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

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### **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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**Title:** Bridging mobilities : ICTs appropriation by Cameroonians in South Africa and the Netherlands

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

## Networks and shifting relations: Social and kinship networks and the formation of a network society

### Introduction

The last two chapters showed how mobility and migration are not new and also how they are deeply engrained in human history. However what is new today is the form and dynamism that they have taken as a result of the advances in ICTs and transport networks. This has led to new mobile societies that are characterized by mobile flows and ‘miniaturized mobilities’ (Elliott & Urry 2010: 28). Secondly, ICT is what spins mobilities and reorganizes social structures, reconfigures existing relationships and builds new ones as well as maintaining existing ones. In the process, we see how everyday life is construed. Underpinning this is the fact that mobility and ICTs do not function in isolation but are inextricably linked to social relations of networks. In this respect, the formation of networking amongst mobile communities in the host country and with families in the home country is choreographed by ICTs (Thompson 2009; Horst 2006; Horst & Miller 2005). While face-to-face meetings are common and the preferred option in the host country given their daily mobility and hustling activities, they have come to be reliant on mobile-phone communication (including SMS & WhatsApp), Skype, cheap-rate calls, emails and Facebook for most daily connections and linking up. As regards the family back home, networking is by mobile communication and once in a while face-to-face meetings when the migrant visits home or parents are brought over to visit.

This chapter examines the plethora of social and kinship networks that together seam mobile communities and are characterized by negotiations and re-negotiations. Until recently, studies on migration put social networks as the driv-

ing force behind migration, showing how social networks impact on migration at all stages in the process (Hagan 1998: 55).

This chapter focuses on how Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities are able to draw on the various forms of social networks such as family, friends, associations, and legal<sup>1</sup> and migration syndicates that are predisposed towards them in an attempt to establish how network ties work. It demonstrates how these networks constantly shift to accommodate new and relevant networks. In addition, the chapter explores whether mobilities have affected network ties and, if so, how. And if they do not, do these ties continue to adopt the norms that migrants have been brought up to respect, i.e. social cohesion? The chapter goes beyond cataloguing how these networks are being forged over time and focuses on how and under what conditions they are weakened. By the same token, I examine the role of weak ties in network flows and how they create bridges that link subsequent weak ties (Granovetter 1973). In summary, the chapter examines the multi-stranded networks that migrants accumulate, including strong and weak ties. Social networking, as such, is seen more as a dynamic process as a result of the emergence of flexible communities that reconfigure and are capable of producing and reproducing complex structures of communication to ascertain the unity of purpose and flexibility (Castells 2004). They are thus able to adapt to the host society. I attempt to understand not only the large presence of Pinyin in Cape Town in comparison with Mankon as well as the extent to which networks of family and friends and ethnic community ties play a role in the corporate sponsorship of migration. Given the dynamic nature of social networks, the gender structures of network are of interest given the differences between women's and men's everyday lives and the different types of networks they therefore leverage.

Networks, as was discussed earlier (see Introduction) are a set of interconnected nodes that process flows (Castells 2004). Critical to our understanding of these flows and the reconfigurations that involve the inclusion and exclusion of networks are their organizational form (Castells 2004) and bonding approach (Putnam & Feldstein 2000). The strength of the weak ties (Granovetter 1973) will also shed light on why there are more Pinyin migrants here than other communities. The mobile communities involved see their daily interaction as one that is informed by the multi-stranded networks they navigate, and this network approach also illuminates the social gaming that occurs. The bonding approach will explain why particular groups of people tend to bond more than others. Weak ties, as noted by Granovetter (*Ibid.*), are practical bridges that link various nodes and are stronger than strong ties. Drawing from the notion of weak ties will allow an understanding of why the Pinyin make up the dominant ethnic group and how

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<sup>1</sup> A legal network refers to the lawyers that are used by migrants to enhance a secured refugee status or facilitate life-partner relationships at the Department of Refugee in the Ministry of Home Affairs.

migrants relate to their weak ties. Despite this octopus-like nature of networks, Castells (2004: 6) identifies three basic characteristics, including flexibility, scalability and survivability. He explains that

Flexibility, networks can reconfigure according to changing environments, keeping their goal while changing their components. They go around blocking points in communication channels to find new connections. Scalability can expand or shrink the size with little disruption.

Survivability, because they have no centre, and can operate in a wide range of configurations, networks can resist attacks on their nodes and codes because the codes of the networks are contained in multiple nodes that can reproduce the instructions and find new ways to perform.

These organizational forms can reconfigure networks and create a network society because of the ICTs that network societies have appropriated to reinvent themselves due to the powers embedded in information technology (Castells 2004). As mentioned in the Introduction, social interaction and linkages between migrants and family are not new but the newness is derived from the manner in which network societies have literally built their lives around ICTs that have caused the mutual shaping and reshaping of humans and ICTs.

What we should also note is that these networks work for people to be mobile because they are hierarchized, given that people do not have equal access to the various forms of capital and resources (economic, cultural and social capital). Although social capital is informed by history and capital and it is accumulated over time, it has become a kind of exclusive right of the elite class (Bourdieu 1986).

Social networks in this chapter, as the title suggests, include kinship networks and they are grouped as social and kinship networks because they are interwoven. Thompson (2009: 362) and Tilly (2005: 5) maintain that a social network 'is a chain of dyadic connections or interactions which is social and not cultural because practices rather than ideas define it'. To limit the working of social networks only to the social ignores the fact that social networks and kinship networks are often guided by both cultural practices and ideas. To say they are independent of each other, as Thompson (*Ibid.*) claims, is tantamount to throwing the baby out with the bath water.

## Overview of network in the migration process

Social networks, besides their dynamic nature, are conceived as a social product in this study. This is not as a result of individual decisions but rather as an outcome of varying needs of interaction that bind migrants and non-migrants together in a complex web of social roles and interpersonal/group relationships. These networks are conduits of information/knowledge and social and financial assistance and shape migration outcomes ranging from no migration to immigration,

return migration or the (dis)continuation of migration flows to the same destination or other destinations (Massey *et al.* 1987; Boyd 1989). The structures (kinship, political, economic and non-ethnic) that generate migration in both sending and receiving countries are channelled through social relationships and social roles that impact on individuals and groups.

It is worth noting that, prior to the rise and use of the term social capital (ties) in social sciences, Durkheim (1933 cited by Field 2003: 11) underscored the connections ties of society and asserts that society does not:

... become (q) jumble of juxtaposed atoms ... Rather the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made.

