Fall, Rob Gruijters, Cordula Hamschmidt, and Sokhna Ndiaye, as well as activists from Guediawaye HipHop Dakar, for their valuable feedback, input, and support at various stages of the development of the study design and data collection. Researchers interested in collaborations using the HIBO data can contact Anette Fasang (anette.fasang@hu-berlin.de) or Noella Binda Niati (nbn25@cam.ac.uk).

2 This research is part of the Cluster of Excellence "Contestations of the Liberal Script" (EXC 2055, Project-ID: 390715649), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany's Excellence Strategy. The writing of this manuscript was supported through a sabbatical term funded by the Einstein Foundation Berlin (grant: EZ-2019-555-2).

rising aspirations for qualified work and upward social mobility, which is often equated with "social adulthood" (Lorenceau et al. 2021; Mains 2011; Nunzio 2019). All projected global population growth in the twenty-first century is expected to occur in SSA (United Nations 2024), making Africa "the continent of the future" with the youngest population globally.

Liberal promises of education, meritocracy, and prosperity have raised African urban youth aspirations and future imaginations since colonial independence, supported by the global spread of Western cultural goods such as movies and popular music (Appadurai 1996). The liberal script of society and liberal models of development anticipate prosperity and equality of opportunity through democracy and expanded educational opportunities. We follow Börzel and co-authors (Börzel et al. 2024) in understanding a societal script as a set of shared descriptive and prescriptive understandings about the organisation of society. The core of the liberal script is defined by prioritising individual over collective self-determination. The liberal script is widely associated with democracy, the rule of law, capitalism, meritocracy, secularism, and minority rights. Education is the liberal solution to global poverty and youth unemployment (Labaree 2008; Mignolo 2011).

This liberal "educationalisation" of complex structural problems, such as neo-colonial global dependencies, a lack of jobs, and poverty, remains stuck in a colonial logic that is at odds with the empirical realities that young adults encounter in contemporary Senegal (Labaree 2008; Mignolo 2011). In fact, liberalism's economic promises, such as reliable returns to education, prosperity, intergenerational upward mobility, and equality of opportunity, have not materialised for the vast majority of young people navigating social adulthood (Ciss 2023; Fall 2024; Lambert 2016; Ndiaye 2022; Niati / Shah 2022). Failed promises of liberalism exemplify the tension between a liberal "rhetoric of modernity" that heralds education as a secure route to social upward mobility, and empirical realities that highlight the continued "colonial logic" of the world economy that disadvantages former colonies (Mignolo 2011). How does this tension between a liberal "rhetoric of modernity" and a continued "colonial logic" of the economy shape young adults' narratives of navigating social adulthood, life aspirations, and political engagement? The project "High Hopes and Broken Promises: Young Adult Life Courses in Senegal" (HIBO) integrates theoretical propositions from the life course paradigm and discourses of epistemic disobedience in the Négritude tradition to address the following research questions in a decolonial, longitudinal qualitative life course study:

1. How do young adults narrate their **life experiences** in navigating social adulthood?
2. What are young adults' key **life goals and aspirations** for adulthood, and which outcomes do they frame as beneficial and socially meaningful for themselves?
3. Who do young adults hold **accountable** for unfulfilled aspirations?
4. How do young adults **respond** to unfulfilled aspirations, that is, which narratives and behavioral adaptations do they employ?
5. How do life experiences and responses to unfulfilled aspirations relate to respondents' **social and political engagement?**

This paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss the context of Senegal for navigating social adulthood (Section 2), the theoretical framework and study design (Section 3), and the data collection process (Section 4). Subsequently, we systematically juxtapose the unique challenges and opportunities for data collection that our international research team encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest (Section 5). We close with a few general observations on

collecting qualitative longitudinal data with youth in postcolonial, resource-poor settings, challenges of joining varied ontological views, and the implications for fostering decolonial international research collaborations (Section 6). Appendix I includes a list of guiding questions for each interview wave. Appendix II introduces two selected anonymised respondent profiles to illustrate the potential of the data.

2 COMING OF AGE IN POST-INDEPENDENCE SENEGAL

Senegal is a particularly instructive context for examining the imprint of failed promises of liberalism on young adults' lives in post-independence, resource-poor settings. First, as a former French colonial centre, it has been comparatively affluent and institutionally stable since gaining independence in 1960 (Fall 2024). Senegal is widely regarded as a leader in democratic, educational, and economic development in the region, and an attractive destination for migrants from poorer neighbouring countries in West Africa. Second, the dominant Muslim religion (estimated at 95% of the population) is organised via several Muslim brotherhoods, most prominently the Mouride and Tidjane brotherhoods. The Senegalese Muslim Brotherhoods are distinctly moderate and have been an essential bastion against the influx of extremist Islamist movements pouring in from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and neighbouring countries (Behr 1970). As a result, elements of the liberal script and the liberal rhetoric of modernity – specifically democracy, peace, and educational expansion – have been comparatively firmly implemented since colonial independence (Mignolo 2011). Alongside the global circulation of Western cultural goods through popular culture and other channels (Appadurai 1996), the spread of liberal rhetoric likely heightened the aspirations and shaped future imaginations of Senegalese youth. And yet promises of liberalism, especially economic promises of prosperity, meritocracy, and social upward mobility have not materialised (Fall 2024). The tension between a liberal rhetoric of modernity and empirical realities in which a colonial logic continues to govern the economy and underpin that rhetoric calls for a decolonial life-course perspective on how young adults navigate social adulthood, construct moral self-worth, and generate livelihoods under frequently adverse economic conditions.

A few simple statistics contextualise the current conditions for adulthood processes compared to those of their parents' generation in Senegal. Many of these indicators have rightly been criticised for being developed by colonial powers within a colonial logic (Lerche 2007; Ward 2004) and may be most fitting for the self-description of the societies in which they were developed. Keeping this caveat in mind, we can still consider these statistics helpful as a basic orientation of the conditions for navigating adulthood, and importantly, we complement them with the first-person accounts in this study. Where possible, we rely on indicators provided by Senegalese agencies (ANSD) and not international organisations.

Life conditions observed in the parent generation are an essential reference point against which youth form aspirations for their own lives (Easterlin 1976). Since gaining independence from French colonial rule in 1960 (ANSD 2023c; Fall 2024), the population of Senegal has increased sixfold, from an estimated at 3.2 million in 1960, to 18.9 million in 2025, with an estimated doubling time of 30 years (United Nations 2025). At current fertility and mortality rates, the population is expected to reach about 38 million by 2055. In 1960, 23% of the population lived in urban areas (780'000 urban residents), compared to 55% urbanisation in 2023 (10 million urban residents) (ANSD 2023c). This rapid population growth and urbanisation have resulted in approximately 75% of Senegal's population being under the age of 35, and about

50% under the age of 19. More than half of Senegal's population – 55% – now reside in urban areas, with the majority of urban residents (68%) concentrated in Dakar, Thiès, and Diourbel (ANSD 2023c). The urban-rural divide in family formation, as well as access to education and health services, remains stark (Ciss 2023). Although the average fertility rate has declined modestly from 5.3 in 2002 to 4.2 in 2023, fertility in Dakar is approaching levels seen in high- and middle-income countries at 2.8 children per woman, compared with persistently high fertility rates of around 6 in rural areas in 2023 (ANSD 2023c).

Since independence in 1960, education has expanded rapidly in Senegal, albeit from low levels. Educational expansion was interrupted by structural adjustment programmes in the 1990s, but resumed in the 2000s. In 2023, enrolment in primary education was at 82% compared to 25% in 1978. Enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education increased markedly over the past decades, but remain regionally uneven and low in absolute terms. Secondary and tertiary education entolment increased from 10% and 2% in 1970 to 52% for women and 42% for men in secondary education, and to 17% for both men and women in higher education in 2022 (UNESCO 2024). Even with this rapid expansion, 63% of the rural population still have no education compared to 44% in urban areas (ANSD 2023a; Goudiaby / Pilon 2022). Access to education and learning outcomes remains highly unequal (Gruijters / Behrman 2020). Moreover, studies highlight persistent quality issues in higher education institutions in Senegal. Institutional instability, partial implementation of educational policies that do not achieve their intended effects, and issues of governance and accountability combine with underfunding and overcrowding in public secondary and tertiary institutions (Ndiaye 2022).

Across SSA, around 70% of youth aspire to professional occupations, which starkly contrasts with labour market realities in which around 90% are engaged in informal employment (Fasang et al. 2025; Lorenceau et al. 2021). 46% of youth aged 15-24 in Senegal were Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in 2023 (ANSD 2023b). High labour market informality reflects a colonial legacy that reserved salaried industrial wage labour primarily for the European colonising powers, while informal, exploitative labour relations persisted in former colonies (Quijano 2000). In global capitalism, this division of labour remains evident in the absence of industrial and manufacturing jobs across SSA. Youth aspirations for professional careers, particularly in the public-sector, are thus also linked to images of colonial administrations, in which public-sector-type occupations were often associated with political power.

To date, the Senegalese economy remains dominated by agriculture and a now greatly diminished fishing industry (ANSD 2023b). Self-employed agriculture is the most common work among women (Maisonnave / Mamboundou 2022), and groundnuts are among the most important crops (Macintosh 1989). Global warming and an unfavourable international distribution of fishing rights have reduced returns to agriculture and fishing, limiting options for younger cohorts compared to their parents' generation. Since the 1970s, large European agribusinesses, which often failed, contributed to the decline of local structures of communal labour and solidarity, ultimately reinforcing food crises and undermining livelihoods in agriculture (Macintosh 1989).

In sum, liberal rhetoric of development and modernity, which heralds democracy and educational expansion as a secure route to economic upward mobility, raises young adult aspirations relative to those of their parents. At the same time, economic opportunities have remained stagnant or declined since colonial independence, likely widening the gap between aspirations and realised life goals for growing cohorts of educated youth in post-independence Senegal.

