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## **The strategies of the new school of urban banditry in Cameroon: accounts of the tempted and the victims as a call to vigilance**

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**Abstract.** All over the world and on all fronts, the Information and Communication Technologies have revolutionized human behavior. In the area of urban banditry, cell phones are used by bandits to devise intricate and sophisticated operating modes. This work both looks at the new operating modes of urban bandits and the role cell phones play in the development of this new school of crime. This study is based on the assumption that cell phones have provided bandits with a new *modus operandi*. The hypothesis was validated, from the surveys and interviews conducted with gendarmes, police officers, taxi drivers, traders and people who have been victims of the bandits as they were moved around town. The results show that the bandits use mobile phones to scam, spy and ambush through various aphorisms. This article presents urban bandits' new operating formulas which were revealed through oral information and the accounts of victims. Written following the interpretative phenomenology theory, it calls on citizens to be more prudent as they move around the city.

**Keywords.** Urban Crime, cell phone, scam, ambush, spying, prudence

### **Introduction**

Banditry has in all times been a social phenomenon which impacts the life of human communities. No society, no time is spared. In their work, several researchers addressed topics related to banditry, not to mention the use of ICT in the conduct of villainous acts. Saïbou Issa<sup>1</sup> recounted the operations carried out by bandits in the Lake Chad basin, which was a kind of rural banditry. Greg Bankoff<sup>2</sup>, explored the phenomenon of banditry as an activity whose historical context is respondentially linked to economic growth and whose revenues vary from city to city depending on the importance of the landscapes and economic activities. Malaquais Dominique<sup>3</sup>, for his part, presents the operational techniques of banditry based exclusively on

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<sup>1</sup>Saïbou Issa, 2004, « L'embuscade sur les routes des abords sud du Lac Tchad. », *Politique africaine* 2/2004 (N° 94), pp. 82-104, URL : [www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2004-2-page-82.htm](http://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2004-2-page-82.htm).

<sup>2</sup>Greg Bankoff, 1998, « Bandits, Banditry and Landscapes of Crime in the Nineteenth-Century Philippines », *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Sep., 1998), pp. 319-339.

<sup>3</sup>D. Malaquais, 2001, « Arts de feyre au Cameroun », *Politique africaine* n° 82, pp. 101-118. D. Malaquais, 2001, « L'Anatomie d'une arnaque : Feyman et feymania au Cameroun », *Les Étude du CERI*, N° 77, pp. 2-46.

fraud, and situates its genesis around the 1990s. While exact sciences researchers have made an appreciative account of the innovations that have influenced the various sequences of life since ancient times, social scientists however are alarmed by such innovations. They criticized their negative impact, such as the use of cell phones for criminal purposes. Knowing that each improvement in living conditions is accompanied by a danger caused by the adaptation of a social vice to the new situation, this work examines the causal relationship between cell phones and banditry in Cameroon cities, at a time when the telephone is playing an increasingly important role in daily activities. What are the new operating modes of urban bandits and how are mobile phones put to contribution? In other words, how do urban bandits use mobile phones to provide more efficiency to their new modes of operation? This work is underpinned by the assumption that mobile phones have provided new operating modes for urban banditry. This hypothesis was verified by information collected from gendarmeries, police stations and from people met in marketplaces and in taxis. Written following the interpretative phenomenology theory<sup>4</sup> as described by Jonathan A. Smith<sup>5</sup>, this work is divided in two parts. The first part examines the line between rural banditry and urban banditry. The second part analyzes the role of cell phones in the unfolding of new criminal operations.

### **I. Urban crime: methods and tricks.**

Banditry has in all times influenced the history of communities and of different geographical areas of the planet. Very adaptive to change, the methods, conduct and practice of this criminal activity are constantly changing just as science and technology.

#### **1 - Overview of rural banditry**

Conceptualizing urban banditry means distinguishing between classical and modern banditry. Classical banditry is one whose method focuses on the use of physical force in order to assault, the use of clubs to beat up, the hitting together of sharp metals to hurt or the use guns to kill before taking away from the victim what coveted. Similarly, “Bandits infested roads and rivers, ravaged fields and farms, sacked towns, pillaged churches and set fire to houses in an orgy of murder, robbery and rapine in which there was hardly an evil deed that their rash boldness [did] not perform”<sup>6</sup>. This form of crime that prevails even today in Northern Cameroon's rural areas is reminiscent of the facets of crime that marked the pre-colonial period<sup>7</sup>. It is called classical crime because of the settings of the operations that are rural areas and the mode of expropriation based on violence. In the peripheries of urban areas, classical banditry is practiced where security forces are rarely present or are present in very small numbers. In areas that stood the progress brought about by science and technology, classical banditry remains in vogue. Attesting the continued existence of this form of crime in this type of environment, Saibou Issa observes that:

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<sup>4</sup>The interpretive phenomenological analysis is a useful methodology for researching on the experience of pain and the meaning that individuals give to their life events.