Drawing from Durkheim's statement, and in conjunction with Boyd (1989: 639), it can be seen that social networks provide the basis by which we gauge society's social cohesion. They also enable people to cooperate with one another. But networks are not exclusively enabling, they can sometimes serve to 'exclude and deny as well as include and enable' (Field, 2003: 3), just as the forms of capital available to people vary and determine to what extent people access social capital (Bourdieu 1986). Accessibility in this context hinges on the notion of interplay or social games of networks. The ability of interplay creates a shifting network, with actors and relations forging new networks to leverage advantages or using any capital that they can muster to access networks that others without such capital do not have access to. Similar to games, social life and social/kinship networks are strategic and call for constant improvisation and strategic creativity with every new challenge or situation. We become adept at navigating and negotiating often contradictory expectations by various other social agents involved in our game. This is internalized habitus that embodies 'the capacity to ... improvise the next move, the next play, the next shot', as Calhoun (2003: 3) puts it. This echoes what Putnam & Feldstein (2000: 2) suggested earlier about social networking being a game of strategic interest. Ties may be strong, reinforced and weak or severed depending on what game is at stake. They go on to indentify two types of social capital – 'bonding social capital' that links people who are similar in many respects and tend to be inward looking, and 'bridging social capital' that encompasses different types of people and tends to be outward looking. (*Ibid.*: 2; see also Putnam 2000: 22-23). This bridging capital is synonymous with Granovetter's weak ties whereby bridging knows no boundaries but is guided by need and necessity.

To understand the shifting relations and the way networks bond and connect, these approaches will help us to understand mobile communities' social gaming. Bonding capital brings together people of similar ethnic background and acts as a kind of 'super glue' while the bridging capital bonds heterogeneously and provides a sociological 'WD-40' (Putnam & Feldstein 2000). In this regard, we can

associate social capital with the ‘infrastructural moorings’ that support departure and anchor arrivals for migration to occur (Urry 2003; Cresswell 2010). Whether with family relationships, social relations or communities and much as social networks are espoused in real values, underlying strategic game-playing is embedded in it. The question here is about the role of ICTs in strategic gaming amongst networks within mobile communities. What does it mean for the social fabric of the society? How do migrants navigate these forms of network and under what conditions do networks weaken and/or disappear? What is the role of weak/strong ties in networking?

The role of networks has always been embedded in the migration process (Hagan 1998; Fawcett 1989; Gugler 1971, 1997). And current studies on migration show the importance of a network in the migration process from the decision to migrate to the continuous flow to a particular destination, transnational links and settlements patterns and the formation of home associations that provide organizational support for newcomers and additional settings for the flow of information and assistance (Nyamnjoh 2010; Mercer *et al.* 2008; Page *et al.* 2010). The most plausible explanation for migration is that persons follow the lead of others from their area and migration thus becomes self-perpetuating and every migrant creates the link for subsequent migrants to follow suit, as has been the case with Pinyin migrants in South Africa. Banerjee (1983: 185) explains that chain migration can broadly be subdivided into ‘delayed family migration’ and ‘serial migration’ (of co-villagers), with the former referring to the migration of members of the same family in stages after the first migrant. And the latter refers to interaction between individuals who are not family members but are known to migrants and/or their families. It is the expectation that when individuals migrate, they will seek ways of taking a sibling and the influx continues until most of the males in the family have moved, as was the case of Joe, Mike and Jake, whose brothers joined them in Cape Town. Priority is given to the male members of the family and the women are brought over when there is little option for them back home or if they go to study. In most cases, they migrate to join their spouses although some women may be left behind not to inhibit their chances of marriage. This may explain why the first two Pinyin women in Cape Town did not come as a result of spousal reunion but were widows who were brought over by their sisters who had been brought by their spouses. However, this does not in any way suggest that there is no female migration amongst the Pinyin and Mankon community, on the contrary.

Contemporary migration is redefining the role of network. Given the rise of information flows, ICTs have become the ‘new talking drum of everyday Africa’ (de Bruijn *et al.* 2009) that have propelled the network society. According to Castells (2003: 33), a network society is defined as a ‘society made up of power,

wealth, management and communication networks within the fabric of the social structure'. Concurring with Castells, Ros *et al.* (2007: 6) maintain that 'current international migration is the inevitable result of interconnection processes generated by the communication and information flows'. For the migrant communities in Cape Town, the high number of influx to the same destination is largely thanks to the information flows that link the home village and the host country, as well as the wide availability of information on the Internet and from returned migrants. Connectivity and access to networks become essential (Castells 2004). My contention here is that chain migration and the forms of network connections migrants leverage for personal interest and to seek asylum are informed by information flows and the availability of information in their own personal circles, especially those with significant numbers of weak ties.

### Network intrigues

My understanding of social networks amongst these groups was enhanced by the long informal meetings I had with informants in Cameroon, South Africa and the Netherlands, and from interviews with leaders and members of both associations and other related ones. In addition, attendance and participation at associational meetings and cultural events were watershed moments in my comprehension of the intricacy involved in social bonding and bridging. For instance, with the sudden death of three PIFAM members, rather than rely on the Cameroon Association that would normally repatriate the bodies, the association decided to take full responsibility and received enormous support from other 'sister' associations. And at the end of this ordeal, they pledged their support and cooperation with these associations (see Chapter 9). Spending time with individuals at their places of business (for the sedentary ones) or hanging out with hawkers listening to their stories and seeing first-hand how they built and maintained ties was informative in categorizing the different networks. Clovis, for example, was issued with a 'you must go' by the Department of Refugee at the Ministry of Home Affairs and the days just prior to his departure were used to actively seek a reverse decision. It is at such moments that weak ties become extremely important to migrants. Acquaintances and ethnic enclaves in this situation provide information about distant parts of the social system. The weak ties between Clovis and his acquaintances formed a crucial bridge between the ethnic enclave and acquaintances, as each member of the enclave could draw on their specific ties. In the same vein, weak ties are quite important to businesses and the building up of a client base (Chapter 4).

Listening to their stories of kinship network and, when fortunate enough to be around when 'beeps' come in from home, I could follow the conversation between them and families. These are rare moments because through such conver-

sations one is able to appreciate the intimacy of the network and thus understand the bonding. Back in the home village (Pinyin), my presence often provoked relations to beep their children in Cape Town to inform them about my visit. They were special moments as I had lengthy conversations with migrants who expected me to give them detailed information about the wellbeing of their family back home.

In Mankon and the Netherlands, one-to-one meetings with individuals were useful as they revealed how loose networks are here. James in Holland, for instance, successfully brought in two of his younger sisters to Europe via Italy thanks to the network amongst migration syndicates that could easily obtain an Italian visa for them. In an effort to hasten James's sisters' chances of integration in Holland, James contacted Cameroonian friends with Dutch passports to see who would be able to marry his sister. John in The Hague was contacted and an arrangement made to drive to Belgium to meet the sister but, John was quick to note that this was a calculated plan and dissociated himself from it. The repercussions were a rupture in his relationship with James, confirming the notion of social games by actors, as well as seeking to forge or intensify new or existing relationships to lever an advantage.

Although the rate of chain migration amongst Mankon migrants to Cape Town is nothing compared to that from the Pinyin community, there are, however, cases of chain migration among kin relations and assistance with information about travel to South Africa and settling in in Cape Town. Migration thus, 'builds upon a growing base of knowledge, experience, social contacts, and other forms of social and cultural capital in self-reinforcing fashion' (Massey *et al.* 1994). This has lead Wilson (1994) to synthesize the role of the network in migration as 'network-mediated migration' and she notes that migration networks must be considered as facilitating rather than encapsulating, as permeable, expanding and fluid rather than as correlating with a metaphor of a rigid bounded structure. This may be true but the tendency has often been to study social capital from the perspective of facilitation and building bridges, with very little on how social capital works (Portes 1998). Depending on the perspective adopted, it is necessary to bear in mind that social networks facilitate as well as encapsulate. And it is again safer not to classify them in straightjackets of 'either or' but 'more or less'.