3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND STUDY DESIGN

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: EPISTEMIC DISOBEDIENCE, NÉGRITUDE, AND THE LIFE COURSE PARADIGM

The HIBO study brings together three theoretical lines of thought that to date have been largely separate: **1)** epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2011, 2009; Niati / Shah 2022), **2)** Négritude (Césaire 1972; Senghor 1971), including recent propositions of transnégritude (Niati / Shah 2022; Touré 2020), **3)** and the life course paradigm (Elder et al. 2003; Fasang / Mayer 2020; Mayer 2004). In addition, our study was designed to allow for intersectional group comparisons, acknowledging compound advantages and disadvantages of overlapping group membership as individuals' lives unfold over time (Collins 2015; Crenshaw 2016; Fasang / Aisenbrey 2022). Below, we first outline the main theoretical assumptions, followed by how they enter our study for each approach. Throughout the remainder of this manuscript, we seek to highlight how the three lines of thought complement each other in our study design and data collection. We pursued an international research cooperation between a Germany-based and Senegal-based team for a decolonial analysis of young adult life experiences in Senegal, which is open to systematic comparison with adulthood processes in other contexts around the globe.

1) The theoretical insights of **epistemic disobedience** guide our study in several ways. First, we center young adults' narratives, agency, and awareness as experts of their own lives, including participatory data analysis elements to amplify young adults' voices as sources of decolonial knowledge (Liebenberg et al. 2020; Mignolo 2009, 2011). Second, we *delink* the collection and interpretation of interview data from theoretical preconceptions shaped by colonial logics, such as the assumption of reliable returns to education in human capital theory. *De-linking* (Mignolo 2009) involves making local experiences and needs visible in their unique socio-political context, akin to the life-course principle of "time and place" (see point 3 in this section) (Elder et al. 2003; Fasang et al. 2024). Our choice of semi-structured interviews with biographical components and participatory data analysis builds on a long-standing local tradition of oral histories and storytelling. Given the absence of local historical writing during colonialism, oral histories were the earliest local efforts for constructing collective memory and a Senegambian identity (Fall 2003). Griots, who are local oral historians and storytellers, take a central role in transmitting history and collective memory, which serve as sources of identity and belonging that are not constructed primarily in reference to colonial inferiority and alienation (Fall 2003; Senghor 2004). Third, we aimed not only for new content from our decolonial knowledge production but also for new, decolonial terms of collaboration among the members of our international research team (Mignolo 2009), as we detail in Section 4.2. Fostering decolonial terms of knowledge production also implied consistently reflecting on the positionality of all members of the international research team (Mignolo 2009; Niati 2024; Niati / Shah 2022).

2) Négritude and transnégritude: We followed the basic premises of epistemic disobedience by grounding our study in epistemologies relevant to Senegal. Specifically, we draw on discourses of Négritude, which originated in the Caribbean, Antillean, and West African diaspora in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. An early center of Négritude was the literary and political salon hosted by the Nardal sisters (Smith 2001). Many leading figures of Négritude frequented the Nardal salon, including Léopold Senghor, poet and first post-independence president of Senegal, or read and published in the periodical *Revue du Monde Noir,* published by Paulette Nardal, such as Aimé

Césaire, and Léon-Gontran Damas (Césaire 1972; Niati / Shah, 2022; Senghor 1971, 1974; Smith 2001). Négritude was a diasporic universalist endeavour to "decolonise the African mind" by rooting black identity and pride in pre-colonial African culture, reimagining African alternatives to the colonial condition, and engaging in authentically African epistemologies – the discovery of black values and awareness (Senghor 1971).

Négritude can be understood as an early practice of epistemic disobedience, although some of the leading figures, particularly Senghor, were criticised as too assimilationist to France and did not believe in a fully independent African future. Yet, Négritude's initial challenge of the colonial logic remains rooted in its genesis. Adhering to African futures within French imperialism sets parts of the Négritude discourse apart from later decolonial quests of epistemic disobedience that called for fully delinking from colonial logics (Mignolo 2009) and rejecting "europhonism", the continued replacement of African languages and identities with European ones (Ngũgĩ 2009). Within Négritude, Aimé Césaire (1972) represented an anti-imperial line of thought, firmly asserting the complete independence of former colonies and recognising the de-civilising effect of colonisation on colonising societies of Europe. Noella Binda Niati and Payal Shah (2022) and Vieux Alassane Touré (2020) recently built on the Césarean anti-imperial line of Négritude to propose the concept of transnégritude. Transnégritude highlights shared colonial oppression in former colonies as a transcolonial experience (Lionnet / Shi 2011), forming the basis of a joint struggle for social justice and independence. Despite socio-historically unique expressions of colonial oppression, the shared transcolonial experience fosters an imagined community among black populations that spans national and linguistic boundaries and gives rise to a shared identity and awareness as they pursue social recognition and economic stability in navigating social adulthood (Niati / Shah 2022).

Theoretical insights of Négritude, and specifically transnégritude, enter our study through our aim to articulate the life experiences of Senegalese youth caught in continuing colonial logics of extraction and defiance (Niati / Shah 2022). We seek to present these experiences in their own voices and to probe their awareness of, and responses to, broken promises of liberalism in post-independence Senegal. Our study highlights that navigating social adulthood in contemporary Senegal entails simultaneously deconstructing the liberal rhetoric of modernity and creating alternative identities and livelihoods outside of the typically unattainable economic stability offered by formal employment. Our respondents' life experiences exemplify how alternative identities and livelihoods are often rooted in decolonial local values of communal social engagement or religious virtue within Muslim brotherhoods.

Transnégritude's emphasis on how contemporary African youth traverse multiple spaces between Senegal and the diaspora resonates with our respondents' agency in pursuing transnational routes to social adulthood through migration. Moreover, many of our respondents are embedded in transnational networks because they have previously migrated and know family, friends, or neighbors who have migrated.

Proponents of Négritude further emphasised openness and collaboration among individuals from diverse backgrounds as part of a humanist philosophy seeking decolonial alternatives in knowledge production and in the social and political organisation of societies (Senghor 1974, 2004). Transnégritude builds on this openness and collaboration through a collective effort informed by our decolonial commitments. Our international research team shared this fundamental assumption of an added value of collaborations among individuals from diverse and fluid backgrounds (Niati 2024).

3) The life course paradigm lends itself to a decolonial analysis, precisely because it is not a theory in a strict sense but a set of broad guiding principles or heuristics that travel across socio-historical contexts and epistemologies with relative ease (Bernardi et al. 2019; Elder et al. 2003; Fasang et al. 2024; Mayer 2004). First, our study rests on the life course principle of "time and place", which holds that socio-historically specific macro-structural contexts shape the timing and sequencing of life transitions in work and family life. The principle of "time and place" resonates with the notion of delinking by putting locally specific contexts in the foreground (Mignolo 2009), and connects to the notion of shared yet uniquely expressed forms of oppression in transcolonial experiences (Lionnet / Shi 2011). Societies share locally specific life-course norms, meaning assumptions about the appropriate timing and sequencing of life events that shape the social meaning of biographical experiences (Riley et al. 1972). Our study on the life experiences of young adults in Senegal is embedded in a larger globally comparative research agenda on the life courses of young adults across different local contexts. The life course principle of "time and place" implies a comparative ambition (Cabib et al. 2025; Fasang et al. 2025; Mayer 2004) to elicit how specific socio-historical conditions matter for life experiences, while avoiding what Mignolo (2009) terms the "hubris of a natural zero point" for comparison. Instead, we adopt the intercategorical approach of intersectionality that comprehensively compares cases to one another (Fasang / Aisenbrey 2022; McCall 2005).

Second, we situate young adult narratives in the context of perceived generational change. The life course paradigm rests on the assumption that social change also occurs through the succession of birth cohorts, and that young people coming of age play a key role as agents of social change, as illustrated by globally spreading contemporary youth protests, especially in post-colonial contexts (Mannheim 1928; Ryder 1965). Attention to generational change and intergenerational relationships further adheres to the life-course principle of "linked lives" (Elder et al. 2003), which holds that individual lives unfold interdependently within networks of shared relationships. How do young adults evaluate their own lives relative to their parents' lives when they were their age? What roles do family members and significant others play in their aspirations and livelihoods? These questions are particularly pertinent because extended kinship systems and local religious communities act as key welfare providers and norm-enforcing social networks in Senegal, given the widespread absence of effective social services such as public health care (Ciss 2023; Gough / Wood 2004) and a communal orientation emphasised in Négritude (Césaire 1972).

Third, we embrace the life course principle of timing, assuming that the timing of life events is socially significant, because the meaning of timing is socially constructed, for instance, as "too late" or "too early". Moreover, earlier life events can impact later-life attitudes and well-being (Elder et al. 2003; Furstenberg 2005). Our longitudinal study design, based on three waves of semi-structured interviews and retrospective autobiographical narration, allows us to trace adaptation processes of how narratives, livelihoods, and meaning-making shift with increasing age and with changing personal and societal circumstances (Holstein 2019).

Building on intersectionality as an analytical paradigm, our recruitment of interview participants ensured sufficient diversity for intersectional group comparisons, allowing comparisons of lower- and higher-educated men and women without normalising a specific reference category – another way of avoiding the "hubris of the zero point" within our group of respondents (Browne / Misra 2003; Fasang / Aisenbrey 2022; McCall 2005; Mignolo 2009).