<sup>5</sup>J.A. Smith, P. Flowers, M. Larkin, 2009, « *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: theory, method and research* », Londres, SAGE.

<sup>6</sup>Greg Bankoff, 1998, « Bandits, Banditry and Landscapes of Crime in the Nineteenth-Century Philippines », *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Sep., 1998), p. 319.

<sup>7</sup>C. Abé, 2003, « Pratique et productivité de la criminalité transfrontalière en Afrique centrale : l'exemple des Zargina », *Bulletin de l'APAD*, En ligne], 25 | 2003, mis en ligne le 15 juin 2007, Consulté le 29 novembre 2015. URL : <http://apad.revues.org> , p. 5.

rural banditry has always existed in African savannas and steppes in general and in the Chad Basin in particular. Until the late nineteenth century, a period during which European colonization took possession of the region, marking the end of the great empires such as Bornu, Baguirmi, the Wandala or the Ouaddai, the raids were a quasi-legal mode of accumulating wealth.<sup>8</sup>

While classical crime consists in abducting cattle, in ransacking houses or an entire neighborhood by a group of bandits organized around a gang leader, modern banditry however targets only lone individuals sometimes during the day to take away their valuables, by the use of special tools that are worth knowing.

## **2 - Urban crime: tools and modes of operation.**

Urban banditry is carried out by the use of more sophisticated tools such as cell phones, scanners, digital cameras, and the Internet and computers, which occupy a prominent place. These tools are used to rip off, falsify, spy or compromise natural or legal persons. In several research projects, urban banditry is known as "*fey mania*". This form of crime is dependent on modernity which is the vector of innovation in all human activities, especially in the wake of the changes brought about by advances in Information and Communication Technologies. To show how dependent this form of crime is on social change Malaquais Dominique notes that:

As a real social phenomenon, the "fey mania" is closely linked to a number of strengths that are essential to consider if we want to understand the recent past, the current situation and the next evolution of Cameroon ... The fey mania through its structures, its techniques, its brands, life styles of its followers and its use by them, is both a reflection and the engine of social change whose first features are complexity, fluidity and internal contradictions<sup>9</sup>.

The equations posed by urban bandits operating like computers have some flaws which, from their algorithmic formula, expose the bandits to risks that could result in the failure of their operations. That is why many urban bandits although wisely conducting their operations by taking necessary precautions, find themselves caught up by justice and its agents. According to some authors, urban banditry appeared in the 1990s in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon<sup>10</sup>. Initially, it was referred to as *fey mania*. According to the language used in the markets and refreshment areas of this city, the *fey mania* means "to be ripped off".

## **3 - Tricks of urban bandits**

The tricks of urban bandits are based on passive, gentle and refined methods of taking away people's of their valuables. These methods include scamming, brainwashing, spying and counterfeiting. People who have been dispossessed by the scammers are referred to as pigeons or "Mougous"<sup>11</sup>. As far as computers are concerned, bandits use mathematical equations to

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<sup>8</sup>Saïbou Issa, 2004, « L'embuscade sur les routes des abords sud du Lac Tchad. », *Politique africaine* 2/2004 (N° 94), pp. 82-104, URL : [www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2004-2-page-82.htm](http://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-africaine-2004-2-page-82.htm).

<sup>9</sup>D. Malaquais, 2001, « Arts de feyre au Cameroun », *Politique africaine* n° 82 - juin, p. 101.

<sup>10</sup> C. Mbiaga, 2011, « Feymania à l'entrée en union: Une escroquerie au mariage devenue un fléau endémique en France », *Journal du Cameroun*, publication du 26/10/2011,

<http://www.journalducameroun.com/article.php?aid=10109>, consultation du 20 Janvier 2016

<sup>11</sup>D. Malaquais, 2001, « L'Anatomie d'une arnaque : Feyman et feymania au Cameroun », *Les Étude du CERI*, N°77. p. 13.

compromise the functioning of the computer systems of a natural or legal person by uploading viruses. On the streets, bandits use cell phones to spy and swindle pedestrians with the help of telephone communication made between the accomplices standing at both ends of the street used by their targets. It is worth noting that urban crime is a new school of crime whose followers are identified by the formulas they use in their operations, regardless of the city where they operate. Most often, it is the story of immigrants come from West Africa needing help to change dollars into CFA. This is a starting point by which the bandit seeks to hold the attention of his interlocutor while waiting for the arrival of his accomplices. Sometimes inquiring about a pharmacy, a hotel or a bank is the formula through which these urban bandits approach their targets, gain their trust and then proceed to their dispossession. Clearly, the tricks of urban bandits result "in such stories where we learn that a particular *pigeon* or even groups of *Mougous* were caught in the claws of crooks."<sup>12</sup> The accounts of the victims show that Information and Communication Technologies play a key role in the unfolding of urban bandits' operations.

## **II - Operation formulas of urban bandits and the role of mobile phones**

Cell phones are used by urban bandits to commit various forms of crimes. These consist of scamming, ambushing and spying whose purpose is to rip off the property of naive citizens.

