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## **Bridging Mobilities: ICTs appropriation by Cameroonians in South Africa and The Netherlands**

Nyamnjoh, H.M.

### **Citation**

Nyamnjoh, H. M. (2013, November 28). *Bridging Mobilities: ICTs appropriation by Cameroonians in South Africa and The Netherlands*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22525>

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**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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**Author:** Henrietta Mambo Nyamnjoh

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**Issue Date:** 2013-11-28

## Introduction

### Setting the scene

As a child growing up in the Grassfields of Bamenda, the provincial capital of the North West Region, I recall vividly how I would be woken up early in the morning by one of my parents to go and see a certain person to deliver a short note, a verbal message or simply to inform them that one of my family would pass by at a particular time. The 1970s was a time when even fixed phones were not a common phenomenon, and there was no inkling of the mobile phone that was to come so many years later. There was just a reliance on a plethora of traditional means of communication to pass on messages. Physical mobility and face-to-face communication were the predominant means. And then there was letter writing, which is fast eroding today. The world has been hijacked by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and, by the same token, the world has hijacked ICTs, thus creating an avalanche of information that has led to a network society. This network society has emerged as a result of phenomenal strides in ICTs and the wider expectations of societal and livelihood transformation that were forecast by earlier studies on ICTs (Castells 2004; de Bruijn *et al.* 2009, 2013; Katz 2008; Ling & Donner 2009). Information and knowledge are the prerequisites that drive mobility in the network society. In the process, ICTs have seemingly brought together families and other far-flung migrant communities, thereby creating virtual and social spaces and making transnational migration and mobility a way of life for many. This new lifestyle of transnationalism (Glick Schiller *et al.* 1992; Levitt 1995; Basch *et al.* 1994; Vertovec 2007, 2009) defies the age-old tradition found in receiving countries that idealized assimilation as opposed to a dual pattern that would make the host country and the home country a single arena. However, even if the latter were to be the case (double engagement), earlier forms of communications, such as slow pace of posting letters or the dependence on emissary would not have fully supported double engagement.

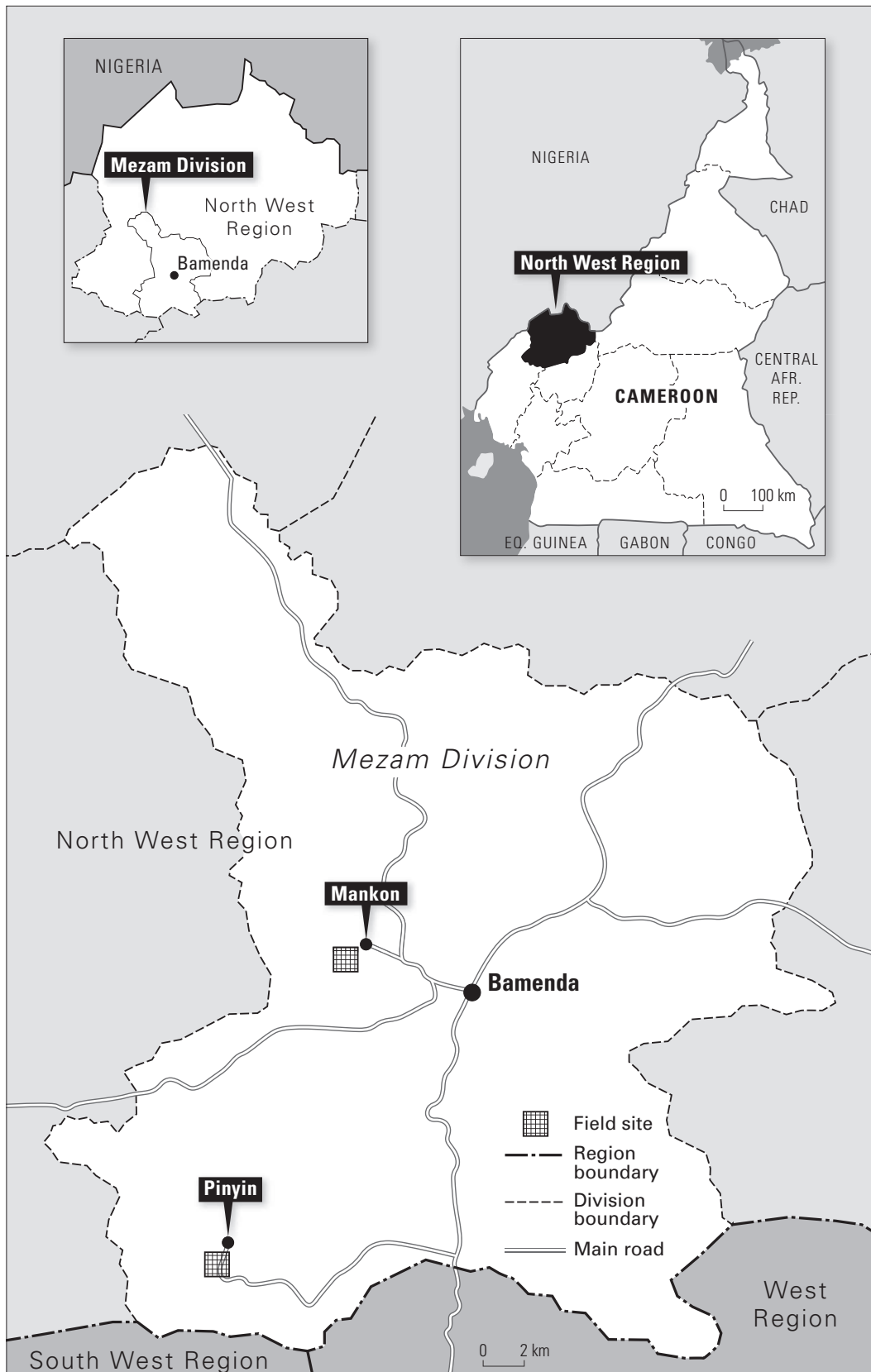
The perception of assimilation, as such, was due to the tardiness of the process of communication, in particular the length of time it took mail to go back and forth. If accelerated communication and the living of dual lives were the catalyst to strides in communication technologies as well as to road and air transport (de Bruijn *et al.* 2009; Nieswand 2011), the question is what these societies were like before the arrival of ICTs.