Prospective migrants log onto the internet to learn more about South Africa and call friends to find out what skills they need to settle economically. Friends in Cape Town often encourage those at home to come, such as Nixon who was encouraged by his friend at every stage of his migration to join him (Chapter 3). Joyce was able to make all the necessary arrangements for her nephew to travel to Cape Town thanks to the network she had built up from the migration syndicates in Johannesburg and Maputo and, through the constant communication she

maintains with him, she can give directives on making a passport and the actual migration process itself.

Equally, my trips back and forth between Pinyin/Mankon and Cape Town brought me into contact with these networks and how they are maintained/forged, severed or re-established. On all the journeys I made, I took gifts of cell phones, money, medicines and Visa cards from migrants in Cape Town to relations to withdraw money directly from the migrant's account in Cameroon; and from Cameroon, I took back food parcels, *ashwabi*,<sup>2</sup> photos and jewellery. Jones, for instance, sent the sum of R 1000 with me with a detailed list of how the money should be distributed, and also a cell phone.

While Mankon is not as polygamous a society as Pinyin, kin relations also lean towards matrilineal lines and the immediate family. This bonding in both communities is heightened when the mother of the migrant is widowed. Major decisions cannot be taken in the family without consulting the migrant and his decision is often final. Families are keen to meet someone coming from the host country in a bid to get first-hand information about their children's wellbeing and the possibility of sending food parcels. But equally, some do not hide their disappointment when it turns out that there is no parcel for them. This is often met with the question '*you been see ... as you di come so? 'Ee no send something.*' These are some of the questions I was confronted with in both Pinyin and Mankon by disappointed relatives and parents. How then do we study and understand these networks in ways that delineate the home and host countries and yet not side-line the agency of the migrants and, by the same token, extrapolate how migrants leverage advantages? Seeking to understand networks from the vantage point of who is linked to who, the content of the linkages and the pattern they form will help us comprehend how their networks enable them to broker information. Equally, by focusing not only on individuals *per se* but on the entire Pinyin and Mankon communities as represented by the PIFAM and MACUDA respectively, we can gain useful insight into the communities' social networking as social capital is both a 'private good' and a 'public good'. Beyond this, the network and bonding approaches, as shown above, will greatly enhance our analytical perspectives of social capital.

## Studying networks

Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988-9) and Putnam (2000), comprises personal and interpersonal interaction. These different interactions share common values and their durability is informed by the way they are harnessed. However all authors approach the topic from different angles. Bour-

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<sup>2</sup> Clothes (uniform) worn by family members and friends in the event of the death of a family member or at a wedding.

dieu's concept is based on Marxist thinking concerned with inequalities regarding access to resources. He maintains that 'capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field' and we are informed by history and capital, one has to work to earn social capital and it is accumulated over time (*Ibid.* 1986). Coleman (1988-9) focuses on the rational choice of the individual in pursuit of their own interests and social interaction is considered to be part of a form of exchange. While rational choice alone cannot explain why people indulge in social capital since people have the ability to pursue their objectives, they do not invest in social capital but delve straight into ways of achieving their interests. Putnam (2000) underscores the importance of civic society and the role of associations in its formation. It is fundamental to the smooth sailing of society and underlies the social capital theory as well as the value of social networks. In a nutshell, Putnam (2000: 19) conceives social capital as 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them'. Although focusing on American society and lamenting its rapid decline, Putnam's simplistic notion of social capital and his overt celebration of the functions of social capital in society make him oblivious to the multi-layered and intricate interconnection of networks. Rather than conceiving social capital as Putnam does, where other persons benefit from someone else's time and energy, Bourdieu (1986) presents a different perspective and categorizes social capital in three forms, namely economic capital (material property), cultural capital (prestige) and social capital (family and network accumulation), with an emphasis on cultural capital and inclinations towards social hierarchy. In the process of hierarchy formation, inequalities are created and social capital becomes the exclusive right of the elite.

Even though Bourdieu's conclusions are one-sided in favour of competing for social capital, we cannot dismiss these assertions given that they fairly depict some contemporary associations. We are able to gain insight into how members of the Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities convert capital accrued from their fields to enhance and improve their standard of living. These capitals are accessed by the ways in which 'mobiles' internalize their habitus and navigate the various fields. Although much of the attention is on social capital, it does not exclude economic and cultural capital as these two forms of capital, give insight into how social capital is produced, transformed and retransformed. For instance, when a family member migrates to Cape Town, integration into the host society is dependent on the networks s/he creates. Similarly, the amount of economic capital that migrant can muster invariably leads him/her to accumulate cultural capital in the host society. In the home country, the provision of financial support and connectivity with family as well as participation in developmental projects in the village communities help migrants to accumulate cultural capital. One way of

achieving economic capital for them is through the economic activities they have been introduced to by social and kin networks in the host country (Chapter 6). When Pinyin migrants arrive in Cape Town, they are introduced into pitching (hawking) and the income generated is converted to human/cultural capital by paying for tuition that gives them access to a university degree and sets them apart as their cultural capital increases as well as their social network. It will increase even further if they secure a white-collar job.

Networking is part to all societies and is a fundamental pattern of life. Monge & Contractor (2002 in Castells 2004: 3) opine that 'networks are created by flows of messages among communicators through time and space' but in the current context of ICTs, 'the ability of networks to introduce new actors and new contents in the process of social organization increased over time with technological change, and, more precisely, with the evolution of communication technologies' (*Ibid.*: 5). For example, Clovis was able to reverse his deportation order and got a two-year residence permit thanks to the networks that he could access with the help of phone calls and texts. These networks are defined by three distinctive traits; flexibility, scalability and survivability (*Ibid.*), thus giving migrants agency to reconfigure relationships and extend interaction to a plethora of human activities, the corollary of which is a 'networked society' (*Ibid.*: 33).

While social networks have the capability to include/enable and exclude/deny (Castells 2004), there is equally a tendency that with ever-widening complex mobilities systems, inequalities will be created. As stated by Elliott & Urry (2010: 19), mobilities have the capacity to 'produce substantial inequalities between places and between people in terms of their location and access to these mobilities systems', which is what they refer to as 'network capital'. The inability of some migrants to acquire network capital means that they have been unable to visit their home country since their arrival in South Africa because access to such capital can change a migrant's status from one of asylum permit holder to business status or temporary residence. As such, kinship ties play a significant role in perpetuating migration and weak ties such as local women and lawyers provide legal assistance to regularize their status, extending their stay in the country when they have been issued with a deportation order. These ties are reignited when it is time for the extension of an asylum permit, while new ones are also forged.