### **1 - Scams**

A scam is a swindling method carried out through the use of a false name, false quality of a product, abuse of a true quality, or the use of fraudulent means to trick somebody physically and morally to dispossess him or do him harm. In the era of Information and Communication Technologies, scam has become a common and frequent case in the metropolis. Scammers use computers to make fake bank notes, fake administrative documents and false documents such as certificates, diplomas, various permits and licenses, bills of sale, etc. Others use the cell phone to send deceiving messages such as: "Urgent: you are the winner of a special pack of 1 500 000 Cash F, 1 laptop + 1 Samsung S3. Send your name quickly to 980 to find out, be quick!"<sup>13</sup>. This form of lying is to make naive people travel long distances so they can be assaulted by them on their way, to make them spend money or to settle their accounts. It should be noted that using the phone in Cameroon cities for scamming has created a new school of banditry whose laureates are deployed in various urban centers where they work as civil servants come out of training schools. According to some victims in Yaoundé, Ngaoundéré and Maroua, the similarity of the formulas used by given bandits is an index to their membership to a particular school of crime. As an illustration, some accounts are worth reporting<sup>14</sup>.

#### **Account 1: Seini, the target of bandits operating around banks**

Seini<sup>15</sup>, a teacher in a technical school in the Mayo-Danay, was quickly spotted by a bandit as he came out of a bank in Maroua and was going on foot to the central market. The bandit immediately alerts his accomplice who stood halfway between the bank and the market.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with Bouba on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>14</sup>Some victims and informants who recounted the stories of scam, spying and ambushes have overwhelmingly requested anonymity or demanded that their names be replaced with other nicknames. These informants declined their names and functions or responsibilities to avoid being booed by the readers and their families for years, to escape the crime of delivery of professional secrecy and misalign suspicious intentions of the researcher.

<sup>15</sup>Interview with Seini Mathieu on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2019, Yaoundé.

He also gives him a description of the target, a young man carrying a bag which could contain a laptop and possibly money collected from the bank. The size and color of the target's bag were also communicated to the accomplice who was waiting for him. When Seini came closer to him, the accomplice bandit approached him with a pathetic look. He then introduced himself as being an immigrant having problems and who needs assistance. With a typical West African accent, he pretends to be a Senegalese. To sound more convincing to Seini and get his confidence, he hands him what looks like his Senegalese identity card. When asked what he expected of his interlocutor, the bandit replied to the teacher that he had some dollar bills that he wants to exchange for CFA francs. Unfortunately, he continued, he does not know where to carrying out this operation, since he does not speak much French and is a nomadic shepherd whose income comes only from the recent selling of his cattle. Continuing his remarks, the alleged Senegalese has requested assistance from the naive and compassionate teacher to not only accompany him where he can convert his money, but also to help him facilitate the operation. He then pulled a large envelope from his bag and drew a dollar ticket which he showed to the teacher to make him believe that the envelope is full of such notes. When Seini's attention is focused on the alleged Senegalese immigrant, the accomplice came into play. Arriving on a motorcycle, he first plays ignorance by asking the teacher what was happening. Without waiting for a reply, he adds another question: "Are you in front of a stranger who is asking you for a favor?" The teacher replied yes and the Senegalese bandit presented his envelope and the note in his hand saying he wants to change money. Thus, the bike rider who pretended to ignore his accomplice told the teacher in the local language: "the money he has is so much, let us help him and take our own share". He also implicitly asked the following question to his accomplice "how many dollars do you have in total?" The accomplice gave him the number of dollars, and from the calculation made by using an application in his mobile phone, the total of the converted dollar notes amounted to 1.35 million CFA francs. The Senegalese bandit promised to give three hundred and thirty five thousands CFA as a rewards to the teacher, in case they managed to convert all his money. Meanwhile, the outlaw bike rider talks the teacher into accepting the deal. He says: "Do not miss this opportunity. I am ready to accompany you. Besides, I know a place where we exchange dollars for CFA". When the teacher suggested that the alleged Senegalese should be assisted by the biker, the Senegalese replied that he preferred that he be with them. Because, he said, he does not have confidence in the bike rider, especially for the fact he speaks to the teacher in a local language. To be a "Good Samaritan" worthy of his Christian faith, the teacher then agreed to accompany the two accomplices to make sure the alleged Senegalese will not lose him money to the suspicious Cameroonian bike rider. When the three were riding on the motorcycle, the bike rider refused to go to the bank indicated by the teacher and suggested that the operation should take place at an economic operator's that he knows and that is located in the neighborhood *Mayel Ibe*. Curiously, the alleged Senegalese immigrant who initially said he absolutely wanted to get help only from the teacher consented to the new proposal. This dramatic change and the awareness of the dangers of the road leading to the neighborhood *Mayel Ibe* suddenly intrigued Seini. Becoming conscious, he realized that the two characters are accomplices who wanted to assault him with the complicity of other bandits who could be on that road. Then, he immediately asked the rider to stop his motorcycle, otherwise, he would be obliged to report and take them to the police. The bandits took this threat seriously, out of fear. Seini, the math teacher, said to the two accomplices, "do you know that I am a police officer and my job is to catch bandits like you? Trembling, the two accomplices burst into excuses. But Seini told them there is no room for apologies. He then took out his cell phone and feigned a call, he said: "Send me a patrol car fast, I have two robbers to drive to cell." Both urban bandits went on to say: "We are so many