This thesis is an ethnographic study about the working of the social fabric of mobile communities. It aims to establish whether there has been a change or transformation in the mobility dynamics of the Pinyin and Makon societies since the ICT revolution and whether its appropriation by the Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities in Cape Town, South Africa and the Netherlands have brought about transformation in the ways in which they relate back home and the changes in the livelihoods of those in the home country. Based on a triangular study that spans South Africa, the Netherlands and the respective Pinyin and Mankon home villages in the Grassfields of Bamenda in Cameroon, this research considers the consequences of ICT appropriation in relation to people's mobility. The study articulates how mobile communities criss-cross the globe virtually or in person in order to create linkages not only with the home country but with wider migrant communities mediated by the Internet and wireless communication. It focuses on the wide array of ICTs used by these mobile communities to maintain or sever links with relations and other mobile communities and how kin back home relate to them via these means.

Communication is all about building bridges and this study sheds light on (i) how communication facilitates the building of bridges; and (ii) whether these bridges are strong enough to maintain relationships. The bridge thus becomes both a metaphor for connection and a practical instrument with regard to mobility and ICTs. This means that, in today's mobile world, relations are simultaneously being built, maintained and broken, but by adopting the dual concept of a bridge it is easier to understand the 'importance and the transformative power embedded in linkages'. Equally, one can ascertain the continuities and changes, given mobility, in communication, and connectivity is 'symbolized by the bridge' (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2012: 2). Bridges and connections are mutually reinforcing as they connect communities, places and distances as well as providing virtual connections via the Internet and mobile phone.

Although the arrival of the mobile phone and other technologies is relatively recent, this study goes beyond this 'newness' and is embedded in the construction of historical narrative more than in the recent advances in communication technologies themselves. Historical narratives help us to understand how the mobile trajectories of the past link it to the present and elicit the mutual bene-

Map 1.1 Research sites



fit that has occurred with regard to improved ICTs, or how the past has informed the present concerning changes or continuity. This of course acknowledges that communication existed in various forms long before the arrival of today's ICTs.

Too often detailed focus is placed on developed countries and developing countries are only mentioned in passing or lumped together as 'Africa' (Katz 2008; Ling & Donner 2009). Equally, particular technologies are chosen in many cases as the focus of study, either the Internet (Miller & Slater 2000; Parham, 2005), the cell phone (Horst & Miller 2006) or Facebook (Miller 2011), in order to zoom in on a particular society. Similarly, research on ICTs is not extensive or broad, often due to limitations of space. This is a holistic study of the various forms of ICTs *vis-à-vis* mobility that focuses on the different aspects of everyday life that a mobile community may engage in and offers a new perspective on mobility and migration – the in-betweens – and the use of ICTs as it considers mobile communities, individuals and families. Through traditional ethnographic research, coupled with the use of information technologies, the social interaction between mobility and ICTs is shown, as are levels of social shaping, appropriation and re-appropriation. By focusing on their economic activities as well as associations, the aim is to show how they navigate the various networks and forms of physical, cultural and virtual mobility. By paying attention to cultural activities (rituals) and how the Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities maintain relationships with kin in the home country, attention is paid to connectivities and emotional mobility, notions that have been largely ignored in migration studies to date. This study aims to fill this gap by placing emotions at the fore as an intangible aspect of migration that accounts for transculturalism. With increasing mobilities, there is a tendency for increased emotion to be shown.

## Mobility

Studies on mobility and migration contain extensive scientific data that enhance our understanding of connectivities and flows. The last two decades have seen a rise in studies on transnationalism that shows migrants having a foothold in both their home and their host countries. These studies have been further complemented by the growing appeal of studies on mobility and ICTs that show how, in today's global world, mobility is being enhanced and informed by ICTs. The notion of mobility often encompasses physical displacement. However, with the world increasingly being interconnected by wireless communication technologies, it is not possible to see mobility in the singular or in terms of physical displacement anymore. Hence the talk of mobilities.

Mobility and migration are often seen to be synonymous. Mobility is an all-encompassing form of movement that is not mutually exclusive to persons but seen as the perceptible and simultaneous shifts in both spatial (place) and social

locus. It presupposes that one kind of movement is not the focus, given that there is a mobility of ideas. And as humans, they are mobile with their habitus – practices, ideas, beliefs and social and material culture. In conformity with Adey's (2010) notion of being "mobile with" migrants seek to reproduce or re-invent customs that they are familiar with to suit the host context. These include cultural practices as birth (born house) and funeral (cry die). The notion of mobility has gone past the idea of physical displacement. It is in this light that de Bruijn *et al.* (2001), with reference to nomads, talk of 'travelling cultures'. If social mobility, as espoused by Elliot & Urry (2010), 'becomes the de facto stratification of migration between migrants and non-migrants', can we also talk of stratification among the mobile communities in host countries?

The term mobility, as such, cannot simply be used to denote the movement of persons but rather by looking at it from the notion of constellations of mobilities – persons, goods, ideas, social, cultural, virtual, and emotional mobilities. These forms of mobilities have been enhanced by the new communication technologies. They 'connect the analysis of different forms of travel, transport, communications with the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized throughout time and across various spaces' (Urry 2007: 6). I also use the concept of mobility to refer to the itinerary of migrants, as well as the various things they carry to their host country – the movement of food, photos, objects and ideas to reinforce the notion of cultural mobility. By so doing, this permits me to adopt, on the one hand, an historical geographical approach that will enable an in-depth analysis of the 'formation of movements, narratives about mobility and mobile practices', by looking at mobility holistically (Cresswell 2010: 17). On the other hand, this also allows me to ascertain to what extent communication technologies have enhanced mobility and connectivity.

Conversely, migration refers mainly to a person's geographical movement from one place to another, permanently or temporarily. While mobility is the preferred *modus operandi*, the terms will be used interchangeably, denoting their various forms as conceptualized here. This study goes beyond a simple description of the use and impact of ICTs and human mobility, or the myopic focus on the communication practices that migrant communities establish and maintain in either the host or home country with no regard to the other. It critically foregrounds an in-depth analysis of the multifaceted ways in which mobile communities interact in the host and home countries and with the wider migrant network.

In this study, I maintain that ICTs have been incorporated to enhance migrants' co-presence in interesting ways in the familiar on-going patterns of everyday social life, as well as to insulate them from the excessive demands of their families. I begin with the hypothesis that ICTs, especially mobile phones, shape

and are shaped by particular relationships in particular ways and that these are mutually reinforcing. Many authors, such as Horst (2006); Horst & Miller (2006); de Bruijn *et al.* (2009, 2013); de Bruijn & van Dijk (2012); Nyamnjoh (2005, 2011) and Vertovec (2004), have demonstrated the profound importance of ICTs, especially the mobile phone, showing how its introduction in rural communities has catapulted the process of ‘linking up’ and has transformed everyday lives.