Much as I compare the formation of networks to octopus-like creatures in nature due to their ability to spread to all fronts that could possibly yield results, they do not have the same characteristics and functionability. While some are visibly weak ties, their interactive role is purposeful and acts as a bridge to other networks. These weak ties lubricate the various nodes and link them to one another. Using the metaphor of a bridge, Granovetter (1973: 1360-1365; see also de

Bruijn & van Dijk 2012) expounds on how weak ties are bridges because ‘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’. It follows that actors (weak and strong ties) participate in social systems connecting migrants to other actors whose relationships have an important influence on one another’s behaviour. Migration syndicates and legal and corporate<sup>3</sup> networks in this study are considered as weak ties because of the role they play in linking multiple nodes and, like a bridge, they are capable of linking networks that were even previously unknown to each other. These networks are the essential lubricant that propels migration. The essence of such ties is to get the job done, for example in the case of Henry regarding his passport mobility (Chapter 3). The success of his migration is credited to weak ties, including his brief stay in Johannesburg and subsequent move to Cape Town, confirming Granovetter’s assertion that ‘weak ties are an important resource in making possible mobility opportunity’ (*Ibid.*: 1373). His assertion that ‘weak ties play a role in effecting social cohesion’ (*Ibid.*: 1373) comes across as simplistic given that not everyone is successful with weak ties. Mark, for instance, moved to South Africa with a promise of further migration to England. As soon as he moved to South Africa, the migration syndicate agent who asked him to relocate to South Africa stopped communicating with him. Mark had to warn others not to fall prey to this syndicate, thus breaking off all ties with them and any related syndicates. However, in cases that have worked, they may be seen to offer social cohesion.

The concept of fields and capitals are more useful than the structural explanations because of their flexibility and dynamism. The concept of structural relations maintain that social structures consist of ‘regularities in the patterns of relations among concrete entities; it is not a harmony among abstract norms and values or a classification of concrete entities by their attributes’ (White *et al.* 1976 cited in Knoke & Yang 2008: 4). Structural relations also exist only at specific times and places and may be static, with the tendency to wane after actors separate. While every society is structured, structural relations are crucial to sustaining cohesion and solidarity within a group. However they may also reinforce prejudices and fan conflicts with other groups (Knoke & Yang 2008). The structural relations approach perceives migration more as an individual movement, focusing on individuals and with less regard for migrants’ agency. In the same vein, it denies migrants the chance to navigate within the various social fields and views society as one in which there is a permanent logical order in place behind society/culture. To have a fair understanding of network capital, it is important to look both at the structure and the action (relations and actors) that are

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<sup>3</sup> By corporate networks I refer to the network syndicate that operates at the Department of Refugee at the Ministry of Home Affairs (officials, agents and security guards).

embedded in each other given they are dialectical and indispensable elements of any social network because actions reproduce structures (Bourdieu 1977; Knoke & Yang 2008). In this regard, social networks are considered within the various social fields in which actors and relations constantly adapt to circumstances that call for going beyond structural-relational settings. The notion of social fields here is tied to that of Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004: 1003) who define social fields as overlapping interactive spaces: 'multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields, encompassing those who move and those who stay behind'. Much as these networks function in the various social fields, there is also the possibility for them to function without collision, thus reiterating the flexibility of networks. This is also suggestive of the shifting and imprecise boundaries of the field but has multiple nodal points of entry.

The accumulation of the various forms of capital, especially social capital, is largely informed by the advances in new communications technologies (information flows), especially in the migration process. Information flows are the lubricant that propels the network to be physically and virtually present at every stage of the migration process, given that what is important is not so much the movement but how it enables connections that result in the network. It is in this light that the United Nations Global Commission on International Migration states that 'global communications networks provide people with the information they need to move from one place to another ... have made it easier for people to move to another and to adapt to a new society' (GCIM 2005: 5). In the sections that follow, I outline the working of social networks among the migrant communities in Cape Town and their families back in their home country, with particular emphasis on (matrilineal/patrilineal) kinship ties and how they inform social networking.

## Networking amongst mobile communities

The Pinyin community is noted for its close-knit community in Cape Town and news of this has reached the home country. It could perhaps be explained by their non-integration in the host society, leading them to create and rely on their associations for a sense of common identity (Anderson 2006). This identity is rooted in their shared sense of remembering of the community's history and culture in creating the home they have left behind in Pinyin. The process of creating a home-away-from-home is guided by cultural norms and practices and the idea of looking after the family. Memory becomes a salient factor in the recreation of mobile communities. It is against this backdrop that these communities seek to network among themselves and with other migrant communities to maintain a social cohesion of network society that seeks to safeguard one another. While these communities' interests may be warm at the outset, with the focus more on

unity and the creation of a mobile community, tensions can arise as a result of conflicting views, leading to frosty relationships among groups, between individuals and between kin.

The community may be woven together but there is also networking amongst clusters in both communities: the younger generation, pitcher men and newcomers congregate together and the first (successful) migrants have their own cohort. Despite this clustered networking, the groups exhibit a tendency to be flexible and permeable. In addition, both communities have clustered in separate neighbourhoods for easy interaction and accessibility. The first Pinyin migrants, as a result of their social mobility, have bought their own property and moved out of Parow, but a large number still congregate there and in Belleville. The community is essentially very inward-looking and tribalistic. I do not in any way mean to be scathing or spiteful because Pinyin migrants equally acknowledge these attributes and see them more as a strength than as a weakness. Thanks to this attribute, they have become a force to be reckoned with in South Africa and are seen as the strongest Cameroonian tribal group. When a new member arrives in Cape Town, he is often advised to join the PIFAM and is taken to the meeting and to the relevant sub-association for self-introduction depending on which quarter in the village he hails from. In addition, the newcomer is put into the care of an older pitcher man as an apprentice and the older man is charged with teaching the latter how to pitch, where to buy goods, what to buy and how to approach a client.

Although most of the Mankon community reside in Maitland, some are also found in other neighbourhoods usually due to work. The tendency is for newly arrived migrants to live with relations and friends either permanently or temporarily until they get their own accommodation, which is always in the same vicinity. In this way, village relationships assist by providing help to newly arrived migrants, as can be seen below.

Henry is convinced that ‘what one becomes in South Africa depends largely on who receives you upon arrival in South Africa, as that determines what you become in South Africa’.<sup>4</sup> Some migrants leave home without knowing anyone who could receive them in the host country so the natural thing is to look for a fellow countryman in whose care they will feel safe. This was the case that Henry was faced with when he arrived in Johannesburg for the first time.

When I first came, I stayed in Johannesburg for a while. Here I met some Mankon people who offered me accommodation and trained me in what they were doing for a living – buying and selling scrap metal for recycling.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Henry, Cape Town; 20/08/2010. A similar statement was made by Peter in a later interview; see Footnote 3.

<sup>5</sup> See Footnote 1 of this chapter.