of us, when you stepped out of the bank, there was a “*call boxer*” who informed us before we had come to you”. When Seini was about to dial 117, the two accomplices wisely started their motorcycle and fled through the crooked tracks of *Lobéré* neighborhood. Seini escaped safe and sound thanks to his awareness of what was awaiting him. When he returned to the bank to catch the “*callboxer*”, he found him no longer, what led him to believe that the “*callboxer*” received a call from his accomplices warning him to disappear immediately before the targeted teacher could lay hold of him.

This scamming formula is used in all Cameroon cities<sup>16</sup>. It seems that the bandits had previously received the same training on this type of operation. If Seini’s attack has not had a convincing effect, we must recognize that other evidence indicate a rather sad end. In fact, on reaching the place indicated for the currency exchange, the bandit, owner of the money, will ask the naive person to go and exchange the money and to leave his bag, phone and other things he has as a guaranty that he will not run away with the money<sup>17</sup>. The two accomplices ensure this naive that they cannot disappear with his valuables and leave such a staggering amount of money being exchanged, since the value of the money is relatively higher than the value of the property left in pawn<sup>18</sup>. If the owner of the valuables accepts the proposal and imprudently leaves his property, he will find later when in front of the bank agent, that the envelope is filled with blank sheets cut into banknotes. When he rushes out to the alleged Senegalese, he will understand that the two were accomplices. And using their motorcycle, they disappeared once he entered the bank to change money. Furthermore, there is a high possibility that the innocent be prosecuted by the police or vigilantes who are guarding the banks, after the alert of the bank agent who might think that his client wanted to deceive him by presenting fake tickets.

**Account 2:** Bianzie Teu’s account of a camera lost to a trick<sup>19</sup>

A student has been the victim of two young, obviously talented hustlers in the city of Garoua. He was dispossessed of a brand new digital camera that his elder brother bought him three days before. Being on holiday with his elder brother, this young Computer Science student took the new camera to immortalize the birthday celebration of his friend. As he walked on foot with the camera in his hand, two young people aged around seventeen approached on a motorcycle and asked him for a favor. They made him understand that they had a winning ticket of *Paris Mutuel Urbain Camerounais* (PMUC). But they added that they were too young and had no national identity card to withdraw the money. They asked the student to accompany them to a PMUC agency to collect the winnings in their stead. During the operation, they would stay outside to wait with his camera, which he will leave as a pledge of his return after collecting the winnings. According to their agreement, after his favor, the student would get one third of the amount. Caught in the trap, the student gladly accepted it and entered the PMUC agency. He is surprised that, once at the counter, he was accused of falsifying a winning ticket and threatened to be handed over to the police. He then asked his accusers to accompany him to the young people he wanted to help. Once outside, the student realized that his two companions had disappeared along with his camera. He was released thanks to the intervention of his elder brother, then a lieutenant and the clemency of the agency leader who understood that the unfortunate was a victim of scamming. Many citizens lost their laptops, cell phones, digital cameras, ID cards to this kind of scam. Several civil servants come to Yaoundé to collect their recall wage fell into the traps of these bandits who left them empty-handed. From the analysis

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Bouba on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

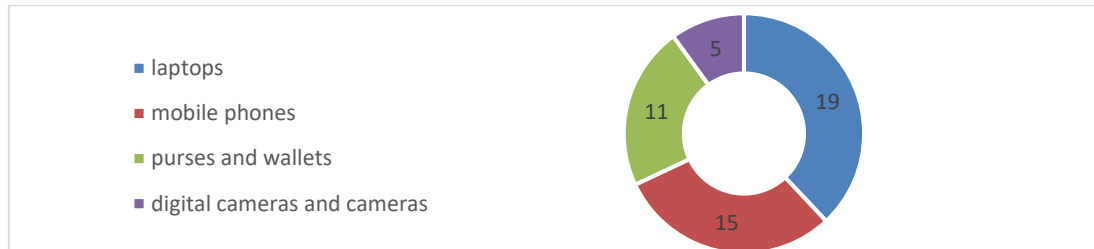
<sup>17</sup>Interview with Souaipibé Daniel on 22<sup>th</sup> May 2016, Kaélé.

<sup>18</sup>Interview with Seini Mathieu on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with Bianzie Teu on 23<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

of questionnaires administered to police officers, it appears that certain objects are relatively targeted with different frequency by the scammers. The following graph shows the answers from fifty questionnaires:

**Chart 1:** table showing the most targeted objects by urban bandits.



**Source:** Dekane Emmanuel, 2015, results of surveys conducted with agents of the police force and security in November 2015.