The trajectory of mobile communities here are those of a community that wants to reassert itself in the host society by travelling with whatever tangible or intangible objects they can take from home. This travelling culture or cultural mobility denotes the historical mobility of the people and their ‘codes, structures, and definitions that enabled the massive transfers of prestigious cultural norms’ (Greenblatt 2010: 11). Such mobility is embedded in current trends of flexible mobility that are ‘facilitated through a wholesale reinterpretation of history and a change in its valence’ (*Ibid*: 13; de Bruijn *et al.* 2001, 2013).

## Transnationalism or ... ?

Recalling Greenblatt’s notion of flexible mobility (2010) leads us to also interrogate the concept of transnationalism in the present context of accelerated flows, mobilities and connectivities. Should we not now be talking of ‘transculturalism’ and ‘transcultural habitus’ as a way of understanding the new complexities of mobilities and connectivities? The era of migrants being uprooted from their societies and cultures and moving to a host country is fast becoming a thing of the past, as migrants today seek to maintain a life of double engagement and a foothold in both the host society and the home country (Mazzucatu 2008). This is equally reflected in current social sciences studies where the study of migration seeks to understand the places of origin and destination (Brettel 2000: 98). Stemming from the seminal studies by Glick Schiller *et al.* (1992), various studies<sup>1</sup> have provided insights into the concept of transnationalism. Acknowledging these contributions, but also being critical of the prioritization of the nation-state over the home village in today’s globalizing age where the global and the local have been merged into a single arena thanks to strides in ICTs, I propose enhancing this debate by entering into dialogue with both transnational and transcultural concepts as I see them as different sides of the same coin. I go further by bringing in a second concept, namely ‘transcultural habitus’. What do these concepts represent? Borrowing from Bourdieu’s notion of habitus (1990) and Guarnizo’s (1997) concept of transnational habitus, I take transcultural habitus as the conscious and unconscious habitual and internalized cultural practices that migrants

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<sup>1</sup> Basch *et al.* (1994); Glick Schiller *et al.* (1995); Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004); and Vertovec (1999, 2004, 2007).

engage in and cultivate to express their identity and belonging to the home village while at the same time maintaining links with their home and host countries. What this suggests is that there is a paradigm shift from rootedness (assimilation) and deterritorialized subjects (Basch *et al.* 1994) to one that is increasingly accompanied by the re-inscription of identity into the territory of the homeland. Vertovec (2004) offers more clarity by claiming that transnationalism does not cause modes of transformation but rather that transformations are caused by each practice that contributes significantly to the on-going processes of transformation embedded in the historical trends of a long-distance social network. Such trends I note are attributed to the concepts of transculturalism and transcultural habitus. Transculturalism, especially in the host country, has received less attention and, when mentioned, this is usually only briefly. This study, while it takes as point of departure the concepts of transnationalism discussed above, shows the increasing trend of trans-culturalism amongst Mankon and Pinyin communities. The study fills this lacuna as regards transculturalism. Culture here is conceived as an:

... evaluative conversation constructed by actors out of the raw materials afforded by tradition and on-going experience. It is continually modified by them in processes of social interaction and their behaviour is guided by anticipation of such cultural behaviour. (Hammel, 1990 cited in Brand 2000: 10)

I would also add that their behaviour is socially and culturally constructed, and is produced and reproduced by actors. If this is the case, should we not consider mobilities as the way migrants form their own habitus based on their experiences of mobility and a mixture of local, national and cosmopolitan cultural references, and how rooting occurs? Following this path signals a gradual shift from transnational theories and emphasizes instead the ‘dialogic dimension of the migrants’ transcultural and transnational ways of being and belonging’ (Landolt 2001), which enhances the understanding of the cosmopolitan concept and sociocultural transformation. While this approach is quite useful, we should remember the fact that a cosmopolitan lifestyle is not a *sine qua non* for all migrants’ connectivity given the inaccessibility of the Internet in rural African communities (including Pinyin and Mankon). Transnationalism and modes of connectivity are thus often useful in explaining the global trends of connectivity. Bringing in transcultural habitus, the aim is to show that migrants’ activities in the home and host countries are guided by a sense of what they already know and a sense of learnt practice because it defines who they are and therefore re-enforces their belonging to the home village.

The path mapped by Bryceson & Vuorela (2002: 7-8) as regards transnational families underscores how ‘families shape and are shaped by movement, separation, and reunion, and the boundaries and vistas they establish for themselves’. Like other transnational communities, transnational families are guided by rela-

tional ties, with welfare and mutual support being fundamental to their existence. However, their overt focus on the transnational trajectory of transnational family inhibits them from linking these trajectories to the emotional transculturalism that is intertwined with it. This is a linkage that I capture in this study. In the same vein, I position my study from an historical perspective and unequivocally state that transnational migration, though the concept may be relatively new, is not new but goes back to earlier mobile migrants, especially those who were engaged in bush trade, rural-rural migration or went to work on the plantations during and after colonialism. This idea has also been proven by Thomas & Znaniecki (1958: 303-15)<sup>2</sup> in their study of Polish peasants in Europe and America decades before the coinage of the term ‘transnationalism’ when showing how letter writing was of prime importance between migrants and relations in the home country in the absence of the telephone (and of course the Internet). Mobile communities have today moved beyond letter writing to voice communication and other forms of faster speech communication (the Internet).

These concepts allow us to understand the new trends of dual engagement, as well as permitting me to delve into various ethnographic spaces in an attempt to understand the social interaction and everyday life enmeshed in mobilities and the appropriation of ICTs. By introducing these concepts, my study contributes to the development of further frameworks that offer an understanding of the complexity of mobilities in the age of ICTs. ICTs have become the interface between the wider mobile communities and families who stay behind (Horst & Miller 2006; Vertovec 2004).

So far, I have recognized that links exist between mobilities, ICTs and network/network societies (communities), as has been underscored by several authors.<sup>3</sup> This presupposes that in today’s age of mobilities, technology and greater interconnectedness, ICTs, mobilities or network societies could be studied in isolation. It is in this respect that Panagakos & Horst (2006: 115) call for studies that subscribe to literal and horizontal accounts that invite us to look at the ‘process of production’, consumption, appropriation and re-appropriation, highlighting the ways in which ICT use are ‘bundled’. I contend that it is only by studying mobilities, including transnationalism, transculturalism and transcultural habitus, ICTs and networks in a holistic manner that we can highlight the everyday practices of mobile communities. In doing so, we start to realize how ICTs have come to propel mobility, which is embedded in the daily lives of the people we are studying. Equally, by focusing on the historical pattern of mobility, we understand trends in contemporary mobility and society.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Poitier (2000).

<sup>3</sup> Urry (2003, 2004, 2007); Castells (1996, 2004); Castells *et al.* (2007); de Bruijn *et al.* (2009, 2013); Brettel (2000); and Mazzuccato (2008).