When Henry eventually moved to Cape Town, he sought residence near his cousin, and rented from a fellow Mankon man who has bought a property. It is interesting to note that the properties owned by Mankon migrants are almost entirely rented out to fellow Mankon. In contrast, when a Mankon youth arrived in Cape Town, he was taken in by a Nigerian and a Congolese (DRC) and was offered accommodation for a month. At the end of the month, he was asked to join them as a drug pusher to pay his share of the rent after the initial month of grace. In desperation, he phoned some Mankon people and begged for help because he did not want to become a drug pusher. Almost immediately, Peter<sup>6</sup> organized shared accommodation for him and he moved out. And Peter offered to pay his share of the rent for the first three months to give him time to organize an income for himself. In accordance with Henry's statement above, this migrant would have been lured into becoming a drug pusher had he not requested the help of the Mankon community as he was easy prey for his benefactors who took advantage of his newness to initiate him into the business by offering him free accommodation for the first month. While networks often have value, in some cases there are ulterior motives for forging them.

All the interviewees attest to having passed through a hawking stage during the early days after their arrival. While some found the job demeaning and would rather have gone back home, they were encouraged to stay on and others simply moved with the flow. It is interesting to note that before the social mobility of those who have decent jobs as well as those still aspiring to social mobility, the one common denominator linking them is pitching (hawking). Successful migrants stand out as those to be emulated by subsequent migrants, and they do indeed often provide advice to the latter.

Much as there is chain migration among kin relations, we equally have serial migration within these communities (Banerjee 1984). Serial migration refers to the assistance given by migrants to prospective migrants who have no blood or marriage ties with them. It is partly motivated by the visits of return migrants and the development projects they organize in the home village. This is facilitated by migration syndicates that assist prospective migrants with visa procedures and escort migrants to the airport. Most Pinyin and Mankon migrants who come to South Africa without the assistance of a relation based in South Africa have used one of these networks. In this regard, family members seek help and pre-migration information from them. For instance, Edmund and Alex travelled to South Africa without any prior contacts and their knowledge was limited to the high number of Pinyin based there. They contacted a co-villager who runs one such syndicate, provided him with the necessary documents and fees and some months later were informed of their travel date. On arrival in South Africa they

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with Peter, Cape Town; 01/03/2011.

realized that most of their friends who had disappeared from home had relocated there so settling in was therefore not a problem for them. Similarly, Penn and his father were motivated by the success of their neighbours. The father was confident that sending Penn to South Africa would bring him financial relief as he had just retired (in 2008). Based on the information he had been given, he used most of his savings to send his son to South Africa in the hope that he would continue chain migration in the family. This shows the intricate interconnection of networks, how they operate across space and time, and what makes them happen as much the information and new technologies that transnational and translocal communities have appropriated. Equally the new age of unbounded virtual and corporeal mobility churns out information from the networks of their kin in Cape Town.

### Kinship relations and social networks

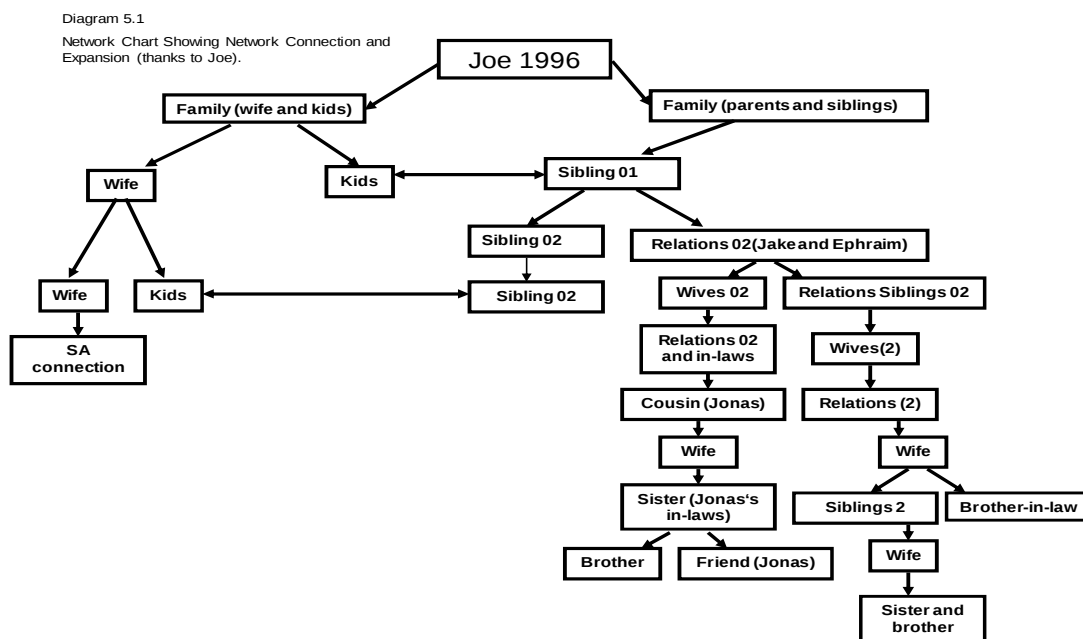
As already mentioned, contemporary migration is embedded in the double presence between home and the host country, as well as with other migrants. Kinship relations and networks between migrants and family back in the home country are either transnational virtual ties or are face-to-face when migrants visit their home village once in a while. As noted by Massey (1992), ‘network as a “place” is constructed out of a particular locus’. This suggests that migrants travel with the same social and emotional values to their newfound community irrespective of ‘place’, but that they are now bound together by a sense of the imagined community they have left behind and strive to replicate the community in their present locus. Kinship relations and networks and the large number of Pinyin migrants can be traced back to the first Pinyin migrant who went to South Africa in 1996. The network chart below shows a network of transnational kinship relationship. Since his arrival in 1996, Joe has brought in his immediate nuclear family (his wife and three sons) and has also brought in four siblings and some close friends and has provided information for others who may follow. In addition, he has assisted newcomers with settling in.

By kinship, we mean blood relations or relatives by marriage and the individual nuclear family, or close relations marked by community ties. This kinship network is also informed by the Pinyin adage that ‘when a Pinyin man discovers a fertile ground he paves the way for many to follow’.<sup>7</sup> Earlier migrants became not only the communication outpost for those who remained behind but also created a bridge for others to follow. In this regard, kinship relations are seen more as a continuum than as a disjointed movement of individuals. This leads to chain

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<sup>7</sup> Conversation with Papa Gabriel, Pinyin; 21/05/2010.

Diagram 5.1 Chart showing network connections and expansion (thanks to Joe)



migration, something MacDonald & MacDonald (1964) defined as ‘that movement in which prospective migrants learn of opportunities, are provided with transportation, and have initial accommodation and employment arranged by means of primary social relationships with previous migrants’ (cited in Choldin 1973: 164-165). There is ample evidence from the literature on kinship relationship as well as empirical data from this study to substantiate the fact that these ties are the most important and well preserved. They are sought after in pre-migration, migration and post-migration periods, and are the most tapped from (Prelipceanu 2008; Choldin 1973; Pelican *et al.* 2008; Fleischer 2006). Relationships with kin and the home village are anchored in the notion of transculturalism and transnationalism (Levitt & Glick Schiller 2004; Vertovec 2002). Although migrants want to have a foothold in the host country, they equally want to maintain a network with family and kith back home. In the same light, these relationships are the primary ones that migrants have grown into and relating to them is manifesting internalized practices.