3.2 STUDY POPULATION: THOSE WHO NAVIGATE SOCIAL MARKERS OF ADULTHOOD

Recruitment of study participants was based on purposeful and snowball sampling. We aimed for rich narratives of navigating social adulthood and sufficient diversity by gender, education, and urban or rural region, to allow for intersectional group comparisons (Collins 2015; Fasang / Aisenbrey 2022; McCall 2005). Religion was not varied systematically, since 95 percent of the population identifies as Muslim, and almost everyone is a member of a Muslim brotherhood.

We distinguished "chronological" from "social" adulthood and deliberately did not fix an age range of "young adulthood" (Durham / Solway 2017; Johnson-Hanks 2002; Mains 2011; Nunzio 2019). Categories of youth and adulthood are socially constructed, context-specific, fluid, and relational in ways that are not well captured by fixed age windows (Lambert 2016; Niati / Shah 2022; Spencer 2012). In uncertain and resource-poor environments, individuals often simultaneously inhabit, or frequently shift between, roles associated with childhood and social adulthood (Devonald et al. 2025). In SSA and other low-income environments, social adulthood is typically equated with social upward mobility, economic independence, financial stability, and the ability to economically provide for others (Durham / Solway 2017; Fasang et al. 2025; Mains 2011; Nunzio 2019). Economic independence is often viewed as a prerequisite for other markers of adulthood, such as forming a family. In uncertain and resource-poor environments, both in high- and low-income countries, social adulthood often remains elusive and unstable throughout the life course (Durham / Solway 2017). Nevertheless, social adulthood typically remains a normative goal for youth coming of age. It is also generally expected by parents and extended families, even if it is never empirically realised for substantial parts of the population, a condition described as "social death" (Nunzio 2019; Vigh 2009). We therefore conceptualise young adults as "those who are navigating social markers of 'adulthood'" (Niati / Shah 2022: 276), building on Henrik Vigh's 2009 notion of social navigation as a practice of continually adapting desired life goals and livelihood strategies to shifting environments.

Due to fluid and shifting roles associated with childhood and adulthood in uncertain and resource-poor environments, life course anthropologists have argued for abolishing the concept of life stages altogether (Johnson-Hanks 2002). We maintain the notion of "social" adulthood as a normatively desired life stage, marked by an orderly and predictable timing and sequencing of adulthood markers, such as completing education, gaining economic independence, marriage, and parenthood (Furstenberg 2005). Social adulthood as an orderly and predictable sequence of life events also clearly emerges as a life goal in our interviews with young Senegalese people navigating social adulthood, who aspire to "progress", to "become someone", "be independent", and take the role of a "giver". Simultaneously, we acknowledge the fluidity of adult and child roles in uncertain, resource-constrained environments by avoiding a fixed target age range and allowing for locally specific conceptions of adulthood. For instance, being able to provide for others economically, which is a key marker of adulthood for our respondents, or depending on others can shift on a short-term basis, based on ad hoc income-generating opportunities in informal "hustling" economies (Cooper / Dubbeld 2024; Thieme 2018).

Consequently, the interviewers sought out respondents who were navigating social adulthood, without specifying a fixed age range, to discuss issues of youth coming of age in Senegal. Effectively, the age range of our interview respondents at the time of the first interview was 21 to 40 years, with multiple respondents falling between 30 to 40. However, they did not feel that they had

reached stable "social adulthood", still self-identifying as young people coming of age, stuck in a temporary limbo, as described in the prominent, albeit controversial, notion of "waithood" (Honwana 2012). To capture this protracted nature of adulthood processes and distinguish between chronological and social adulthood, it was crucial not to impose strict age ranges on the target population. Some of our respondents assumed relatively stable roles as economic providers at a young age, becoming parents and supporting their elderly parents, roles that are all associated with "social" adulthood in Senegal.

Potential respondents were initially approached through personal networks or in public locations where they were likely to spend time, and where it was socially appropriate to open a conversation. For instance, lower-educated female respondents were recruited from among saleswomen at local markets, while higher-educated respondents were recruited in part on university campuses. Overall, respondents were eager to share their stories and generally appeared to greatly appreciate the interest in their situation and the predicament of young adults in Senegal. Many expressed a lack of spaces for their voices to be heard, and perceived our study as a welcome outlet for their experiences and opinions. Respondents also often suggested other contacts for follow-up interviews. No monetary compensation or other forms of incentives were provided to avoid selective participation. Across the three interview waves, the interviewers remained in close contact with the respondents, primarily via WhatsApp and other messaging services, to be available to answer respondents' follow-up questions about the study.

The interviewers attempted to accommodate the respondents' schedules and preferences regarding the interview location as best they could. They sought places that were sufficiently calm for high-quality recordings, with minimal interruptions, and that involved manageable travel times for each participant. Most interviews took place in family homes, workplaces such as shops, or on a university campus. Interviewers endeavoured to create environments familiar and natural to the respondents to ensure they felt at ease and open to autobiographical narration. The duration, location, and circumstances of each interview were documented by the interviewers, including whether other persons were present for parts or the entire duration of the interview. Typically, a customer or family member would drop by briefly to bring lunch, ask a question, or greet and join the interviewer in a chat. Nevertheless, the majority of the interviews were conducted without others present or actively listening. The research team met regularly to discuss the interview documentation and reflections, to incorporate relevant information into subsequent interviews, and into data interpretations.

In this paper, we focus on 26 respondents who completed all three waves of interviews. Table 1 provides an overview of all respondents by gender, education, and urban-rural region, based on the third-wave data. Several respondents moved between urban and rural areas between data collection waves. Tertiary-educated individuals (60%), men (62%), and urban respondents (65%) are somewhat overrepresented, although, given the around 55% urbanisation in contemporary Senegal, these deviations are not extreme. Our qualitative case study did not aim for a population-representative distribution. Instead, the goal was to listen to individuals with rich stories and varied backgrounds, including different genders, educational levels, and urban or rural origins, to enable intersectional group comparisons and foster decolonial knowledge production (Section 3).

Table 1: Sample descriptive statistics

Gender	N	%
Men	16	62
Women	10	38
Total	**26**	**100**
Education		
Primary education	3	12
Secondary education	7	27
Tertiary education	16	60
Total	**26**	**100**
Region		
Urban	17	65
Rural	9	35
Total	**26**	**100**

Note: All time variant information pertains to the last wave

Nonetheless, the HIBO data is especially well-suited to amplify voices and highlight the life experiences of educated urban residents (Interviews with Djibril, Appendix II). Educated urban residents are the fastest-growing population subgroup among youth in contemporary Senegal, due to educational expansion and progressing urbanisation (ANSD 2023a). Therefore, they are, by demographic momentum, a major agent of social change in contemporary Senegal (Section 2). Although interviews with lower-educated respondents are fewer in number, their life histories and narratives of navigating social adulthood are equally rich and informative (Interviews with Awa, Appendix II).

4 TIMELINE AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Figure 1 provides an overview of the research process timeline, beginning with the recruitment of the project's international research team and continuing until the final three-day youth assembly in Dakar in October 2024. During the assembly, respondents discussed the study's core themes and findings with the research team and other local activists and stakeholders, as a part of participatory thematic analysis (Liebenberg et al. 2020).

The qualitative data was collected in July and August 2021 (Wave 1), October and November 2021 (Wave 2), and January to June 2024 (Wave 3). Due to scheduling delays with some respondents, data collection spanned several adjacent months. The interviews were conducted over the longest time frame in the third wave, during which interviewers made extensive efforts to follow up with

Figure 1: time line of data collection process

as many prior participants as possible, even if this involved long waiting periods or conducting interviews online. Wave 2 was a brief follow-up to Wave 1, conducted only a few months after the first interviews to address open questions that had emerged during Wave 1 and to assess the overall volatility in respondents' lives over a short time interval. Despite this brief interval many respondents' lives had changed substantially, reflecting a highly dynamic economic and political environment. The longer period until the Wave 3 enabled us to assess how respondents' lives and perceptions had evolved during a major political regime shift, including intensifying youth protests and the election of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye (Figure 1).

4.1 PREPARATION OF DATA COLLECTION AND SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In 2019, we recruited a team of eight Senegalese interviewers (four men and four women) through a job advertisement at Cheikh Anta Diop University, the leading public university in Dakar, via local email lists and prior contacts of the research team based on previous fieldwork in Senegal (Niati 2024; Niati / Shah 2022). We received many applications for interviewers due to the relatively high compensation offered for the Senegalese context. All interviewers were graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, or assistant/adjunct professors in social science fields. After Wave 1, and due to the constraints outlined below, we continued with three core interviewers, all experienced social scientists, who became part of the international research team.

Shortly after the initial recruitment in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic caused major disruptions to the research process in early 2020 (Figure 1). Hiring processes were delayed and travel bans prevented in-person workshops for interviewer training and the joint development of guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews in Dakar (Section 5). To address this, we conducted multiple full-day online seminars with the interviewers, using focus group-style discussions to prepare the interview questions around core themes. These themes later formed the principal thematic blocks of the semi-structured interviews, including work and family biographies, gender and generations, unemployment and entrepreneurship, migration, brotherhoods, and political participation.

We discussed in depth how to formulate questions that respect local norms, amplify the youth's own narratives, reflect the lived realities of young adults, and remain participant-oriented (Mashuri et al. 2022). Each thematic block began with general, open-ended questions, followed by more detailed prompts to encourage narration, and elicit in-depth answers from the respondents (Adeoye-Olatunde / Olenik 2021; Kallio et al. 2016; Mashuri et al. 2022). Questions were deliberately phrased in general and polite terms to avoid offending or silencing respondents, preventing discomfort, or risking premature termination of the interview. Extensive discussions within the international research team, drawing on the intuitions of the Senegalese researchers and insights from the pre-tests, guided the phrasing of the questions (Appendix I). The pre-tests resulted in substantial simplification and reformulation of several questions. Each of the three interview waves concluded with an open-ended question, inviting respondents to share anything else they considered important or wished to add. We approached respondents not as "research subjects" but as experts on their own lives, seeking their experiences, opinions, and reflections on our core research topics as sources of decolonial knowledge production (Mignolo 2009). Certain potentially sensitive topics, such as sexual behaviour or criminal activity were not addressed unless the respondents raised them themselves, to avoid discomfort and to maintain the trust necessary for participants to openly share their experiences and

worldviews across the multiple waves of the longitudinal study.