This graph shows that the laptop (19) is the most targeted tool. This choice accounts for the fact that nowadays, the computer is the most used tool by city dwellers, civil servants, students and bandits. Again, this apparatus is easily sold and brings much more money than the other objects<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, the bags containing laptops are easily noticed by bandits. This makes the pedestrians carrying them the primary targets of urban bandits. Formerly, the bags used for laptops were handbags. Knowing that these bags attracted bandits, city dwellers have opted for backpacks, which in their opinion, cannot attract the attention of urban bandits. However, less than a year later, the bandits realized that the townspeople have switched from the use handbags to that of backpacks, which is now the fashion. To adapt to this new trend, the bandits continue to track the townspeople carrying beautiful backpacks. This is done by a network of accomplices stationed in different corners of the city to share information and organize their rogue activities. Telephones (15) are for their part sought by bandits because of their recurrent use, their low weight and their easily being sold. They are as much needed as sophisticated. This is particularly the case with android phones that have many applications and are suitable for all uses<sup>21</sup>. The purses and wallets (11) and digital devices (5) are less targeted by bandits because of doubt as to their content.

## 2 - Ambushes

An ambush is the act of lying in wait in a particular place for an agent of the army or security to assault them, with the use threat or a weapon<sup>22</sup>. Ambush is confused with *guet apens* which "consists in lying in wait for a while for one or more persons in a certain place to commit against them one or more offenses."<sup>23</sup> All are traps that bandit groups set on major roads or tracks. They consist in surrounding or encircling the people to attack the middle of a stretch of road. Formerly, these ambushes were practiced only on major corridors, highways, major roads or on ways leading to isolated towns or villages or covered by forests. They are part of the classical crime because of their procedure centered on violence. They also meet the criteria of

<sup>20</sup>Interview with Bouba on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Bouba on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>22</sup>A. Cerf, 2007, « La loi du 5 Mars 2007 et les infractions de prévention : l'exemple du délit d'embuscade et de la déclinaison le guet- apens », *CRDF*, n°6, 2007, p. 141-148.

<sup>23</sup>A. Cerf, 2007, p. 141-148.

rural banditry due to the setting of the operation that is usually away from urban centers. In the era of Information and Communication Technologies, ambushes were successfully tested in cities to the point where we talk about modern ambushes for a theory of modern crime. This testing of ambushes in cities proves that the tricks of bandits evolve and adapt to time and context. In his work, Saibou Issa notes what makes banditry peculiar in these terms:

Its ability to reproduce, mutate according to changes in the repressive policy of the state, and according to the coming of new criminal situation, which disseminate new vectors of attack and new actors in border crime<sup>24</sup>.

Modern ambush stands out from the classical through the careful calculations that urban bandits do before carrying out any operation<sup>25</sup>. Here, people to be assaulted are first targeted and tracked thanks to a network of telephone communication that links the bandits installed in various crossroads and strategic points of the city. To avoid the control of the Telecommunications Regulatory Agency, the bandits use codes to write messages. If necessary, they speak slang to conceal the secrets of their communication. In Cameroonian cities, passengers are ambushed mostly taxi drivers and bike riders<sup>26</sup>. It is on the tracks leading to the outskirts of cities that these lawless carry out their ambushes, in Yaoundé town areas such as Nkouabang, Nkolmesseng, Soa, Nkozoa, Tsianga village, Olembe, Etc<sup>27</sup>. When a taxi driver or motorcycle rider targets a person with valuables at the entry of such outskirts, he informs his accomplices who are standing halfway on the road the target has taken. During his trip, the target will then face a first group of bandits before him. If he chooses to turn back, he will be confronted with a second group that he had not seen when he was advancing on his way.

**Account 3: A motorbike lost in an ambush<sup>28</sup>**

In 2012, a bike rider fell into such an ambush while driving a customer between Nkolmesseng and Nkouabang in Yaoundé city. His brand new Honda motorcycle was coveted by the bandits without his knowledge. When he was on his way at around 7pm, two men with machetes surged about fifty meters ahead. When he noticed them, he decided to turn back immediately to save his life and that of his passenger. Unfortunately, he met three other robbers armed as well. He found himself well trapped and had only one choice: surrendering. These bandits asked him to hand them his phone, his motorcycle and his daily income, what he did. As for his passenger, he was ripped of his baggage, his phone and his bag whose content was not revealed. After the operation carried out in just within minutes, the bandits advised the motorcycle rider not to buy a Honda motorcycle anymore. Otherwise, it would be stolen again. They also made it clear that the attack had been scheduled two weeks back but that they had no opportunity to carry it out until then. Before vanishing, the bandits told them to hail other bikes in order to return to their homes. They handed them one thousand for the transport fare before disappearing with the Honda motorcycle<sup>29</sup>. This story highlights how modern and effective the techniques used by bandits are. Apart from the engine and other properties taken away, combative and resistant victims sometimes lose their lives as well.

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<sup>24</sup>Saibou Issa, 2006, « La prise d'otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad une : nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier », *Polis/R.C.S.P. /C.P.S.R. Vol. 13, Numéros 1 - 2*, p. 119.