Communication back home and networking often intensify when a sibling is about to leave for South Africa and in the days immediately after his/her arrival. A case in point is that of Edwin and his younger sister Adele (who got married in Cape Town). She was instrumental in his coming to South Africa and settling in Johannesburg. But, like Henry, he was disappointed with the lifestyle of his host coupled with the constant police harassments. He phoned his sister from Johan-

nesburg to inform her of the situation and was prepared to go back home than to sell stolen computers if this was the only chance open to him. She immediately made arrangements for him to move to Cape Town and after two weeks with her, she advised him to move to Parow where most of the hawkers live. Here, she had made contacts to arrange a mentor for him (Chapter 6). It is worth mentioning that all these plans were done behind his back.

Adele's spontaneous reaction (paying for a ticket for him to fly to Cape Town the next day) and her ability to draw assistance from the ethnic enclave networks show that kinship networks still remain the fundamental bonding ties. Mike, like other migrants, is seeking to bring in all of his siblings (he has already brought in his wife and two brothers, and plans to bring a further two as well) and has even outlined how they will eventually assist their mother with setting up a business that will provide an income for her and limit her dependence on her children. Thanks to the Pinyin networks he has in Cape Town, he has been able to secure a peer interest-free loan and admission to university for his spouse. Mike, like most migrants, juggles constantly within his wide range of social networks both at home and in the host country. Importantly, he has laid the foundation for subsequent family members to move there and this will greatly reduce the financial and psychological costs of migration by providing information on employment and material assistance and accommodation. It will also offer a supportive relationship during the adjustment period, as well as reducing the costs and strain on Mike of providing for so many people in the home country (see Banerjee 1983).

#### *Frosty kin networks*

Network relationships with kin require a lot of trust. Not all members in the family can be sufficiently trusted with the migrants' affairs back home. Information abounds about how kin have plundered migrants' resources at home and in the host country. Assisting siblings to join migrants in the host country is often considered a way of easing the financial burden on the first migrants back home. This, in some cases, turns out to be a burden. In extreme cases, as proven by empirical data, instances of sibling rivalry and feuds are not uncommon and this invariably threatens kinship ties back home. In other instances, the spill-over extends to the wife's parents-in-law. For instance, Terence single-handedly sponsored the migration of his younger brother from Bamenda to Cape Town and provided accommodation and financial assistance for him to start pitching. The expectation was that, after settling in, his brother would contribute to his rent and food. However, the latter turned a blind eye to these and never discussed his finances with his brother. And each time his parents or sister called from home, he would run outside to answer the call, away from any possible eavesdropping. His attitude soon became untenable, leading Terence to conclude that he was being

ill-advised by his sister at home. Terence reported the matter to his father and threatened to kick him out of his house. The father called the brother and told him to calm the tension. A few months later, he moved out of the house. During this period, Terence's spouse, Joyce, was also making arrangements for her nephew to travel to Cape Town. In the midst of this feud, Joyce's nephew arrived and the news did not go down well with her mother-in-law who thought Joyce asked her spouse (Terence) to bring in her nephew so he could spend money on her family as well. The result was antagonism between Joyce and her parents-in-law and her brother-in-law and for a while communication between them ceased.

Another case in point is Mike. Prior to his departure for South Africa, he agreed with his father to assist his stepbrother and to have him join him once he had settled. When the opportunity came, he chose his real brother over his stepbrother. This immediately led to tensions between the co-wives with the stepmother accusing Mike's mother of having instructed him not to take her son. The stepbrothers immediately pooled their resources and sent their brother to Cape Town as well. Once in Cape Town, Mike opened a shop and had his brother manage it while he went to school. The brother let the shop become run down and left him with huge debts. Consequently, Mike fired him, then dropped out of school to work to pay off the debts he had incurred to start the business. The ramifications were felt back home and his mother tried to restore peace between them. He later decided to assist his sister by sending FCFA 300,000 (approx. € 500) so she could register for the police's entrance exam and as money for bribes. The money was appropriated by her spouse and this made Mike vow never to send money to her again. While the tendency for most studies is to show the linearity of kinship networks as encapsulating, facilitating, homogenous and compact, there is more to networks than meets the eye. They can also be impeding and generate simmering rivalries.

For those who have regular documents and can travel home, there is often excitement about seeing family and friends after long years of absence. This is mutual and the first weeks are spent performing rituals such as visiting the graves of deceased relatives and seeing relations. This was the case with Jonas<sup>8</sup> who maintains that for the first two weeks of his visit to the village, the euphoria and excitement about his homecoming superseded financial demands but from the third week when all was quiet, people began coming to him with their problems and in the fourth week he became edgy and was overwhelmed by the demands being made on him. He switched off his phone and went to live with his sister in Nso, Kumbo Division, after which he went to Douala to be with a friend for the last two days prior to his departure. Migrants are becoming increasingly weary of the insatiable demands of relations and have devised coping mechanisms to deal with

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Jonas, Cape Town; 13/08/2011.

them, as can be seen in Jonas's actions. Although they have a strong desire to go home and be connected with the family physically, this urge soon changes to eagerness to go back to South Africa, as if distance will mitigate the demands. Their lives are constantly being lived in the in-between. Nonetheless, frosty relationships are at times packed with emotional distress as the line between frosty and good relationships and emotions seems blurry and impacts on both of the parties concerned.

## Networking through marriage

Marriage patterns amongst the Pinyin and Mankon show a preference for women from the home village and there is extensive networking involved in this. Often, these networks go beyond kin structures and can at times involve the whole neighbourhood when it comes to searching for a bride. The new communication technologies, especially the mobile phone, have given communities extensive networking over space and have redefined the traditional practice of bride search. This is similar to Andersson's (2001) conclusions in his study among the Buhera community in Harare, Zimbabwe. Apart from Emma and Esther (who we will meet below) who are South Africa spouses, the rest are from Pinyin and Mankon.

Marriage for Pinyin men resident in Cape Town usually depends on extensive networking to look for a bride in Pinyin. It begins with him sending word and his photo to family in the village to look for a suitable bride for him. They in turn consult their network to see whether there is a daughter in a close family's social network who could be eligible and sent to South Africa. In the absence of anyone within the family's social network, the search is extended to the quarter and beyond. When someone is found, her picture is sent to the prospective husband in Cape Town who in turn finds out about her from his friends. If he accepts her, he sends off money so the formal negotiations can begin and the bride price is paid. The prospective husband is represented by his father or brother throughout this process. This has come to be known in Pinyin circles as a 'picture marriage'. Doris in Cape Town and from Pinyin originally is one such woman. According to her, 'it was an arranged marriage over the Internet and (following) several phone calls. I barely knew him, and we had only met in passing prior to his departure for South Africa.'<sup>9</sup> She talked of how her father made several calls to different people in Cape Town and Sweden to find out more about this prospective husband before entrusting his daughter to him. She adds that on the actual day of payment of the bride price, it was her father-in-law who stood in for her husband and it was to him that she gave the cup of palm wine after drinking: '*I know na pa ya, na for ee I be drink mimbo give cup*'.<sup>10</sup> While the arrangements are going

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Doris, Cape Town; 24/07/2011.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Doris, Cape Town; 31/07/2011.

on in the village, the groom has also appointed a member of the family or a friend to assist the prospective wife with making her passport and sending it to him either by post or with someone going to South Africa to commence visa procedures that will allow her to join him. According to Jones, this was the fashion in Cape Town, for a man to ‘import a wife from home’ because it was a moment of pride for the groom to be proceeding into manhood.