## Pinyin and Mankon as frontier people

Pinyin is a mountainous area and the village is traversed by small streams that can turn into rivers during the rainy season. Pinyin people, according to oral history, migrated from Widikum sometime in the 17<sup>th</sup> century following a chieftaincy struggle and then settled in their present site (Tasi, unpublished manuscripts).

As a result of wars and in a quest for good arable land, the Mankon people, who originated from *Nsahnyoum* in northeast Africa, migrated to the Mbam Valley, the land of the Tikars, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Warnier 2012: 42; Ncheawah & Tanibang 2004: 3-4). After a series of migratory movements, they settled where they are today.

Pinyin is in the North West Region of the Grassfields, about 45 km southwest of the regional capital of Bamenda. Pinyin is the largest clan in Santa Sub-division in terms of population and land, covering an area of about 750 km<sup>2</sup>. It falls under the jurisdiction of Santa Council.

Mankon is in the Mezam Division of North West Region. The entire region is referred to as the Bamenda Grassfields and Mankon lies on the Mezam River that rises on the *mushiig* (Bamenda Escarpment). Unlike the geographically remote Pinyin, Mankon is only about 8 km from the centre of Bamenda and does not experience the telephone problems that Pinyin has. In contrast to Pinyin, mobility in Mankon was rural-urban, with some migrants going to the Coast to work on the plantations.

While most villagers, Mankon included, practised rural-urban mobility, the people from Pinyin were among the exceptions that focused on rural-rural migration.<sup>4</sup> This took them to Nkambe, Mesaje, Sabong-gari, Fonfuka, Fundong and Njinikom as bush traders and cattle owners/traders. Its geographic location in the highlands of the Grassfields overlooking Bali, Batibo, Santa and Bamubu may explain the Pinyin people's mobility in an attempt to discover what could benefit them financially.<sup>5</sup> Their mobility was characterized by weekly visits to neighbouring markets in Bali, Ashong, Santa, Guzang, Bawaju and Widikum and this later evolved into cross-border trade between Cameroon and Nigeria and West and East Cameroon during the colonial period.

Trade with East Cameroon saw the introduction of coffee planting in Pinyin as traders came back with coffee seeds. This perhaps explains why a customs post was set up at Santa during the colonial era and is still operational today. After independence, Pinyin men used to trade palm oil in Nigeria and come back with cigarettes, gunpowder, liquor and textiles; some of which were sold in neigh-

<sup>4</sup> Conversations with papa Gabriel (bush trader), Pinyin: 27/05/2010 and 14/01/2011 and papa Anyam, Bamenda: 21/09/2011.

<sup>5</sup> Personal conversation with papa Nkeng, Bamenda: 07/10/2011.

bouring villages. Most of the textiles were sold in the West Region to the Bamilekes.

In Mankon, I can still recall my paternal grandfather and some of his peers who were long distance traders between Calabar and Cameroon taking palm oil from Metta and bringing back kerosene, dane guns and gunpowder as well as cloth. As mentioned by Warnier (2012: 51) and corroborated by Pa Muluh, a bush trader who visited markets in Boyo and Donga & Mantung divisions, 'regional and long-distance trade was carried out through elaborate institutions including professional traders and porters, synchronized markets, currencies (cowries and brass rods), savings associations and a credit system'. Chapter 6 discusses these practices that have simply been transposed to Cape Town by both the Mankon and the Pinyin communities.

Their mobility was rudimentary as it was marked by long-distance trekking, head porters and indigenous forms of communication with kin networks and those forged in the process and providing accommodation and respite. Such long-distance mobility and trade brought matrimonial alliances and diplomatic relations with other chiefdoms (Warnier 2012).

Accounts of the histories of Pinyin and Mankon have always included mobility, which was facilitated then by indigenous forms of communication such as messengers and village criers and influenced contemporary migrants to embrace mobility. This mobility has continued unabated until today but in various forms: rural/rural, rural/urban and international. And nowadays it is embedded in the notion of 'bush-faller', where the loci of migration are synonymous with bush/farm and the current generation of migrants are expected to work hard and send home remittances and lavish goods and to help develop the home village (Nyamnjoh 2011; Pelican 2008; Alpes 2011).

As one of the villages that leapfrogged into wireless communication, Pinyin was connected to mobile telephony in the mid-2000s and faced challenges regarding network reception. On account of the village's rocky terrain, communication by road and mobile phone (due to network reception problems) presented difficulties, especially in the wet season. People still had to go to the tops of hills and/or climb trees to make calls. To date, Pinyin is only connected to one of the country's three mobile telephone service providers, namely Mobile Telephone Network (MTN). In addition, the problem used to be further compounded by a lack of electricity for users needing to charge their phones. This had to be done, for a fee, in bars and shops at night or in homes that boasted a generator. The scenario gradually changed when the village was connected to the national grid and phones could be regularly charged. This had a huge impact on mobility and connectivity between those who stay and migrants. It led to an increase in traffic in communication and connectivity.

The rapid encroachment of the city towards Mankon village has resulted in the distinction between village and city life becoming blurred. Most Mankon residents commute into town now for their daily activities. Mankon had the lone landline that connected the Mankon Palace until the early 2000s but the village experienced wireless landlines when Cameroon Telecommunication (CAMTEL) introduced this new service. However, mobile telephone services reached the village when the rest of the province was connected in 2000. The arrival of telephony has connected the village to the rest of the world and increased the speed of connectivity and mobility. Compared to 1999 when there were about 6 Pinyin migrants in Cape Town, the number today is over 100. In the same vein, being connected has seen mobility amongst those who stay at home. ICT has given them the opportunity to 'go places' through the calls they make. This was previously unimaginable. It has not changed the notion of the bush market trade but it has offered them the opportunity to make more informed decisions.

Contrary to the rudimentary forms of communication that marked earlier mobility and migration patterns, mobility today is largely defined and informed by ICTs as well as by old forms of communication (village/town crier). Juxtaposing these trade trends to contemporary socioeconomic activities among Pinyin migrants in Cape Town, trade patterns are identical but have been facilitated by communication (information) and knowledge about the goods in demand as people now often make business transactions without having to migrate or may initiate a first visit and subsequent transactions are done electronically and/or by phone.

It is critical to understand present-day mobility patterns and reconstruct the past to comprehend and assess how patterns then may have informed the present trend of mobility. From this brief sketch and historical account of Pinyin and Mankon migrations, we can infer that the aim of migration has been mainly in search of fertile farm land and to be strategically located geographically, with natural buffers warding off imminent threats from neighbouring villages.