<sup>25</sup>Interview with Zaza Joseph on 21<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with Yekeme Jean on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>27</sup>Interview with Zaza Joseph on 21<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>28</sup>Interview with Amougou on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with Amougou on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

### 3 - Spying

Spying is the secret collection of private information through the use of ingenious devices in order to compromise the fundamental interests of an individual, a business or a State<sup>30</sup>. The information sought by urban bandits may involve confidential or obvious information on the life of a person they are targeting for a possible operation aimed as a settling of accounts. Spying as done by bandits consists in identifying a person at the entrance of a bank counter, the exit of the market, accounts departments or a money transfer agency for a wise pursuit by accomplices. In fact, in the places named above, many people seem to act as small traders, *call boxers*<sup>31</sup>, photocopy men or peddlers. Yet they are real spies. By their increased curiosity, they manage at times to have all the information about the items purchased, the amount received in a money transfer agency or the amount collected by a civil servant while photocopy their balance sheets or back pay. With this information, they alert their accomplices who are taxi drivers through messages and other telephone codes. The equation would require that the accomplice taxi driver appears before the targeted person as any other taxi driver, with some passengers on board. If the targeted person enters the taxi, he falls into the lion's den. Accomplices playing the role of passengers which will confuse the target in order to steal his phone or wallet or take his luggage in rear trunk. This is done by an accomplice who will alight before the destination of the target. In her works, Sarah Sakho<sup>32</sup> recounted the sad story of dispossession.

#### **Account 4:** Marie Blanche's sad dispossession in a taxi<sup>33</sup>

A bandit taxi driver and three other accomplices including a fake policeman in uniform, a young Muslim dressed in a robe and a very old age woman were in the taxi. When Marie Blanche gets into the taxi, the young Muslim confessed to her that he is a stranger who fled with the money. The police officer immediately grabbed his bag and confiscated the banknote bundles contained in it. Marie and the other passengers were quiet, hoping to share the money snatched from the hands of the Muslim foreign fugitive with the policeman. But after a short distance, the stranger told to all who are in the taxi that the money must be purified or they will all face a spell. For he has ensured the passengers that some incantations were made on these notes by a marabouts, to bewitch those who would steal it. In order to do this, it requires each passenger to add their own money to those tickets confiscated by the police before it can be purified. Ignoring the situation, the White lasted more than three hours in the taxi. And that resulted in the loss of tens of her banknotes. It is some time after she got off from the taxi that she realized that all the other passengers were accomplices. The proliferation of expropriation techniques in Cameroonian cities led Malaquais Dominica to conclude that:

In Cameroon, in recent years new figures of success with an ambivalent status have appeared: the "fey men". These new rich, who built their fortune on fraud, scam and exploitation of extraversion resources, not just incite the envy of the young "conjuncture of Douala". They gave birth to a social

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<sup>30</sup>M. Donze et P. Heidmann, 2009, « Un espion interférométrique, *Olympiades de Physique* », [http://www.odpf.org/images/archives\\_docs/17eme/memoires/gr-19/memoire.pdf](http://www.odpf.org/images/archives_docs/17eme/memoires/gr-19/memoire.pdf)

<sup>31</sup>The call boxers are people who exercise in telephone booths encountered at the edges of the streets.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Sakho, « Feymania, l'escroquerie à la camerounaise, *Slate Afrique* », mise à jour du 22/12/2011. <http://www.slateafrique.com/1775/feymania-arnaques-cameroun>, site consulté le 18 janvier 2016.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

phenomenon, the “fey mania” reflecting the inflection of classic itineraries accumulation in a context<sup>34</sup> of criminalization of the State.

Several account of victims of these crimes have been narrated by the victims themselves, their relatives or police and gendarmes officers.