Our experience with the online workshops to develop the semi-structured interview questions corresponds with findings from other qualitative research that transitioned to digital formats during the pandemic (Keen et al. 2022). Although interpersonal interactions outside of group discussion were limited, the online format allowed for inclusive participation by researchers located in Senegal, Germany and the United States at the time, overall, facilitated high-quality, productive exchanges (Keen et al. 2022). We further conducted joint online workshops to reiterate qualitative interview techniques, documentation practices, and transcription procedures before beginning the primary fieldwork in 2021, to ensure a shared understanding of interview collection and documentation standards. Interviewers navigated the flexibility of semi-structured interviews by prioritising participants' open narration over a fixed questionnaire, thereby amplifying respondents' voices. An extensive database of scientific articles on qualitative methods and youth issues was shared with the team, to which all team members contributed. Each interviewer and another team member regularly reviewed interview recordings to improve interview techniques, encourage respondents to provide richer accounts, and avoid leading or suggestive questions.

The interviews were conducted in French or Wolof, and many alternated between the two. Wolof is the most widely spoken local language in Senegal, particularly in our interview regions (Diouf et al. 2017). Each interview was recorded and translated where necessary, then transcribed into French. Literacy in Wolof remains low, at approximately 15%, compared to literacy in French, which is 38% among the population aged 10 years and older, despite Wolof being spoken by the vast majority of Senegalese people, either as a first or second language (ANSD 2023a). Wolof has only been consistently alphabetised since the 1970s, and schools continue to operate primarily in French, while Koranic schools (Daaras) operate in French and Arabic. The interviewers were most able to grasp the meaning of the Wolof passages in interviews that they had conducted themselves and translated into French. The transcribed interviews can therefore be analysed in French, as well as in a validated English translation. The research team has conducted extensive initial coding in MAXQDA and consistently refers back to the original Wolof expressions where approriate to ensure the precise meaning is preserved in quotations.

4.2 RESEARCH ETHICS AND DECOLONIAL TERMS OF COLLABORATION

The interview respondents provided informed consent for the recordings and were fully briefed on the study's aims. Ethics approval was obtained from the relevant ethics board at Humboldt University of Berlin. All data and coding are stored securely on Humboldt University servers. Given the highly sensitive nature of the material, access is currently limited to the authors of this paper and to researchers collaborating with one of the authors. The authors constitute the core international research team involved throughout the entire data collection process. The Berlin-based members of the team were Anette Eva Fasang and Noella Binda Niati, while the Senegal-based members were Mariéme Ciss, Assa Kamara, and Nancy Ndour.

We aimed not only for new content by delinking from Western theoretical assumptions rooted in colonial logics by amplifying young adults' own life narratives, but also for establishing decolonial terms of collaboration within our international research team (Mignolo 2009; Niati 2024; Rahman / Johnson 2025; Zuberi / Bonilla-Silva 2008). At the same time, we embraced the humanist openness to integrating perspectives from diverse backgrounds in productive ways within our

international research team, as emphasised in Négritude (Césaire 1972; Senghor 2004). The Berlin-based and Senegal-based researchers collaborated closely during all stages of the research, from planning and preparing the data collection, making necessary adaptations to the study in response to the research realities during the COVID-19 pandemic and evolving political unrest, through to the data analysis and ongoing publication stage. Reflexivity and the positionality of all researchers involved were continually discussed in detail, both in terms of our individual and collective positionality as a research team, to avoid the "hubris of the zero point" (Mignolo 2009).

Our reflections on our positionality aimed to move beyond a dichotomy of insider versus outsider positions, acknowledging the multifaceted and fluid nature of each participating researcher's positionality (Niati 2024). The core research team consisted of a Berlin-based Hungarian-American researcher with extensive experience in comparative life course research in several high and low-income countries but with no prior research experience in Senegal; a Berlin-based Congolese-American researcher with extensive experience in youth and education research in Senegal and Ivory Coast; and three Senegal-based Senegalese researchers, one of whom had extensive research experience in France and whose research interests span health care, migration, and intergenerational and gender relations in Senegal. Several other Europe-based and Senegal-based researchers also contributed to the study at specific stages by providing comments and feedback.

Building on these reflections, discussions of our individual and collective positionality also revealed that being an all-female core research team offered important advantages for fostering decolonial terms of collaboration, although this was not an intentional part of the study design. An all-female research team helped to avoid complex intersectional dynamics of gender and European and African descent that are intertwined with colonial histories and power relations, in which European men are often most strongly associated with domination. The shared experience of conducting research in patriarchal environments, in which women remain underrepresented in positions of power in both Germany and Senegal, albeit in locally specific ways, helped to foster mutual trust, reduce communication barriers, and strengthen the team's collective commitment to completing the study. At the same time, the fact that the funding came from the German Research Foundation and was administered through Berlin introduced structural inequalities that would ideally be mitigated in a fully co-funded project, which, however, was not feasible in the present case.

The Senegal-based researchers spent several weeks in Berlin to jointly discuss and validate interpretations of responses from the first two waves of interviews with the Berlin-based researchers before fieldwork for the third wave began. The Berlin-based researchers spent multiple extended periods in Senegal for fieldwork, exchange, and workshops. This reciprocal exchange ensured that insights from the earlier waves could be appropriately considered and incorporated in the design and conduct of the third and final wave. Additionally, we engaged respondents in participatory data analysis in a three-day youth assembly at the end of the study in Dakar (Figure 1), allowing for an opportunity to reflect on preliminary findings with young adults and local stakeholders.

4.3 FLEXIBLE ADAPTATIONS IN THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

The first wave of interviews was delayed by violent protests in Senegal in March 2021 (Figure 1). Young people took to the streets to oppose the arrest of opposition leader Ousmane Sonko and to decry the lack of employment prospects, which

intensified during COVID-19-related curfews. The March 2021 protests prevented travel to Senegal and within Dakar for safety reasons and made it impossible for interviewers to schedule personal meetings with respondents due to the curfews (Section 5). People in urban areas largely chose to stay at home to avoid street violence or arrests. Once the Berlin-based researchers were able to enter Senegal after vaccinations became more widely available in early 2021 and travel bans were partly lifted, the Berlin-based postdoctoral researcher spent several months in Dakar conducting ethnographic fieldwork and accompanying the interviewers during the first wave of interviews on-site in July and August 2021, supported by regular online meetings with the Berlin-based team members. A total of 73 interviews were collected, falling slightly short of the initial target of ten interviews for each of the eight interviewers. All first-wave interviews were conducted in person; only switching to occasional online videos in wave 3, after personal contact between interviewers and respondents had been established. Due to the varying quality of the interviews and the subsequent unavailability of some interviewers after the first wave, the decision was made to proceed with only three of the original interviewers in Waves 2 and 3. These three interviewers, experienced female Senegalese social scientests, interviewed all 26 respondents who partidipated in the three waves of the study and subsequently became core members of the research team, jointly analysing, interpreting, and publishing the data.

In October and November 2021, we conducted a second round of interviews, during which the three core interviewers reinterviewed 29 of their original 30 respondents. We did not follow up with the interviewers who no longer participated in the second and third waves. Rather than attempting to maintain the larger sample from the first round, which had already revealed similar patterns across many respondents, we redirected resources towards extending the study longitudinally through high-quality interviews with a smaller group of respondents.

In 2022 and 2023, we held multiple workshops in Berlin and Dakar to assess preliminary findings and lessons learned from the first two waves and to prepare Wave 3, including continuous reflection on the researchers' positionality (Hamilton 2020; Niati 2024). The third round of interviews was conducted from January 2024 until June 2024, with 26 of the original participants (Figure 1). Consequently, the dropout rate among the three core interviewers' respondents was very low: of the 30 initial respondents, 26 completed all three waves. This low attrition reflects the trust the interviewers built with their respondents, as well as their extensive efforts to schedule follow-up interviews. Some interviews were conducted by phone or via Zoom if respondents had left the country or relocated to remote areas by Wave 3, illustrating the inclusive potential of online qualitative methods pioneered during the pandemic (Keen et al. 2022). The reasons as to why specific participants could not be followed up with were documented, as were the interviewers' general impressions of the interviews.

The timing of Wave 3 was particularly challenging, as the research team had to balance security concerns and with logistical feasibility. Violent protests occurred again in June 2023 and February 2024, triggered by former Prime Minister Macky Sall's unconstitutional attempt to run for a third term and the subsequent postponement of the national election until March 2024 (Fall 2024). In response, we quickly adapted several questions to enter the field for Wave 3 in early 2024. Most interviews were conducted after April 2024, immediately following the election of Diomaye Faye and his party, PASTEF (African Patriots of Senegal for Work, Ethics, and Fraternity, in French: *Patriotes Africains du Sénégal pour le Travail, l'Éthique et la Fraternité)*. PASTEF had enjoyed the support

of the majority of young people during our fieldwork in the preceding years. Wave 3 thus provided an opportunity to assess how individuals' lives, perceptions of the political situation, and political engagement had evolved across the regime change. Indeed, many, but not all, of our respondents expressed greater support for peaceful, and in some cases partly for violent, political protest, and demonstrated increased optimism about the capacity for youth movements to effect political change between Waves 1 and 3. These shifts reflect the broader momentum and rising political awareness among young people in the country.