Similarly, the search for greener economic pastures in new destinations is central in the current trend of migration. Prior to migrating to post-apartheid South Africa, favoured destinations were mainly Europe and North America. However migrants are now selecting destinations in the new South Africa, particularly Cape Town and Johannesburg, which are the preferred destinations for most Pinyin and Mankon migrants. Other emerging African countries with economic prowess are also popular with these migrants too.

The Pinyin and Mankon are represented in Cape Town by their respective associations: the Pinyin Family Movement (PIFAM) and the Mankon Cultural and Development Association (MACUDA). Like their predecessors, the essence of mobility is not about severing ties, it is about maintaining relationships across

borders, the search for belonging and creating a new life. When people move, they do not do so in isolation as they carry tangible and intangible objects that remind them of the life they have left behind in their home village. They also follow the paths taken by others before them and maintain connections with those they leave behind. This presupposes that communication is possible between migrants and family in the home country, between migrants and would-be migrants, and amongst migrants in the host country. There has been an increase in mobility patterns. Beyond this dialectic of home and host country, migrants have carved out a space for themselves and are seen as a mobile community that is deeply embedded in its cultural practices through the daily social and cultural activities that they participate in. Such formations in a mobile community are in contrast with findings in earlier studies that posit that informational society creates a fourth world of marginalized people who have been bypassed by communication technologies (Castells 1996, in Donner 2008: 29-31). In fact, to conceive communication in this light is to obfuscate the interpersonal communication and connectivity that have made it meaningful to regions like Pinyin that have leapfrogged to wireless mobile communication. As such, connectivity has become the norm not the exception and has led to a mobile community and society.

Although Pinyin and Mankon migrants may be considered as residing in the margins, or as marginal, I see them as ‘frontier’ people (Kopytoff 1987) because they display the characteristics of those perpetually on the move and who are in search of a niche for themselves. They are constantly exploring frontiers. Given that they are mobile as a community, they have become each other’s keepers. How then does one extrapolate from their frontier nature the ‘workings’ of earlier societies to make sense of the contemporary one? To do so, I focus on social and kinship networks that have become fundamental to the Pinyin and Mankon migration and mobility process and how the new technologies are enhancing these networks. I look at the different practices that underpin the societal fabric and how it defines ideas of belonging and home.

In the remainder of this section, I focus on the concepts that are seen as the main issues speaking to mobilities in relation to the formation of mobile communities: social and kinship networks, society and technology, habitual practices and the notion of belonging and home.

### ‘Tuyau’ and ‘lines’: Social and kinship networks

Mobility occurs due to the interaction, multiple networks and community solidarity that members are able to forge with one another and amongst other migrant communities. In this respect, social and kinship networks provide an avenue to unpacking the constellations of mobilities, given that they are propelled by net-

works. My interest in personal/kinship networks, linkages and network society was heightened by the respondents in the villages and how they see themselves as part of the information superhighway and how they are connected with their children and other relations far away by the click of the call button on their mobile phones. Equally I was intrigued by the ways in which migrants are connected at various levels in the host country and with other migrant and ethnic migrant groups and Internet-mediated forums, and how these levels of interconnection make them belong to a shifting network society that would have otherwise been impossible. Communication technologies in this regard are creating a network society that helps to expand mobility and the migration industry. However, whatever the different levels of connection and networks that are forged, they still continue to maintain strong social and cultural ties with the home country.

A network society and community is an important prerequisite for migration as well as enhancing the survival of migration and mobilities respectively. If migration is a dynamic system that takes into account sending and receiving countries, then this also implies that it centres on linkages. The social network and a network society are important within the framework of this study as they provide an understanding of the different social field as it is seamed by networks.

Migrants often have a defined terminology to refer to particular networks. In this regard, 'line' is used to refer to migration syndicates that assist in the migration process. It is thus common to hear a prospective migrant say that they have found a 'line' for a particular destination. And for these 'lines' to function, one needs to pay for them. 'Line' in this sense is synonymous with *tuyau*, a French word (English: pipe) that is used by migrants in Cape Town.

Following Fawcett (1989: 673), networks/linkages do not only refer to the persons involved that make up this network. Instead, I take into account the elements that are dependent on the people, such as communication between migrants and would-be migrants and families trying to use their networks to secure migratory passage for their children. Networks are, according to Castells (2004: 3), 'process flows that channel information between nodes'. The node is 'significant in its ability to contribute to the network's goal' (*Ibid.*). This implies that linkages/networks are not simply examined at one location but in the entire migration system both at home and in the host country. And at the centre of these interactions are social networks that give meaning to every action in the process. Networks thus occur at multiple levels and invariably tend to cooperate or compete with each other, thus enhancing our understanding of mobilities, the mobile community and its intricacies. By extending the framework of networks to include home and host countries, the communication nodes that facilitate these linkages and networks permit me to move away from anachronistic single-site

research to multi-sited research, and to simultaneously capture community solidarity and that of kinship as well. In other words, it sheds light on the multifaceted networks, be they personal, kinship, community/ethnic or agency/migration industry, and when and how they are played out at the different ends. However kinship and personal networks, also known as strong ties (Granovetter 1973), include various forms of assistance. What marks these networks are the lasting impacts the networks have on migration given obligation towards kin relation are of an abiding nature (see also Nieswand 2011). The speed, power and connectivity of networks have increased due to improvements and transformations in communication technologies, especially in mobile and wireless technology, that have given users the chance of interaction. Could this be the imminent change brought about by ICTs on network? Of late, the possibilities of accessing the Internet on the move with smart mobile phones have increased interaction and, by extension, virtual mobility. Arguing along similar lines Mitchell (2003: 144, in Castells 2004: 11) notes that ‘wireless connections and portable access devices create continuous fields of presence that may extend throughout buildings, outdoors and into public space as well as private’. This has profound implications for the relocations and spatial distributions of all human activities that depend ... upon access to information’. As regards access to migration information, weak ties (Granovetter 1973) play an enhancing role. These are ties that are not strong enough to be considered within the frame of regular networks (kin and kith) yet are not excluded nor included and are quite useful. In Chapters 6 and 7, I refer to some of them as legal networks – lawyers, staff at the department of Home Affairs (charge with issuing/extending refugee permits) and migration syndicates that assist migrants with legalizing their stay.