**Account 5:** Taxi drivers turned bandits: an account of their mode of operation

Fadi Sala<sup>35</sup>, daughter of a wealthy resident of Yaoundé Omnisport neighborhood was for a long time spied upon by a taxi driver and his accomplices who coveted her return tablet. Knowing that the latter was a student, the bandits’ accomplices waited for her after class end to dispossessed of her tablet. In the taxi that she took, there were three people behind and one in the cabin. Fadi is the fifth passenger to get into the overloaded car alongside five accomplices. When the car started to roll, the taxi driver said, « My daughter, please adjust my external mirror. I cannot see the cars coming behind us. « When she turned to do so, the bandit who was sitting just next to her opened her bag that was placed on her lap. To complete their act, the taxi driver remarked that this mirror was still not well positioned and that Fadi had to adjust it again. While the latter was struggling to adjust the mirror, the accomplice got the tablet out and quickly closed the lady’s bag. Two minutes later, the one who stole the tablet told the driver that he had reached his destination and he had to drop him. He went down and left the girl alone in the cabin, with the taxi driver. While pursuing their route, a second accomplice suddenly asked the taxi driver: But where are you taking me? Did I not tell you I was going to Etoa Meki? Why are you taking me in this direction? Immediately, the taxi driver asked the girl to go down, arguing that he mistook her destination. He told her to stop another taxi. It was only later that she realized that her tablet and wallet were missing. Fortunately, two weeks later, Fadi recognized her tablet in the hands of a girl in her neighborhood. From questioning the girl, she learned that the tablet had been sold to her by her neighbor. The two girls then decide, with two policemen to search for the thief at his home. They found almost all the people who were with her in the taxi on the day of the theft. After confessing their crime, they immediately restored the money to the girl who bought the tablet. As concerns the theft, they were taken to the police station. From this story, it appears that the taxi drivers are part of urban bandits involved in scamming. This remark was made by Josy Mauger, who said in 2004 that "the practice of swindle in taxis is quite known to many passengers ... The taxi driver, with the assistance of two clients, scam passengers by stripping them of their property. And it is usually women who take the bait as the commander Bonanjo’s research brigade, Julien Ze Akame said "<sup>36</sup>. A côté de cette forme de dupe, il existe d’autres formules d’opération adressées principalement aux pasteurs des églises.

**Account 6:** Pastors targeted: an account of the operating modes

Here, the goods stolen by professional urban bandits consist of the money raised by believers on the occasion of the annual harvest festival. This led to a violent argument between the pastors and theirs communities. These scams result of the telephone calls from unknown numbers, a person who has managed to imitate the voice of a close friend of the targeted pastor. In Garoua town for example<sup>37</sup>, two days after the harvest festival when an amount of about

<sup>34</sup>D. Malaquais, 2001, « Arts de feyre au Cameroun », *Politique africaine* n° 82 - juin, p. 101.

<sup>35</sup>The real name has been changed by the respondent in order to keep the victim’s identity secret.

<sup>36</sup>Josy Mauger, 2004, « Cameroun: l’escroquerie reprend dans les taxis », [Cameroon Tribune \(Yaoundé\)](http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200405270383.html), publication du 27 Mai 2004, <http://fr.allafrica.com/stories/200405270383.html>, Consultation du 19 Janvier 2016.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with Aissatou on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2016, Kaélé.

eight hundred thousand francs had been raised, a pastor targeted received a call from a friend who lives in Kousseri. This friend whose voice the pastor has recognized asked the pastor to shelter one of his neighbors for the night, who was traveling to Yaoundé. Responding positively to the request of his friend, the good pastor waited for the traveler joyfully. Once in Garoua, the latter called the pastor and told him where he was. Arriving at the indicated place, the pastor found his foreign guest being seized by a truck driver who wanted to be paid his money before they could enter the town, Garoua. While the pastor inquiring about what was happening, he received another call from a friend of Kousseri. This friend asked him to put the amount of seven hundred thousand at the disposal of the foreign guest to free the truck driver. In fact, he explained, the stranger had sold goods in Maroua to buyers have paid with counterfeit money. He pledged to personally send him the money the next day through "Express Union", a money transfer agency. Having confidence in his friend, the pastor accepted unconditionally. When he got home, he emptied the Church's cashbox of its contents, and ended the dispute between the guest and the truck-driver. All tired, they all had a short night. Surprisingly, the next morning, the pastor found that the stranger was gone. He disappeared into the night. Moreover, his telephone number and that of the friend who recommended him to the pastor are no more going through. Accused of embezzlement, the pastor is discredited and judicial procedures have been initiated against him. His elder brother, a civil servant, had to borrow money to restore to the Church the sum lost to this scam. From the analysis of the story told by the victim himself, it appears that the bandits themselves would be people who know him enough<sup>38</sup>. These people might have been informed that the money of the harvest festival is held by the pastor and through spying, they devised an effective plot<sup>39</sup>. Investigations by the victim and the police revealed that the man behind it all was the son of the elder sister of the victim's wife who happened to live in Garoua, in the same town as the pastor himself<sup>40</sup>. In the opinion of the informants, spying is a trick developed by urban bandits to dispossess tax collectors, bankers, cash managers or cashiers. This point of view is supported by the following scam story involving a postmaster working for the Post and Telecommunication in Maroua.

**Account 7:** The fake gold scam: lessons for civil servants

Some functionaries such as high-ranking civil servants try to maximize their income with illegal investments in various sectors that generate profit. Such civil servants are targeted by the bandits and sometimes fall in their trap, which was the case of a former collector working for the Post and Telecommunication in the town of Maroua, Far North<sup>41</sup>. In order to blindfold him, the bandits showed two kilograms of gold to this civil servant. They said they wanted to sell it. In order to not miss the opportunity to make a fortune of what was offered, the employee has not hesitated to use the cash which he was responsible for. Finally, it was tens of millions that were invested in the purchase of this gold. Only a few hours later, this postmaster realized that it was fake gold. Meanwhile, his deceivers disappeared and are no longer reachable. To avoid humiliation and prison, he also left the town and took an unknown destination, leaving a note on a table for his family<sup>42</sup>.