4.4 LOCAL DISSEMINATION AND PARTICIPATORY DATA ANALYSIS ("PENCUM NDAWYI")

Accountability to our respondents, who generously shared their life stories and world views with us, was a central priority of our research. We also aimed for accountability beyond the immediate duration of our study (Rahman / Johnson 2025). To support decolonial knowledge production, we incorporated participatory data analysis components, enabling our respondents to participate as co-researchers in the data interpretation process (Liebenberg et al. 2020). We designed these activities to minimise the burden on respondents by avoiding lengthy or meticulous coding, while creating a format that amplified their voices and offered an engaging and rewarding exchange for everyone involved.

In October 2024, we invited all respondents, alongside a diverse group of youth activists, academics, and local stakeholders, to a three-day youth assembly in Dakar, called "Pencum Ndawyi" in Wolof. The assembly served to present initial study findings, discuss data interpretations through participatory data analysis, reflect on the terms of our research, and provide networking opportunities. Respondents were compensated for travel and accommodation to facilitate participation in the three days of discussion and exchange. Of the 26 respondents who completed all three interview waves, 22 participated in the youth assembly. The event was jointly organised by the SCRIPTS cluster of excellence funded by the German Research Foundation, of which our study was a part, and the Dakar regional office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation together with our collaborators at Rose Dieng University, France, Senegal, and involving academics from other local universities.[3] The language of the assembly was a combination of French and Wolof, with simultaneous translation between the two and into English, to enhance inclusivity and reduce language barriers during the discussions.

The interview participants responded very positively to this event, engaging enthusiastically and critically with the preliminary findings alongside the international research team. They also took part in group and panel discussions with local stakeholders, activists, and academics, addressing the challenges faced by contemporary youth in Senegal. Plenary and small-group discussions were structured around topics such as gender relations, employment and entrepreneurship, politics, and migration, reflecting the core thematic blocks of our interviews. Sessions on contemporary gender relations and the drivers of undocumented migration were particularly lively and, at times, controversial throughout the three day event. The assembly received media coverage in "Le Soleil", a major local newspaper, and contributed to raising local awareness of our respondents' daily struggles in navigating social adulthood.

During the three-day event, we held sessions explicitly dedicated to the HIBO project, in which we also discussed issues related to Western researchers conducting research in Senegal and ways to foster decolonial terms in research collaborations

3 Video clips from this event are available online at the following address: https://www.sowi.hu-berlin.de/de/lehrbereiche/mikrosoziologie/schwarzes-brett.

(Zuberi / Bonilla-Silva 2008). Respondents were largely aware of, and sensitive to, neo-colonial structures in research collaborations, yet they also emphasised the added value of pooling resources and learning from each other, as well as the necessity of exploring multiple contexts for conducting comparative research. Mutuality and reciprocity between African and European researchers emerged as key motivations and expectations for the interview participants, who noted that such principles were insufficiently realised, particularly in collaborations with French researchers and agencies. Respondents perceived the dynamic between within our research team as distinct from what it might have been in a partnership with French researchers. As part of a broader comparative research agenda on young adult life courses across the world (Fasang et al. 2025), the study stimulated respondents' interest in the shared and divergent conditions of navigating social adulthood across different regions of the world. This comparative perspective highlighted the universal value of comparative research without a natural "zero point" for comparison (Mignolo 2009), underscoring possibilities for mutual learning in line with the collaborative ethos emphasised in transnégritude (Touré 2020; Niati / Shah 2022).

Another outcome of the discussions was the recognition that contemporary social issues, such as irregular migration and youth prospects in countries like Germany and Senegal, are highly interdependent within a neo-colonial global economy. Participants emphasised that these issues should therefore be jointly studied by researchers from both contexts. A widely shared sentiment was that young adults in Senegal lack spaces where their concerns can be heard, and they placed hope in the research to inform local policy development in Senegal and Germany. By inviting interview respondents alongside local activists and academics, the youth assembly provided opportunities for exchange and networking, which were well received and fostered connections beyond the duration of the study.

5 SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND POLITICAL UNREST

The COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest had a profound impact on our research, generating unforeseen challenges but also creating new opportunities (Keen et al. 2022; Rahman et al. 2021). Our study aligns with previous research highlighting the many advantages of qualitative methods and a life course approach for understanding how the pandemic affected young adults' lives (Settersten et al. 2020; Teti et al. 2020). Table 2 summarises key challenges and opportunities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest. These events were partly interrelated, often occurred simultaneously, and led to similar concerns, such as, ensuring the physical safety of researchers and respondents in the field. Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the initial stages of the research, particularly before the first wave of data collection, affecting the recruitment of participating researchers and administrative processes in Berlin. Political unrest in Senegal began later, in March 2021 (Figure 1), and peaked at specific points during the research process. We adopt a broad understanding of political unrest, encompassing violent street protests and looting, as well as peaceful demonstrations, temporary internet shutdowns in Senegal that hindered online meetings between the Berlin-based and Senegal-based researchers, and general uncertainty and stress experienced by both participating researchers and respondents. In the following sections, we first discuss the challenges and then on opportunities arising from these circumstances (Table 2).

5.1 CHALLENGES

The COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest both led to government-imposed curfews and created high levels of uncertainty, emotional stress, and concerns for the physical and mental well-being of participating researchers and respondents. Both circumstances required repeated decisions about whether to continue or pause the research (Rahman et al. 2021) and restricted the mobility of, and the time that Berlin-based researchers could spend in Senegal. During the preparation for data collection, Germany imposed pandemic-related travel restrictions, which delayed by several months the hiring of the core project postdoctoral researcher who was based in the United States at the time. Although the selection committee had completed its work before the pandemic, the appointed candidate was unable to enter Germany to sign the work contract due to these restrictions. Extensive communication with the German border authorities eventually secured special permission for the postdoctoral researcher to enter Germany and assume the position in autumn 2020.

In 2020, for the first time in its history, Senegal imposed travel restrictions that prevented the Berlin-based researchers from entering the country as a safeguard against COVID-19. At the time, COVID-19 was widely perceived across the African continent as a "European" or "White man's" disease, which further complicated on-site recruitment and the conduct of focus groups for questionnaire development. As a result, we conducted a series of Zoom workshops in 2020 and 2021, following the recruitment of interviewers, to develop the guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews, which combined autobiographical and thematic elements (Section 4).

Throughout the data collection process, the German government issued multiple travel warnings for Senegal due to the violent political unrest. Consequently, we had to cancel and reschedule planned project workshops in Senegal on short notice for both safety concerns and for administrative reasons. University regulations could not authorise travel to areas for which the German government had issued travel warnings, and funds from the German Research Foundation could be used for travel to such areas. As a result, the travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest alone caused considerable delays and required substantial efforts at adaptation and rescheduling by the research team, resulting in cancellation costs and increased stress on researchers and respondents. The research team continually faced decisions about whether to continue or pause the data collection process, prioritising the health and safety of both researchers and interview respondents involved (Fosu 2024a; Rahman et al. 2021).

Administrative challenges of conducting fieldwork in Africa, already considerable under "normal" circumstances due to regulations from European funding agencies, were further exacerbated during the pandemic, when much work was carried out from home offices amid considerable uncertainty about rules and procedures. For instance, given that Senegal is a predominantly cash-based economy, most of the recruited interviewers initially did not have bank accounts. Interviewers had to be paid in cash via MoneyGram, a procedure not foreseen under standard university regulations. Uncertainty about regulations during the pandemic, alongside other administrative obstacles, including travel permissions, visas, required vaccinations, and the logistics of paying interviewers, further complicated coordination and delayed all project activities. Consequently, the primary fieldwork did not begin until the summer of 2021, when the project's core postdoctoral researcher was able to enter Senegal and spend several months in Dakar conducting ethnographic observations and coordinating the fieldwork.

Table 2: Challenges and opportunities due to COVID-19 and political unrest

Challenge	Opportunities
– **Emotional stress and uncertainty** for all researchers involved. – Frequently **changing regulations** that constantly shifted conditions for research: travel restrictions, government travel warnings, vaccination regulations, access to vaccinations, infections, and university administrative requirements. – Time burdens and limited mobility of **researchers with care responsibilities** due to the shutdown of schools and child care facilities, quarantines of ill and frail relatives. – **Increased administrative communication** and problem-solving with university administrations, who were seeking solutions to new and shifting challenges and operated slowly due to home office regulations and infections. – Constant **flexible adaptation of the data collection process**, reconsidering whether to pause or continue, balancing ethical integrity, responsibility for the safety of participating researchers and respondents, and research aims, while completing the key longitudinal components of the data collection. – **Delay and rescheduling of visiting periods** and workshops of Senegalese and Europe-based team members, often on short notice, which incurred cancellation costs.	– **Heightened awareness** of the importance of the research topic, as intensifying youth protests and pandemic-related restrictions put the situation of young adults at the center of public debate and increased the motivation of the research team and respondents. – The global context fostered **closer collaboration and trust** between Europe-based and Senegal-based researchers, flexibly adapting responsibilities and steps in the data collection and analysis; experience of shared struggle as “équipe de choc”. – Online alternatives for focus groups and interview follow-ups **reduced barriers for participation** and enabled higher participation in last interview wave. – Possibility to **flexibly adapt questions to changing circumstances** related to the research focus, for example, expanding questions on perception and participation in political protests.

Furthermore, team members with childcare and eldercare responsibilities faced additional time constraints during repeated school and care facility closures, as well as the intermittent suspension of care services during the pandemic. These circumstances, combined with pre-vaccination self-isolation requirements and national travel bans, further restricted travel and fieldwork opportunities. Consequently, it was vital for the project to receive multiple extensions in order to complete the third wave of interviews under more stable post-pandemic conditions, following a political transition, and at a time of renewed general optimism.