Networks do not necessarily entail strong ties with lasting impact on relationships. While we talk of strong ties, the reverse can also be true. There are weak ties that in some instances perform tasks that strong ties cannot, such as the migration syndicate. Often this tie is orchestrated by family and personal relationships that set the process in motion financially. The same can be said for refugee permits, where an unholy alliance has been formed between migrants, Home Affairs officials and lawyers (legal ties) to perpetuate the process. Granovetter (1973: 1360) notes that it is through these ‘networks that small-scale interaction becomes translated into large-scale patterns, and that, these in turn feed back into small groups’. Not limiting the network approach to strong ties/networks because these are standard ties, the weak ties have the ability to bridge both strong and weak ties. However, contrary to Granovetter’s notion that ‘no strong tie is a bridge’, I would maintain that strong ties are a bridge in themselves, although not exclusively because they depend on weak ties to negotiate the migration process of relations. They are the financial facilitators. Weak ties in

this case would refer to the migration industry/syndicates and agencies that facilitate the migration process from Cameroon to South Africa. How does the notion of strong and weak ties inform the population ratio of Pinyin and Mankon in Cape Town?

## Society and technology

The interaction and conviviality between ICTs and society has enhanced migrants' navigation between networks. This section considers society and technology, with particular reference to the Actor Network Theory (ANT) widely associated with John Law and Bruno Latour. Latour (1996: 369) maintains that the ANT 'aims at accounting for the very essence of societies and natures without limiting itself to human actors only but extends to the word actor – or actant – to non-human, non-individual entities'. Succinctly put by Kien (2009: 43), 'ANT seeks to expose the intimate relations between humans and technologies, actors and actants and network', and how they manifest themselves in practice. It is this intimate relationship that I seek to examine here and how the relationships and appropriation propel networks (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2012). I argue that actors and actants cannot be placed on a par because, on their own, phones (actants) would never ring or take photos without someone (the actor) giving the command. But as actors, humans are endowed with the know-how to give mobile phones the specific task of performing. However, concurring with Latour (1988: 159), their primary focus is building and bridging networks and to maintain this position, an actant continuously builds relationships with other actants. The relationship between ICTs and mobility therefore is highly intertwined as ICTs today play a determining role in mobility (dis)connection and networking. Connections thus become central to ICT insofar as relationships are (dis)connected, configured and reconfigured.

An actant can be anything provided it is 'granted to be the source of an action' (Latour 1996: 373). Although Latour holds that the main criticism for this theory is the 'complete indifference for providing a model of human competence' (cf. Mutch 2002: 487), or by not recognizing the higher agency and power of humans that, in my opinion, point to the limitation of this theory as well. Although power is not tangible, it is an effect of the capacity of actors on the networks – a capacity that communication technologies possess. I imagine that the arrival of mobile and communication technologies could invite us to re-examine this critique and the whole notion of ANT and give adequate importance to human agency with regard to how it relates to communication technologies (Rose & Jones 2005: 27). Throughout this chapter, I have underscored the relationship between mobility, networks and ICTs and how their speed and connectivity have increased as a result of the inextricable relationship and appropriation of technology by society.

This infiltration of ICTs into our daily lives and the use of technologies I term the appropriation of ICTs by mobile communities. In doing so, a convivial relationship has been created whereby ICT is shaping the lives of the users and by the same token the users are equally shaping and adapting ICTs in their lives not just to serve new adaptations but principally to serve their old motives by developing innovative ways of doing it (Brynin & Kraut 2006; 8). As a result of their social shaping, appropriation and re-appropriation, they have formed symbiotic relationships that have become actors, and actants on each other, something Rose & Jones (2005) refer to as the ‘double dance of agency’. Technology is meaningful insofar as it serves the purpose for which it is meant.

It follows that technologies and humans build relationships and networks over time – actor-network – that may be unstable but are held together by the continuous engagement of the actors (Kien 2009; William-Jones & Graham 2003). However, actors at times may resist being involved with a network because of their independence (agency) that can lead to (dis)connection. There is a ‘glue’ that attracts them to each other, something Latour (1996) refers to as ‘translation’. In other words and as noted by William-Jones & Graham (2003: 275), ‘each actor has its own diverse sets of interest, thus a network’s stability will result from the continual translation of interests’. Often, this is to have a continued sense of connecting with family though far away. This suggests that by the very essence of their translation (social shaping and re-shaping), networks mutate in multifaceted ways as they are appropriated by different users in unintended ways. They go beyond the normative values and function built into them, as they are not mere passive entities.

This is what I consider as the social shaping and re-shaping of technology and society respectively, and their interaction, when appropriation and re-appropriation occur, which is the focus of how we see the interaction between society and communication technologies. As Lehoux *et al.* argue (1999: 440, cited in William-Jones & Graham 2003: 277), the ‘meaning of a technology is not entirely a given a priori, but rather, progressively constructed (*and reconstructed, I may add*) through social practices’.

ICTs come in a conglomerate of what Slater & Tacchi (2004: 3) refer to as ‘communicative ecology’ that embodies the totality of ICTs: radio, print media, computer, mobile phones and more recently social media and co-presence interaction. We should not lose sight of the choice, role and power of distinctive technologies, with some more accessible and easier to use than others. This availability provides users with informed choices about which technology to adopt and adapt to, and which to use for specific purposes. Arguing along similar lines, Ling (2004) shows that there is preference by others for a technology that enables a co-presence experience, thus making Skype calls by far the most widely used

form of communication besides the mobile phone among transnational migrants with Internet-literate family and friends.

With regard to this study, the ANT provides mobile communities with the savvy of bridging networks given that these technologies are shaped by consumers in how they translate them for their own usage. In the process of translation, technologies may meet the standards of consumers and be incorporated into their everyday lives and affect collective wellbeing through its sustainability and multiplicity of networks. However, it could also lead to inequalities in society with the haves and have-nots (between those with 3G smart phones and those still using 1G and 2G phones). This effectively means that they are excluded from accessing the apps that are available to 3G users. This also shows the coexistence of old and new technologies, giving actors the agency to choose which network to use. It also helps to see both the actions of machines and those of humans simultaneously and to ‘understand how the agency of humans and machines are mutually dependent and intertwined’ (Rose & Jones 2005: 33). This does not take away their agency as they have found ways of translating the technology to suit their needs. While maintaining networks is thanks to the conviviality between humans and technology, it is also informed by learnt habits that have been facilitated by ICTs.