It clearly appears that scamming, ambushing, spying and falsification are the operating modes of urban bandits found in Cameroon cities. The comparative study of the recurrences of

<sup>38</sup>Interview with Bouba on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.

<sup>39</sup>Interview with Aissatou on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016, Kaélé.

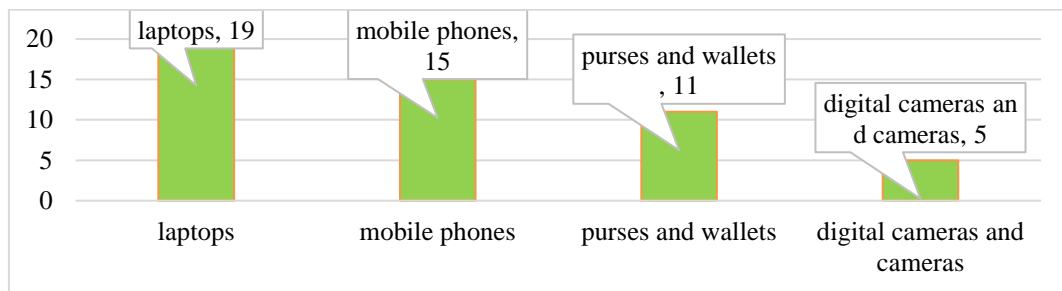
<sup>40</sup>Interview with Souaipibé Daniel on 22<sup>th</sup> June 2016, Kaélé.

<sup>41</sup>Interview with Yadang on 23<sup>th</sup> April 2016, Ngaoundéré.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with Yadang on 23<sup>th</sup> April 2016, Ngaoundéré.

these modes reveal, according to the answers of our respondents, that scamming is the most practiced method. It is successively followed by falsifications, ambushes and spying. From the fifty questionnaires duly filled by our respondents it can be established on the one hand the different qualitative variables of the operations of urban bandits and on the other hand the numeric recurrence of each quantified qualitative variable (Chart 2)<sup>43</sup>.

**Figure 2:** Frequency of types of bandits operation



**Source:** Dekane Emmanuel, 2015, results of surveys from the agents of the police and security forces on November 2015, Yaoundé.

This graph shows four types of operating modes among which three are carried out with the help cell phones, namely scamming, falsification, ambushes and spying. This leads us to say that 75% of the operations led by urban bandits are carried out with the contribution of cell phones. This means that a cell phone in the hands of urban bandits represents the weapon in the hands of rural bandits. Scamming is the most common operation among urban bandits. This fact can be verified in the field by the recurrence of stories on expropriation phones, laptops, briefcases and wallets during a scamming operation. It is also justified by the flattery that resulted in the robbing of institutions' funds by tax collectors, bursars or treasurers deceived by the bandits of the new school of crime. Falsification is in second position because of the abundance of ICT tools nowadays, that allow urban bandits reproduce exactly official documents that can easily enter the administration system. Ambushes and spying come last because of the failures and high risks that this mode presents to urban bandits.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, it is important to say that a new school of banditry has risen in Cameroon. The followers of this school increasingly swarm Cameroon cities. They stroll up and down along markets, boulevards, nearby banks, chapels and mosques. The agents of this school are identifiable by their operating modes based on the choice of a target, his tracking and his systematic control through telephone conversations between the accomplices and the techniques of deprivation by scamming. Many of these urban bandits are recruited as call boxers, agents of public secretariats, real estate agents, car cleaners, car mechanics and hawkers. The cell phone is their favorite tool, because of the ease it offers them in organizing ambushes, conducting scams and techniques of spying on targets. These bandits usually run after well-dressed people holding a hand bags whose shapes make them believe that they contain money, laptops or anything precious thing. In front of the abuse of these bandits, several townsmen of

<sup>43</sup>Results of surveys from the agents of the police and security forces on November 2015, Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Yaoundé have adjusted their dressing style in order to avoid being targeted by bandits. They have switched from suits to jeans and knitwear, the new dressing style of the victims. Others choose backpacks instead of handbags. Another group of victims prefer merging with the criminal leaving their hair tousled or braided to make the bandits believe that they are in the same activity. But all these methods are nothing compared to the foresight of the bandits and the permanent evolution of their modes of operation that are constantly updated as computer software. Moreover, these citizens should develop a sense of prudence during their movements in the city, they should watch over their phones, their laptops and their luggage when in a taxi. They should also refuse any request for assistance on money exchange and other harmful favors unknown people ask them.

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Bianzie Teu	Military	on 23 <sup>th</sup> August 2015
Amougou	Mototaxi-driver	27 <sup>th</sup> March 2015 Yaoundé
Bouba	Police Commissioner	28 <sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé
Aissatou	Housewife	25 <sup>th</sup> May 2016 Kaélé
Yekeme Jean	Police Commissioner	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé.
Souaipibé Daniel	pastor	22 <sup>th</sup> May 2016, Kaélé
Zaza Joseph	Taxi-driver	21 <sup>th</sup> March 2015, Yaoundé

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