In spring 2021, culminating in March, protests erupted in Dakar, with predominantly young people taking to the streets to express their frustration with the Sall government, youth unemployment, limited employment prospects, and constraints imposed by the pandemic. COVID-19-related restrictions and curfews took a severe toll on the informal street economy, which the vast majority of young adults and Senegalese of all ages rely on for their basic livelihoods.

On the one hand, the evolving protest movement opened exciting opportunities for the project, allowing us to incorporate additional questions on protest and political engagement in the second and third waves of data collection. On the other hand, curfews imposed during the youth protests, acts of vandalism and looting, often targeting French institutions and supermarkets, as

well as the forceful suppression of demonstrators by the police, including multiple deaths and arrests, posed severe safety risks for all researchers and complicated the scheduling of in-person interviews. Intermittent internet and power outages implemented as a government measure to limit local coordination of protest movements via social media, further disrupted communication among researchers and respondents. As a result, the research team had to make pragmatic, short notice, decisions on how to continue the research in this overall highly dynamic environment. Both the pandemic and political unrest also restricted access to archives and other locally available data sources, including the destruction of several major university archives during violent protests in 2023.

5.2 OPPORTUNITIES

The unfolding COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest starkly highlighted the importance of our research focus on young adults navigating social adulthood under adverse conditions, as well as their struggle for political and economic change (Table 2). The lack of economic prospects for young adults, neo-colonial dependencies, street protests, and democratic shortcomings of the Sall government were at the center of public debate and widely recognised as key issues in a pivotal moment in Senegal's history (Fall 2024). These circumstances increased both researchers' and respondents' motivation to participate in a study addressing pressing contemporary social issues. Furthermore, the thematic focus of our questions tackled highly salient matters that most of our respondents were deeply concerned about, constantly reflected on, and discussed in their daily lives. Many respondents reported that participating in the interviews gave them an opportunity to articulate their thoughts, that the study was very important, and that it created a space for young people's voices to be heard, which was often missing in their daily lives.

Moreover, the shared experience of navigating adverse conditions with the common goal of completing the research fostered trusting, close relationships among the Berlin- and Senegal-based members of the international research team, consistent with our aim for decolonial research. The initially limited ability of the Berlin-based members to spend time in Senegal shifted more local responsibilities to the Senegalese team for contextualising the research and for ensuring respondents' health and safety in choosing interview locations and modalities (Fosu 2024b). Across these challenges, the international research team collectively embraced a self-understanding as an "équipe de choc": a team of researchers determined to completing the study, even while repeatedly shocked by unforseen obstacles and crises.

Although initially perceived as a suboptimal necessity, adapting various parts of the preparation and data collection to online formats proved surprisingly effective, consistent with findings of other studies (Fosu 2024a). Furthermore, we continually adapted the semi-structured interview questions to capture respondents' attitudes and participation in the unfolding youth protests, yielding rich, timely data, particularly in Wave 3. The longitudinal data allows us to trace how respondents' perceptions of the potential for positive political change, as well as their own agency regarding the effectiveness of youth protests, evolved in a highly dynamic situation.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The HIBO study set out to pioneer a decolonial, qualitative, longitudinal analysis of young adult life courses and social and political engagement in Senegal, drawing on insights from discourses on epistemic disobedience, Négritude and transnégritude, and the life course paradigm (Elder et al. 2003; Fasang et al. 2025; Mignolo 2009; Niati / Shah 2022; Senghor 1971). Against the backdrop of

educational expansion, urbanisation, and stagnating labour markets, growing cohorts of unemployed, educated young adults struggle to achieve economic independence, find work commensurate with their aspirations, and establish social adulthood in Senegal (Fall 2024; Lorenceau et al. 2021). The HIBO study amplifies young adults' own narratives to provide a decolonial perspective on their experiences navigating social adulthood amid adverse economic conditions and unfulfilled promises of liberalism (Börzel et al. 2024).

The HIBO data offers a unique opportunity to address research questions about young adults' life experiences, aspirations, and social and political engagement under highly volatile circumstances in Senegal during the COVID-19 pandemic and a period of political unrest between 2021 and 2024. Insights from intersectionality and life course research emphasise the potential accumulation of (dis)advantages across individual lives (Dannefer 1987, 2003; Diprete / Eirich 2006), as well as the flexible adaptations through which young people navigate adversities and opportunities. Accordingly, the HIBO data can also inform young adults' resilience, in terms of their capacity to adjust and achieve locally meaningful outcomes in the face of adversity (Liebenberg/Ungar 2008, 2009). In particular, our data provides rich accounts of the life circumstances that young adults perceive as beneficial, even as they recognise the persistence of unfulfilled aspirations in navigating social adulthood.

This paper presents our theoretical motivation and data collection process, highlighting the specific challenges and opportunities that emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic and political unrest. We hope that the lessons we have learned will prove helpful to other qualitative studies seeking to produce decolonial knowledge within international research teams.

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APPENDIX I: GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Before each interview, interviewers informed the participants about the anonymity of their responses, asked for permission to record the interview and informed them that they could terminate the interview at any time. Additional interviewer instructions in each wave are highlighted in italics below.

WAVE 1: JULY/AUGUST 2021

Presentation of the study:
Introduce yourself and present the project. Explain the objective of the study and the types of questions we will be asking.

Socio-demographic information (open questions)
– Age, Gender, Place of residence, Level of education, Marital status, Number of children, Occupation, Parents' education and occupation

A. Employment
1. Are you currently employed? What do you do for a living?
2. Can you talk about any employment or economic challenges you have faced?
3. What are the main challenges facing young people of your generation today? Do you think young people in general share these challenges?
4. Are you aware of any government policies or programs that promote employment or entrepreneurship? (If applicable:)What do you think of these programs?

B. Migration
1. What do you think about irregular migration?
2. In your opinion, is there a link between unemployment and illegal migration (explain your answer)?
3. In your opinion, what are the reasons that drive people to engage in this type of migration?
4. To what extent do public policies (e.g., employment, migration, education, youth, economic, social, etc.) have an impact on migration?
5. In your opinion, what is the impact of foreign remittances on the community (infrastructure, job creation, etc.)?
6. What role does family play in migration?
7. Would you consider or have you considered migrating? Why or why not?
8. Do you know anyone who has migrated? What was their experience? Overall, good or not?
9. Are you aware of any government policies or programs aimed at eliminating irregular migration?

C. Generational change
1. Do older and younger people share the same frustrations? If so, tell me about these frustrations.
2. Who or what do people hold responsible for these frustrations?
3. What solutions are people looking for?
4. When you compare your parents' situation at your age, where did they stand? In terms of family life and work? What kind of education and employment did your mother and father have?
5. Do you think young people today find it easier than their parents to earn a living and start a family? E.g., buying their own apartment or house; moving out of their parents' home?
6. How have things changed between your parents' generation and today?
7. What were the main challenges your parents' generation faced, and what are the main challenges your generation faces?
8. Do you support your parents financially, by providing care or helping them with shopping, etc.?
9. Do your parents support you financially or by providing childcare or other forms of support?

10. What would your parents want for you and your life? What is important to them when they look at your accomplishments?
11. Are your parents' expectations different from yours?
12. Do you think there is increasing conflict between young and old people? Or is there generational solidarity? Do generations help each other a lot?

D. Family life

1. How has your own family life developed so far? You said above that you are [single, married, divorced, etc.]?
2. Would you like to have more children?
3. In your opinion, what is the ideal number of children to have?
4. In your opinion, what is the ideal form of childcare when children are young? Should they be with their mother, father, extended family, or other forms of childcare?
5. Do you think your family life has affected your educational or employment opportunities? Has it improved or limited these opportunities? Can you give an example?
6. Do you think your education and professional situation have had an impact on your family life? Either by opening up or limiting family opportunities? In what way?

E. Brotherhoods

1. Are you a member of one of the brotherhoods? What has been your personal experience in this brotherhood?
2. What do you think of the role of brotherhoods in Senegal? Is it positive or negative?
3. Do you and your parents share similar views on brotherhoods, or do you have different opinions? In what way?
4. What role do brotherhoods play in social or political life in Senegal? Do you think they improve the situation for young adults?
5. What kind of life do brotherhoods most approve of for young adults, both in terms of family and employment?
6. What views do the brotherhoods promote on intergenerational relationships, for example, what forms of support and approval would they expect between parents and children?
7. Have the brotherhoods played a role in the changes you described above between the life chances of your parents' generation and your own?

F. Political Engagement

1. Tell me about the protests in March 2021. Why were there protests at the beginning of the month (March 5-7)?
2. What triggered these recent protests?
3. What are/were the frustrations? Was it related to the pandemic?
4. Who came out to protest? Was it only young people, or was it multigenerational?
5. Are you a member of a civic movement organization?
6. What solutions is your organization seeking?

G. Open Question

1. Is there anything else you think is important or would like to add?

WAVE 2: OCTOBER & NOVEMBER 2021

A. Employment

1. Does having a degree or not having one influence the choice and acceptance of a job? Is it legitimate for young graduates to demand a higher salary?
2. Does having a less desirable job allow you to live comfortably?
3. Are social success and social mobility determined by the type of job you choose?
4. Why should the government invest in entrepreneurship?

B. Migration

1. Why do people want to migrate if Europe seems to be a "false Eldorado"?
2. Do remittances from migrants or their lifestyle abroad encourage migration?
3. Are those who have studied abroad and returned home held in higher regard than those who studied in Senegal?
4. Some who migrated for education and have returned expect a salary advantage. Is the expectation of a salary advantage by these migrants justified? Why?