## Habitual practice

According to Bourdieu (2009), such kinship relational networks and other social networks are informed by the internalized culturally accepted norms and habits that they have learnt over the years. This leads us to the notion of habitus and loci and the logic of practice of everyday life. He claims that habitus highlights structured responses and structured behaviour as informed by rules of behaviour that have been internalized. But at the same time one has measures and possibilities (agency) to transform these rules. The environment or context that informs behaviour allows the possibility that what is internalized is transformable within the logic of everyday practice. Thus habitus makes sense only within a given locus or context. How does the notion of habitus inform mobilities, social and kinship networks? Although Bourdieu draws on Durkheim’s notion of collective consciousness in the sense that it regulates behaviour, the former’s idea of habitus is not as frozen as Durkheim’s. As such, habitus is different from one field to the other, and thus structured. Again Bourdieu argues that even if one is committed to a habitus, that everyday context depends on the extent to which one can reproduce it effortlessly and this translates to a sort of everyday practice of that habitus. It is in the process of reproduction that habitus is transformed. The notion of habitus is thus born out of Bourdieu’s social reproduction – the process by which a society maintains itself over time. It is ‘the capacity each player of a game has

to improvise the next move, the next play, and the next shot' (Calhoun 2003: 3). This manoeuvring does not occur in space but rather in a social field where each actor tries to exert coercion on others by playing the game that is specific to that field and what is at stake. With specific reference to knowledge of the rules of the game, it requires that 'every field of social participation demands of those who enter it a kind of preconscious adherence to its ways of working. This requires seeing things certain ways and not others, and this will work to the benefit of some participants more than others' (Calhoun 2003: 18). In this respect, when jostling for the extension of a refugee permit for instance, migrants are astutely versed in the game and its rules (shrouded in secrecy and mediated by middlemen). Hence, practical knowledge of the rules in any game in a given field, as well as being shrewd in understanding the values and rules of the game is of particular importance. In relation to the fields of pitching (economic activities, Chapter 6) and that of the various associations (PIFAM and MACUDA, see Chapter 7), these are two different fields where play is executed by the same actors but the objective structures are different. To reconcile both the power of the structure and the subjective choice that gives social agents agency, Bourdieu saw social agents not simply as following rules but as dynamic agents who could improvise and adapt to changing circumstances that called for going beyond rules and for acting strategically and interestedly (*Ibid.*: 19-20).

The structure of this field is often controlled by those with economic capital (wealth) who use it to acquire cultural and social capital. On the whole, the defining resource is social capital as it has the ability to bridge and bond (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2012) and strategies are of significant importance for participants in living up to the games in the different social fields. Strategies are inert and derive from a *sens pratique* (practical sense or logic). In migrants' associations, the structure is ruled by the elders and those in positions of power, such as the president and the vice president, although subversive power is held by younger people and newly arrived migrants, especially if they want to thwart attempts that impinge on their financial stability without any direct reward. The ethnographic chapters in this volume discuss the various forms of networking, ethnic enclaves and multiple alliances that underpin actors' actions and play out in the various fields amid constant improvisation and strategic creativity. This also means that games are subjected to continual change. As Calhoun (2003: 4) puts it, 'when we improvise our actions, we respond both to the social and cultural structures in which we find ourselves and to our own previous experiences'. To what extent are Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities able to strategize and improvise in their daily activities?

From this perspective, my reading of the interaction among community and families, amongst other migrant communities and with ICTs is based on the prac-

tice of everyday habitus and social fields. It allows me to analyze whether interaction and connectivity have increased with the arrival of ICTs and whether the migrant communities have changed their everyday practices. This approach emerges throughout the chapters and complements the analytical framework.

This approach helps me to map the various social fields and provide an analytical framework with which to categorize the different levels of relationships and interaction that occur within each level of the game (Chapters 6 and 7), the power dynamics and hierarchization embedded in such relational interaction. I am also able to assess the ease with which migrants improvise and straddle various social fields by reminiscing and emphasizing their belonging to home.

## Belonging and home

Increased global mobility in the wake of revolutions in ICTs has rekindled interest in the notion of belonging. Ethnographic data show how migrants' quest for home and belonging is heightened, reconfigured and reinterpreted by their appropriation of information and communication technologies. In analyzing the notion of home and belonging, Heidegger (1993: 361) provides the framework of 'dwelling' to unpack this concept where dwelling means to 'reside or to stay, to dwell at peace, to be content or at home within a place'. Mobile communities' continuous 'mobile with' (Adey 2010) suggests that they do not consider Cape Town as home and, as such, do not belong because the notion of home carries with it a powerful connotation of belonging.

Using the bridge as a metaphor for connecting people and places and bringing streams and banks and land to each other's neighbourhood (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2012), I go even further and consider the new forms of ICTs as a bridge that is changing the notion of home and belonging, and links/delinks and reinforces/despises the notion of home and belonging in the case of migrants, while in the host country, they are disconnected and are instead connected to the home country, notwithstanding the geographical distance that separates them. Increasingly, ICTs are cutting them off from the host communities and linking them with home. In this regard, while the notion of home may speak to the physical archetype, it extends here to the ideational notions of home that migrants travel with and reconstruct over time. In addition, objects have become an integral part of mobility and belonging as they help soothe emotions of longing and separation. Objects transported from home include photos, architectural objects and 'sacred icons or consumer goods – fetishes attest to the family's virtue, their status and their stability' (Wright 1991: 214). They have become purveyors of nostalgia and the emotionalized ideas of home. These objects become a connecting device between the home and host countries, between relations and between the living and the dead, as some are given by default for having been crowned

successor: they bridge and bind communities, an aspect that has been expounded on by van Dijk (2012) with regard to marriage.

The idea of home and belonging is inextricably linked to feelings of nostalgia and longing, although these may not be mutually shared. In this respect, home to the individual migrants serves as a mirror that reflects the family's portrait and binds them to it (Wright 1991). The home thus becomes the tangible and intangible container that allows both home and host communities to draw loyal support from to maintain a continuous sense of family and gain solidarity and strength from it. The home could well be physical land in the plantain grove behind the house where one's *nitong* (umbilical cord) is buried, where one retires or where one is repatriated for burial because 'home' to migrants is where one was born and thus where they belong. Belonging, above all, is marked by where one is buried (Chapter 7). In this regard, by self-consciously creating a home away from home through associations and sub-associations and taking part in different rituals, migrants are simply affirming their belonging. The commitment by both Pinyin and Mankon communities is rooted in the fact that they consider themselves as sojourners whose aim is to invest back home for future return, and they have no desire to actively integrate in the host society. Could such determinism be more fuelled by the policies of promoting legal integration than social integration that has created this sense of apathy among migrants?

Migration among both communities thus continues to echo the notion of home and is seen in what van de Veer (1995) calls the 'dialectics of belonging and longing' (cited in Oonk 2007: 17). Belonging juxtaposes rootedness with uprootedness, and establishment with marginality, while longing is related to the desire for change and movement. These dialectics of belonging and longing reignite a sense of identity that Oonk (2007) contends is dual or paradoxical in nature. Belonging is reminiscent of discrimination and exclusion, and also identifies positively with the highly esteemed Pinyin and Mankon heritage. Longing creates an awareness of multilocality that mutually reinforces belonging to the 'here and there' as well as sharing the same 'roots' and 'routes'. While belonging is considered in the dichotomy of autochthones and allochthons (Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2001), I demonstrate a community trying to regroup in a new territory to recreate a sense of home.