On the day of her arrival, members of the husband’s quarter converge on the airport to welcome the bride, with the groom looking very distinguished in his suit and sometimes with a bouquet of flowers too. But equally, it is a moment of pride for whoever gives the bride a ride in his car and the men scramble for this honour. And there is a reception later in the evening to formally welcome her.

The situation is no different for Mankon migrants but some would rather go home to get married and travel with their new wife, as Paul and Peter did.

*Photo 5.1* Arrival of Pinyin members at the airport to welcome the wife of a member (the husband has a hat on)



*Photo 5.2* Arrival of the wife



*Photo 5.3* Husband and wife together



*Photo 5.4* Reception at the home of a Pinyin elder



By contrast, only two informants in the Netherlands succeeded in having their wives join them, a process that took over two years. In Cape Town it takes a maximum of two months for the tuyau to be completed. However, not every wife is ready to be 'imported'. Nixon was not lucky and, after having gone through the process of bringing his wife over, she decided to return home because the situation in Cape Town did not match her Utopian expectations of 'bush'.

## Gender social and kinship network relations

The literature on kinship networks has been too male-oriented, i.e. 'gender blind' (Gidengil & O'Neil 2006: 2), with little regard for gender balance. Whereas some studies, especially in the US, have shown that women tend to have more extensive general networks than men (Smith 1976; Choldin 1973), the same cannot be said of this study (see also Hagan 1998). Amongst the mobile community, female social networks are limited, with women having fewer networks than men to offer help and support. Women are often dependent on their family relations and the fact that most are married makes it difficult for them to navigate as easily as the men, a trend that is also raised by Hagan (1998) in her study of the Maya community that settled in Houston. Gendered social networks, especially in the economic domain, interact to produce outcomes that are more advantageous for men than for women. Women's contacts tend to be localized, often within the family and in the case of the Pinyin women, these are amongst each other, while men's ties more often extend beyond the association to a multitude of occupational and associational settings.

It may be difficult for women to establish their own networks outside Pinyin and Mankon circles because migration among women is primarily for spousal reunion and joining their spouses years after they first moved to Cape Town means that they are absorbed into the networks that their husband has already established. This shifts a woman's preoccupation from creating her own networks to studying her environment and engaging in business or studies. In addition, women's abilities to create new social networks faster is impaired by cultural norms whereby they are expected to relate more to their husbands' networks and family relations in the host country. Their networks are usually previously formed networks and their agency to create networks of their own is limited. Most have opted to adopt the ties that have been put in place for them by their spouses, as was the case for Judith and Jane from Mankon. They joined their spouses in Cape Town after many years and, rather than create new social networks, they chose to adopt those of their spouses, thus attesting to the flexibility and permeability of social and kinship networks.

In the same vein, Esther and Emma are South Africans married to Pinyin and Mankon men respectively. While both women have maintained kinship ties with

their individual families, their social network relations have been largely reduced to those of the Pinyin and Mankon communities as well as the friends of their spouses. This could be partially explained by the fact that both Pinyin and Mankon, like most African societies (Adepoju 1994: 5), are still conservative patriarchal societies where women are expected to blend into their new surroundings either by volition or following the dictates of cultural practices. Emma's husband explains that it is the norm for woman to feel part of her new family because it is the man who pays the bride price (*lobola*) and so the relationship should not be reversed: the woman has to follow the man. True to this, Emma's husband Charles turned down swapping his Cameroon passport for a South African one because it would mean giving up his Cameroonian nationality. However this is not to say that they are unable to set up their own networks and new contacts are eventually created that help them settle in. Conversely, as Lowndes (2006: 224) notes with regard to women's social and kinship network, women are more likely than men to see relatives and speak on the phone with them. In this respect, she argues that women and men tend to have different social-capital profiles, with women's social capital espoused in 'neighbourhood-specific networks of informal sociability'. Acknowledging her findings, I could add that sociability is not limited to specific networks but instead spans home and the host country because of their mobility. While they seek to forge new social relationships (or none at all) beyond those already created by their spouses, they equally maintain strong kinship ties with their immediate families in the home village and to a lesser extent with their in-laws. This is well explained by Russell (1999: 219) who holds that 'the very building blocks of social networks are gendered' because 'women's continued responsibility for caring and domestic work tends to restrict the range of social activity they are involved in, but it does provide an opportunity to build up supportive social networks in the community'. The networks of Pinyin and Mankon women in Cape Town depend on the associational structures of the PIFAM and its sub-associations more than the men do and still cautiously keep to themselves. PIFAM women have made unsuccessful attempts to set up a women's group but some have gone beyond this to pursue networks within the church and those with children back home intensify kinship relationship, as Joyce has done (Chapter 9).

Some, like Bianca, consults a doctor in Cape Town on behalf of her mother to buy prescription drugs that she sends to the village. In the same vein, Jane's mother consulted her gynaecologist in Cameroon on behalf of her daughter during the latter's pregnancy and communicated information to her (Chapter 9). The kinship networks of the women, married or single, that I spoke to are almost entirely limited to their maternal and spousal relations. Even back in Pinyin and

Mankon, those who call their children abroad or beep them are usually the mothers.

Female migration has not changed the relationships women enjoy in their families. Instead, ICTs (and especially the mobile phone) are used to continuously maintain family networks and an awareness of what is happening in each other's lives. Equally, maintaining such networks is embedded in the cultural practices that see women primarily as care givers. This care is intensifying thanks to mobility and ICTs.

### Negotiating *ngunda*: Social networks in asylum/refugee circles in Cape Town

Recent migration trends among Mankon and Pinyin migrants in South Africa are characterized by migrants entering the country as legal migrants and subsequently changing their status to that of asylum seeker. This is commonly referred to by migrants in South Africa as *ngunda*, or *adoro* by those in the Netherlands. Studies of the social networks of asylum seekers and how they have navigated and negotiated the process of seeking asylum are still relatively sparse (Koser 1997). The focus has been on the various processes of migration: from the decision-making, choice of country of destination and adaptation into the host society (Hagan 1998, 2003; Boyd 1989; Banarjee 1983), overlooking the fact that aspects of asylum seeking are part of the first step towards migration. Asylum seekers and refugees have often been viewed with contempt in their host countries, especially in South Africa. And this has recently led to a wave of xenophobic attacks against migrants and prompted debates on xenophobia (Segatti & Landau 2011; Vale 2002). This has not dissuaded Pinyin and Mankon migrants from emigrating to South Africa and the migration process of subsequent migrants to South Africa is often sponsored by settled family relations who facilitate the migrant's change of status from that of a regular migrant to an asylum seeker/refugee. It assumes that serious consideration has been given to this asylum route as a way forward and as a prerequisite to migration. Enough networking is galvanized and stories made up prior to the arrival of the migrant so that s/he can rehearse the story and then deliver it convincingly to the officer at the asylum centre. This is in contrast with Turner's (1995) view that 'organised state violence and torture as a means of destroying trust, and provoking community breakdown; compounds the processes of asylum seeking'. Instead, refugees and asylum seekers are not simply passive recipients of care. Asylum seeking is just a step to achieving the targets migrants have mapped out for themselves: it is a game of strategic interests. Migrants actively network for appropriate help on how to secure extended refugee permits to allow them either to complete their studies and move on to employment or to continue the migration pattern. Weak

ties are particularly relevant here as migrants network with lawyers and workers from the Department of Refugee in the Ministry of Home Affairs to get the maximum extension (two years) or a temporary residence permit. These weak ties are dormant but reactivated for such purposes or when migrants are arrested and/or face imminent deportation.