C. Generational change and family life

1. Last time we talked about your parents' lives, can you give examples and explain how your life today is easier/more difficult than your parents' lives?
2. Do you think that the transition from a traditional society based on solidarity and mutual aid to a modern society based on individualism, the pursuit of profit, marriage outside the clan, etc. has slowed down growth (economic and demographic)?
3. Is there a correlation/link between education or employment and procreation? What is this link?

D. Brotherhoods

1. Does religion or membership in a brotherhood have an impact on social mobility? Explain how.
2. Does the fact that some young people listen more to religious leaders than to politicians have an influence on engagement (political/civic, etc.)?
3. Do you think that those with limited employment opportunities tend to follow religious leaders rather than politicians? Why?
4. Does the shift away from Koranic schools in favor of modern schools have an impact on youth deviance today?

E. Political engagement

1. Are you politically engaged?
2. Are you a member of a political party?
3. What is your opinion of politics in Senegal?
4. What would make you want to protest? In your opinion, when is it really necessary to protest?

F. Open Question

1. Is there anything else you think is important or would like to add?

WAVE 3: JANUARY TO JUNE 2024

Before the questions, please update the demographic information:

Remind me of your...

- Marital status, Place of residence (urban/rural), Level of education, Occupation, Number of children, Parents' level of education (mother and father), Father's occupation, Mother's occupation
- Believes he/she is better off than his/her parents (yes or no)?
- Supported the protests (yes or no)?

A. Education:

1. Did you attend a public or private secondary school?
2. Can you remind me of the highest level of education you have attained/completed?
3. (If you attended university), how did you choose your field of study?
4. Have you undergone any professional training or obtained a qualification since our last interview (formal or informal)?

B. Current occupation/livelihood:

1. What do you currently do for a living? What exactly is your profession? Is it a full-time job? Is it self-employed or working for someone else? Is there anything else you do on the side**?**

2. Who can you turn to when you are short of money? Parents, partner, other family members, friends, fraternities, government
3. Are you currently receiving financial support, and if so, from whom? For example from parents, partner, other family members, friends, fraternities, government, scholarships?

C. Life Goals and Occupational Aspirations

1. When you were a teenager, what kind of work did you want to do? Why? What kind of work?
2. Does your current job situation match what you wanted? Why or why not?
3. *(IF the respondent has NOT found the type of work they wanted):*
   a. Why do you think you haven't found the job you want yet? Who or what is responsible for this situation? Why is that?
   b. Are you looking for better job opportunities?
4. (IF the respondent found the type of job they wanted):
   a. How did you get your current job?
5. Do you think your professional situation will improve in the next five years?
6. If so, why and how? (What will you do to make this happen?)
7. If not, why not? (What would need to happen for your professional situation to improve?)
8. Has your training (formal/informal) had an impact on your professional situation and, if so, how? PROMPT: Did you acquire relevant/useful skills during your training?
9. When you think of people you know personally who have been successful in their careers, what do you think are the reasons for their success?
10. Do you have any ideas for improving the employment situation for young people in Senegal?

D. Family

Next, we would like to ask you a few more questions about your family life.

1. First, could you remind me if you are currently married?

If the respondent is NOT married:

2. Do you feel pressure from family members or others to get married? Why (not)?
3. What are the main reasons why you have not married yet? *Invitation:* Are there any other reasons? For example, does your financial situation play a role? Does your professional situation play a role?
4. Do you intend to get married in the future? What would need to happen for this to become a reality? For example, education/degree, job/salary, house, family, etc.
5. Does being single affect how others perceive you? If so, in what way?

If the respondent IS married:

1. At what age did you get married?
2. Would you say it was early or late to get married compared to people of your generation?
3. Why did you decide to get married at that age? *Invitation:* Did economic considerations play a role? If so, how? Did pressure from family members play a role?
4. Did getting married have any impact on your job or economic activities? *Invitation:* Did marriage cause you to work more or less than before? Did you change jobs? Why?
5. Does being married have an impact on how others perceive you? If so, in what way?

E. Political Engagement:

1. What do you think of the recent protests (2021-2023)?
2. Are you familiar with any activist movements? (e.g., YEM, M23, etc.)
3. What is your opinion on current youth activist movements?
   a. *Invitation:* Do you agree (or disagree) with the protesters' demands?
   b. *Invitation:* Do you agree (or disagree) with their methods? (e.g., strikes, marches, press conferences, social media, etc.)
4. Do you think the protesters are likely to achieve their goals? Why?
5. Has your opinion on the protests changed since our last interview?
6. Have you participated in the protests in any way?
   a. If not, do you know anyone who has?
7. Have you participated in other forms of political activity, such as strikes, social media campaigns, neighborhood associations, or education?
8. Do your friends and family support the protests?

F. Open Question

1. Is there anything else you think is important or would like to add?

APPENDIX II: SELECTED RESPONDENT PROFILES

This appendix presents a profile of two selected respondents to illustrate the potential of the data: a male respondent with tertiary education (Djibril) and a woman with primary education (Awa). All names are fictitious to ensure anonymity, and all potentially identifying information was omitted.

DJIBRIL

Deeply frustrated, hopeless economics PhD, who becomes increasingly politically engaged across waves

Djibril, born in 1987, was first interviewed in person at his home in a medium-sized urban area in July 2021 and October 2021. His third interview took place via Zoom in May 2024, as he was in another country for medical treatment at the time. He obtained his doctorate in economics in Senegal at the age of 32. Initially, he combined temporary fixed-term lecturing jobs with other activities, such as selling luggage, to make ends meet. By 2024, at age 37, he found himself unemployed with serious health issues. The interviews, conducted in French, reveal his eloquence and frequent references to economic and demographic theories (e.g. Gary Becker, Thomas Malthus) as he explains his assessment of Senegal's current situation.

Wave 1 (July 2021): At 34 years old, Djibril was already expressing significant frustration. He described himself as a temporary teacher, touring universities, and engaging in other activities due to the limited job market in Senegal. He felt that the older generation was blocking opportunities for young, educated individuals, leading to a lack of meritocracy in recruitment processes, particularly in universities. He explicitly stated that there was "no such thing as meritocracy" and that employment was driven by "lobbying" and political connections rather than qualifications. Economically, he felt he was "surviving, not living", struggling to cover basic needs like food and rent. He initially viewed illegal migration as a drastic, ill-advised measure, though he understood the desperation that drove people to it. He blamed both the State for its "mismanagement" and the population for its "opportunism" and political apathy. His personal coping mechanism for frustration was to withdraw, stay in his room, drink tea, and avoid news, which he saw as "full of lies". He was against protests, viewing them as ineffective and destructive to the economy, and expressed his discontent through abstaining from voting.

Regarding family formation, Djibril was single and childless at 34. He noted that his mother married at 26-27 and had already started a family by his current age, while his father had also established a family. He felt that his current economic and professional struggles prevented him from forming a family, expressing deep shame about his inability to support himself or contribute to his family of origin's expenses. This shame led him to visit them only occasionally. He desired a large family, ideally 6-12 children, contrary to Malthusian views, and expressed a traditional preference for raising children within the family home. He felt his family life, particularly his parents' emphasis on education and perseverance, had positively supported his academic pursuits. However, his current unemployment had severely degraded his ability to pursue family life, making him feel distant from his family in a medium size city, visiting only during major holidays to avoid the shame that his lack of economic success brought to the family.

In terms of generational dynamics, Djibril believed his generation faced different and more severe challenges than his parents' generation, particularly regarding employment. He noted that in his parents' time, there was a "tenacious" employment policy, and they didn't face the widespread unemployment of educated individuals

seen today. He saw a "total degradation" in opportunities, pushing youth towards idleness and less effort, not because they were lazy, but because "taps are closed". He supported his mother financially, sending her money whenever he could, viewing it as a matter of pride and duty, but he refused financial support from his parents or older brothers, preferring to manage his life independently despite the hardships. He acknowledged a "lack of shared vision" and "generational conflict" where older individuals in power refused to cede positions, even when unproductive.

He was a devout Mouride, finding positive experiences in his brotherhood, which he saw as an economic model promoting self-belief, hard work, and contribution. He believed brotherhoods played a crucial role in social cohesion and peace, especially in calming agitated youth during uprisings. He shared similar views with his Tidjane parents on the positive role of brotherhoods in society. He felt brotherhoods endorsed patience, hard work, and a family life aligned with Senegalese culture, and promoted respect for parents and state authorities, fostering intergenerational solidarity. However, he did not believe brotherhoods had a direct impact on social mobility or life chances.

His initial stance on protests was one of strong opposition. He believed demonstrations were not the solution and that peaceful, non-violent methods were more effective. He condemned the ransacking and violence, viewing it as dishonest and damaging. He remained apolitical, preferring to stay out of civic movements and political parties, believing they were full of "lies".

Wave 2 (October 2021): By the second interview, Djibril's frustration with the employment situation had deepened. He reiterated that degrees had no impact on employment in Senegal due to "politicisation, discrimination, and a lack of meritocracy". He felt it was legitimate for graduates to demand higher salaries due to their investment in human capital, but this was undermined by political appointments. He had even resorted to "reducing his diplomas" (applying for jobs below his qualification level) but still faced "negative discrimination". He openly declared Senegal a "corrupt country" where "meritocracy does not exist", and urged decision-makers to "quarantine the politics". He cited instances of uncompleted government training programmes due to unpaid trainers, highlighting the pervasive corruption.

His views on migration had also evolved. He now fully understood why people migrated, even to a "false El Dorado" like Europe, because of the "respect for human rights and meritocracy" found there, which was absent in Senegal. He felt that the success of Senegalese migrants abroad, who could build homes and support families, further encouraged others to leave. He lamented that in Senegal, foreign nationals were often favoured in recruitment over Senegalese citizens, and that foreign-educated individuals were more highly regarded. He acknowledged that the expectation of a salary advantage for foreign-educated migrants was justified due to the "European diploma complex" in Senegal.