The fact that members of these communities have consciously chosen to recreate their home communities in the host community points to how they want to maintain their personhood. If getting married is seen as a sign of integration, then it has to be reconsidered with respect to the communities in question. Marriage is clearly not a prerequisite to integration, instead those who are married to South African women or are in long-term relations with migrants have been co-opted

into the community but they accrue the benefits derived from relationships to excel in business.

To sum up, I argue that while ICTs continue to enhance mobility for those who move and for those who stay put, they have become inextricably linked in forging networks and reconfiguring existing ones. Contrary to earlier studies that predicted change and transformation in societies that leapfrogged into ICTs, these new ICTs have been appropriated to enhance the workings of Cameroonian society. We should not see this as having changed society fundamentally or as having divided it, but as improving people's mobility and keeping them in touch with their homes and their cultural practices.

## Research questions and outline of the book

The concepts above provide me with a roadmap with which to understand current trends in mobility and migration, the interactive nature between humans and ICTs, the level of connectivity among mobile communities and that between migrants and families back in the home country.

In the light of this analysis, the underlying question in this study is:

- How do people in mobile worlds navigate their social fabric and make sense of their individual being?

And as follow-up to the main question, I also pose the following questions:

- ICTs have been hailed by earlier studies for bringing about change and transformation in societies. To what extent is this true for Pinyin and Mankon communities?
- To what extent has the introduction of ICTs reduced the perception of mobility and migration as rupture between host country and home village?
- How do increased mobility and improved ICTs change the dynamics of transnational social spaces?
- To what extent has increased connectivity in ICTs and mobility informed communication between migrants and the home country as well as feelings of home and belonging?

In an attempt to provide answers to the questions above, each chapter in this volume focuses on the workings of the Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities and each is a piece in the puzzle. The volume consists of ten chapters including this introduction. The historical, theoretical and conceptual frameworks in this first chapter set the scene and show that migration and mobility are as old as the history of any given society. Chapter 2 introduces the fieldwork site and explains the process of data collection (methodology) and analysis. This chapter provides an account of how the field and I mutually engaged with each other and allows me room to reflect on my role as a researcher as well as charting my own personal navigation of mobility, connectivity and networking, both as a migrant and as

an researcher providing a practical and empirical understanding to the stories told.

The analytical framework is guided by the concepts of mobility, network, society and technology, habitus and belonging.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are the core chapters and offer a greater understanding of the theoretical concepts of mobility, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and network before the rest of the chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9) present the data analysis. The final chapter, Chapter 10, summarizes the study and draws some conclusions. In an age of accelerated mobility and ICTs, it is increasingly difficult to extricate the themes described in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 and to place them under separate headings as I have opted to do here because of their overlap and the intricate web of connectivity. However, this separation is a deliberate choice related to a decision to further the contextual understanding of contemporary trends in mobility, ICTs and networking. Chapter 3 seeks to draw on the past patterns of migration to understand the current trends of Pinyin and Mankon migration. To do so, I have adopted an historical approach to explore this and go on to look at mobility and migration and the way they are, with communication technologies mutually reinforcing each other and creating a new mobile culture of virtual presence and co-presence. Chapter 4 questions how and to what extent the change in communication technologies has impinged on social relations. By focusing on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), with a historical note on how Cameroon has leapfrogged from its embryonic stage of poor accessibility of ICTs among the population at large to today's wide availability, we can comprehend the relationship between mobility and ICTs. In addition, the provision of basic amenities, such as electricity, has helped the process of connectivity as cell phones no longer go for days without being charged, thereby increasing reachability and connectivity between home and host country and among mobile communities. Chapter 5 examines the multi-stranded networks that migrants accumulate and how they navigate these forms of network. Together, these three chapters provide answers to all the questions while also laying the foundations for the subsequent chapters. The chapter also deals with network and the emergence of a network society with respect to the PIFAM and MACUDA and all the other associations that have emerged as Cameroonian in a show of solidarity. The accumulation of network underpins mobile culture and networks become important factor in social structure relationships as well as in the formation of snowball networks. Besides existing ethnic enclaves and social relational networks, there is a tendency to forge new ones and consolidate others. One such new network, which is of prime importance to the mobile communities in Cape Town, is the legal network of lawyers whose role it is to bail out migrants from police cells, arrange contractual co-habitation (life partnerships) for

documentation and other forms of legal papers that permit migrants to stay in the country.

The following four chapters (Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9) synchronize the 'being there' and 'being here' (Geertz 1988), which simultaneously informs the writing process and engages my 'ethnographic skills into textual analysis in order to persuade you (the readers) of the authenticity of the accounts' (Segall 2001: 581).

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the ways migrants form different levels of bonding within their intra-groupings. Chapter 6 dwells on migrants' economic activities, elucidating on how migrants are constantly breaching laws and operating on the fringes of the long arm of the law when engaging in business activities. Compared to the economic activities of their parents in the past, ICTs have facilitated communication and knowledge and created faster business transactions with lower overhead costs. Chapter 7 offers in-depth accounts of both associations and their workings, with a particular focus on how they manage ROSCAs. These have come to be the backbone of the associations but, unlike in the past when these associations were engaged in home village activities, less out of fear of witchcraft than for the prestige it brings to those involved. To these new groups of migrant communities, participation in village development is considered as the 'noble' thing to do and participation is rewarded with cultural capital and respect from peers and the village community.

Chapter 8 explores the transcultural activities that migrant communities engage in and the various rituals they perform in the host country. These are essentially life-crisis rituals, with the most prominent being death. How ICTs have helped to transform the way these rituals are performed is also discussed. As a result of mobility, some rituals have become fluid and dynamic but performing them helps mobile communities develop as a fortress and reifies their identity and belonging, disconnecting them from the host country.

Chapter 9 presents additional aspects of transculturalism with a greater focus on the 'I' as opposed to the works of the associations, shifting from the sense of 'we' to that of 'I' (he/she), and it zooms in on the individual migrants and their relationships with their respective families and friends. Emphasizing individualisation illustrates the way individual migrants relate to and (dis)connect with family. It shows the in-betweens and challenges they deal with, the emotions that are generated and how they respond to them. While studies of transnationalism have focused more on transnational links with the home country than on the transcultural, this chapter acknowledges the influence of the transcultural, taking both perspectives into consideration.

With the exception of the introduction and the conclusion, all the chapters illustrate and provide answers to the research questions posed above. They show how mobilities and ICTs are linked and permeate the social lives of communities

and the practice of everyday life. Through this permeability, we are able to appreciate the social processes of the appropriation of ICTs by societies and the social shaping and reshaping that influence both society and ICTs.