Economically, he highlighted the increased difficulty of life compared to his parents' generation, citing scarcity, demographic boom, and uncontrolled price increases. He noted that his parents, with more modest salaries, lived more comfortably. He dismissed the idea that modernisation had slowed growth, instead blaming "leaders who do not know which foot to dance on", emphasising that Senegal's abundant natural resources should lead to greater prosperity if there was better organisation and less corruption. He observed that there was no correlation between education/employment and childbearing in Senegal, unlike in developed countries, and that the high cost of living, rather than education, was leading some women to desire fewer children.

He maintained his view that religion and brotherhoods helped calm the population and promoted patience, but did not impact social success or mobility. He believed young people listened more to religious leaders than politicians because politics was full of "lies". He expressed disdain for political parties and had completely stopped voting, seeing it as a way to avoid complicity with a corrupt system. His personal stance against protests remained, advocating for individual withdrawal from the political process as a form of demonstration.

Wave 3 (May 2024): By this final interview, Djibril, now 37, was in another country for medical treatment, still unmarried and childless, and completely out of work. His health issues compounded his deep sense of despair. He stated, "life is over", and he had "lost all hope", primarily blaming corruption and nepotism for destroying Senegal's potential. He no longer applied for jobs, believing it was pointless, and regretted his university education.

A significant shift in his political engagement was evident. While he had previously been against protests, he now fully supported the 2023 and ongoing protests, viewing them as legitimate and even condoning violence as a necessary means to gain attention from a corrupt government. He felt that if the government "doesn't listen to the people's cries for help", then breaking things was justified, stating, "moderation is for cowards". He believed the demonstrators were likely to achieve their objectives, citing past successes in 2021 and 2023/2024, despite the "damage" and "deaths". He clarified that his previous statement about not voting was his individual approach, but he supported the people's right to protest, even if it involved ransacking, because the government was "thieves". He had not personally participated in the demonstrations but offered advice to groups and defended their actions. He continued to counsel young people from a distance, urging them to be aware of their future and fight for their goals. His family, particularly his mother, was against the demonstrations, but he saw himself as an "exception" who supported them for the "common good".

His thoughts on family formation remained consistent: his unemployment and the lack of opportunities prevented him from marrying and starting a family. He felt pressure from society to marry, but refused to do so if he couldn't financially support a wife and children. He clung to the hope that if he could secure a good job and build a house, he would find an "ideal woman" and start a family. He dismissed societal judgment for being single, stating he knew his reasons and did not care about others' perceptions.

On generational dynamics, he reaffirmed that his parents were "better off" than he was, even in terms of housing and wealth. He continued to see a "generational conflict" where older people in power refused to give way to younger, qualified individuals. He believed that the lack of opportunities had led to a "demoralised system" where the "poor man is judged as the bad man" and the "just man is judged as the complicated man". He saw no positive change in intergenerational solidarity at a societal level, only within his immediate family.

His views on brotherhoods remained largely unchanged; he continued to see their role as positive in calming the population and promoting patience, but not in directly influencing social mobility or employment. He reiterated that young people often followed religious leaders over politicians due to the pervasive "lies" in Senegalese politics. He maintained his intense dislike for Senegalese politics, refusing to listen to or engage with politicians, whom he viewed as lacking dignity and being solely self-serving. He had completely stopped voting as a personal protest against the corrupt system.

AWA

Unmarried shopkeeper with a primary education, deeply sceptical of politics and protests

Awa was first interviewed at her home in an urban area in July 2021. Her second interview took place in October 2021, and her third in May 2024. She is a shopkeeper who sells fabrics and has a primary school education, having dropped out in the fifth grade. The interviews were conducted in Wolof.

Wave 1 (July 2021): At 40 years old, Awa was single and childless, living with her parents. She worked as a fabric saleswoman, a business she started after her sewing venture failed. She described life as "very hard" in Senegal, with people getting "tired with no results" and jobs being difficult to find. She believed that unemployment was directly linked to irregular migration, as people sought other ways to survive when local opportunities were scarce. She felt the government should make work more accessible to reduce emigration. She had a pragmatic view of remittances, acknowledging that successful migrants built houses and supported families, creating some employment (e.g. for masons). However, she was personally against migrating, seeing no point in leaving if life abroad was equally difficult, citing instances of migrants struggling to send money home. She believed her parents' generation had an easier life, with money having more value and basic needs being more accessible. She blamed the government for current frustrations and believed people sought "success", "peace", and "health". Her parents, who had no formal education, worked in trade and on the railroad. She felt her parents were "better off" than her in terms of well-being and housing. She believed her parents' generation found it easier to earn a living and start a family, and to move out of the family home, due to the lower cost of living. She supported her parents financially when she could, and they supported her morally. She perceived generational solidarity, with young and old helping each other, and no significant conflicts.

Regarding family formation, she was single and childless at 40 and lived with her parents. She had never been married but desired to have children, though she did not specify an ideal number. She believed the mother should be primarily responsible for educating children. She saw no connection between her family life and her educational or employment opportunities.

She identified as Tidiane and believed in being a "good Muslim", following Islamic charters like prayer, fasting, and giving zakat. She had visited Tivaouane, a religious city for Tidianes, but was not part of any *daahira* (brotherhood associations). She believed brotherhoods had both positive and negative roles; positive in guiding people to the "right path", but negative when some leaders were solely after money. She shared similar religious views with her parents, who were Khadres, emphasising that all were Muslims. She noted that some religious guides engaged in politics, while others focused on spiritual guidance. She believed some guides did good for the country by bringing peace during conflicts, but others exploited young people by asking them to beg. She was unsure about the brotherhoods' role in promoting family life or employment opportunities for youth. She believed the practice of marabouts asking young people to beg was more prevalent now than in the past.

Her stance on protests was consistently negative. She viewed demonstrations as "very bad for the country" due to the destruction of property, which harmed the economy. She believed avoiding demonstrations was always better. She was unfamiliar with specific activist movements beyond seeing them on TV. She believed the youth were frustrated by unemployment and poor university conditions, but she did not think the COVID-19 pandemic was a significant factor. She observed that primarily young people participated in protests, as older people had "other things to worry about". She was not a member

of any civic organisation and wished for "peace" and "jobs" for everyone. She was not politically involved or a member of any political party, stating that "elected people are only there for their own benefit". She firmly stated that "nothing could make me protest", fearing being killed in the street while those they protested for lived comfortably at home.

Wave 2 (October 2021): In her second interview, Awa, now aged 40, maintained her views on employment. She believed that if one couldn't find a job with their degree, they should look elsewhere, and that graduates had the right to demand higher wages. She felt a less desirable job could still provide a comfortable life if one had "limited needs". She reiterated that the state must invest in entrepreneurship to create jobs and foster peace.

Her perspective on migration remained unchanged: people migrated out of necessity due to a lack of local opportunities, believing there were more opportunities abroad. She confirmed that migrants' remittances and lifestyles encouraged others to migrate, citing an example of a young man who continued to attempt illegal migration because others in his area were making investments he couldn't. However, she still believed that success abroad varied, and some foreign-educated individuals struggled to find jobs even with high salaries.

She continued to emphasise that life was more difficult for her generation than for her parents', primarily due to the decreased value of money and the high cost of living. She believed individualism, leading to smaller families and isolated living, made it harder to save and cover expenses. She noted that "intellectuals" and working individuals tended to have fewer children, adopting a "Western way of life" due to economic realities.

Her views on brotherhoods were consistent: she saw them as not directly providing job opportunities, but rather as recipients of money from their members. She believed politicians were self-serving and that young people were aware of this, leading them to abandon political engagement once they secured job opportunities. She did not see religious leaders as having a significant influence on political or civic engagement. In a striking opinion, she stated that those who attended Koranic school were "more deviant than the others", and that "criminals" often came from Koranic schools, particularly if they stayed there overnight and begged. She believed the abandonment of Koranic school for modern education had an impact on youth deviance, but her reasoning was unconventional. She maintained her apolitical stance, seeing politicians as solely self-interested, and reiterated that nothing would make her protest due to the personal risks involved.

Wave 3 (May 2024): In her third interview, Awa, now 43, remained unmarried and childless, still living with her parents and working as a fabric saleswoman. She continued to feel strong societal pressure to marry, which she experienced through direct teasing. Her primary reason for not marrying was that she "hadn't seen it yet" (the right person), dismissing economic or professional situations as factors. She intended to marry if she found the right person but was unsure what would make it a reality.

Her opposition to protests remained absolute. She reiterated that demonstrations were "very bad for the country" because they destroyed property and harmed the economy. She was unfamiliar with activist movements beyond seeing them on TV. While she believed these movements were "a good thing for the country" if their demands were in the national interest, she firmly disagreed with any methods involving "destruction" or "chaos", which she saw as risky for young people and disruptive to daily life. Her opinion on

demonstrations had “not changed” since the last interview; she continued to reject the “destruction of public and private property” and “deaths of men”. She had never participated in any demonstrations and did not know anyone who had. She had also never been involved in any other political activities, like strikes or social media campaigns. Her friends and family did not support the protests.

Her views on generational dynamics were consistent: her parents’ generation had an easier life due to the lower cost of living, while her generation struggled to earn a living and form families. She believed it was easier for her parents to afford housing and move out of the family home. She saw no conflicts between young and old, believing they were supportive of each other.

Her perspective on brotherhoods was largely unchanged. She remained Tidiane, emphasising being a good Muslim. She acknowledged both positive (religious guidance) and negative (leaders seeking money, begging practices) aspects of brotherhoods. She shared similar views with her parents on religious practices. She noted that some religious guides engaged in politics, while others focused on spiritual matters. She believed some guides were beneficial for the country by promoting peace during conflicts, but others exploited young people.

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