In this respect, empirical data on the significance of social networking among asylum seekers corroborates with that of Crisp (1999) and Duke (1996) who maintain that social networks are of paramount importance to migrants as they enable the goal of self-determination to be achieved. Acknowledging Williams's (2006: 867) perception of refugees and migrants as 'tactical actors', I would add that migrants and refugees are equally strategic and shrewd in the way in which they go about seeking asylum. While seeking asylum is a means to an end, migrants also exploit loopholes in the system to access vital information and social benefits. The relative ease with which asylum is granted confirms claims from migrants that South Africa is yet to put in place adequate structures/policies to harness and rein in the number of migrants heading to South Africa.

Migrants have learnt the social game pertaining to the various social fields and how to strategically plan and map out their asylum case. I make the case that migrants' personal and associational networking are of vital importance and inform their daily interaction in asylum seeking, which transforms their status from irregular migrants to refugees and later to that of someone with exceptional skills upon the completion of their studies so they can find a job. Although I am looking at asylum networks within the Pinyin and Mankon communities, rather than grouping them together as a homogenous group, I treat them as individual cases, given that asylum seeking is negotiated by individuals. Inasmuch as the process is launched by family relations or other networks, each migrant has to activate the network relation to a specific end (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). Although the community may assist in linking a migrant to a network, for the networking process to work it depends entirely on the individual and how well s/he is able to tell a convincing story or to pay enough kickback to the agent working with the refugee officer. It is important to mention here that, except for those with South African identity cards or permanent residence, almost all Pinyin and Mankon migrants have opted for asylum, including those with study permits. This is because migrants have come to realize that asylum permits allow one to pay lower tuition fees (as locals) in universities and it qualifies them for medical treatment in local hospitals at minimal cost.

Applying for and being awarded refugee status in Cape Town is relatively easy compared to in Johannesburg, as was reported by those who first lived in Johannesburg before relocating to Cape Town. Yet it is still a herculean task to obtain it in Cape Town given that migrants have to camp at the refugee centre

overnight or go as early as 4:00 to secure a good position in the queue. The process of applying for asylum or extending one's refugee permit could take the whole day for some, days for others or just a few hours for yet others. It all depends on how willing migrants are to follow the '*tuyau* line' (Chapter 4) as there is a chain of connection that has been put in place to ease the process for the latter group. I accompanied some informants to the refugee centre when it was time for them to extend their permits to see for myself the reported daily experiences at the centre.

Photo 5.5 Migrants at the asylum centre seeking an extension to their refugee permit



This is an observational account of one informant that resonates with the rest of the community. Chris's permit had expired a month before he went to request an extension. His first dilemma was how to convince the officer that he was 'sick' and consequently had been unable to come for its renewal at the stipulated time. Chris contacted a fellow Pinyin who put him in touch with someone who could give him a fake medical certificate to show he was 'truly sick'. With this document, he proceeded to the immigration centre intending to fast track the process. While there, he phoned an agent who wasted no time in meeting him at the centre and the agent then phoned the officer. A few minutes later, the officer came out to see the agent and check Chris and any other migrant following this *tuyau*. Back in his office, the agent sent him an SMS with the name(s) of the person(s) he had. In the interim, the security guard was notified and was ordered to open the gate and let in the next group, so he slipped in with those who were waiting with the agent. It is such networking that I refer to as a corporate net-

work, given that their relationship is more economic and instantaneous. Once inside with their documents, extension is automatic between six months and two years depending on how much the migrant is willing to pay. About an hour later, Chris was called in, interviewed and his asylum permit was extended for nine months. Unlike most migrants who had been queuing at the centre from the early hours of the morning and still did not have any chance of extending their permits or starting their asylum case, Chris was able to buy an extension within hours of arriving at the centre, thanks to the connections he has. Underpinning his ability to network smoothly is the use of communication technology. During this time, he made more than five calls, all geared towards renewing his permit. This, it would appear, confirms what Smith (1976: 21) opined: 'it is not what you know – it is who you know' that matters.

By contrast, Tabufor from Mankon chose to use the religious network he created within the church where he worships to secure a residence permit. Religious networks like other networks play a significant role in assisting migrants to settle in the host country and also providing a family for them there. This is also a source of networking between the mobile communities in the Netherlands and their counterparts in Cape Town, although those in the Netherlands do not use theirs as a means of achieving refugee status. Nonetheless, religious networks help migrants overcome difficulties such as a death in the family, act as an intermediary in family conflicts among migrants in the host country and assist migrants in obtaining an extended temporary resident permit in Cape Town. Levitt (2006) has shown the significance of religious networks in the lives of migrants, how they help them to make a place for themselves in this case in Massachusetts and, at the same time, to belong to the home community by linking up with the religious community they left behind in the home country. However, a focus on religious networks limits transnational links between home and the host country.

This section hopes to fill this gap by looking at internal religious networks that are sourced by migrants in relation to asylum seeking and/or a temporary residence permit. It also shows how religious networks impact on the migrant's wellbeing and extends to relationships back home. Tabufor, for instance, worships at a Protestant church in his neighbourhood and has joined the choir there. He is also a handyman as he does carpentry, building and painting so whenever the church appeals for someone to assist in these fields he volunteers. Hearing about his status, a choir member advised him to talk to the pastor and request a letter stating that he is a volunteer with the church. He did as advised, presented the letter at the Department of Refugee and was given a two-year temporary residence permit. Similarly, each time Delphine has to go for an extension of her refugee permit, she fasts and prays with her pastor, and they also pray together on the phone in the middle of the night. When I met her on the eve of her visit to

this department, she was at her business reading Bible passages that had been recommended to her by the pastor. According to Delphine, this has been her way of extending her permit as she is not ready to use a *tuyau* each time she goes for an extension and it has always worked for her. In this regard, asylum seekers have strategically formed and cultivated networks that attend to their specific interests and that can help them achieve their goals as asylum seekers and refugees and the benefits that accrue from this status (Baker 1990). While communication technology plays an important role in networking, face-to-face meetings are preferred when meeting asylum agents, while the phone plays a role in making possible the 'meetingness' (Urry 2003).

## Conclusion

Advances in new technologies are redefining the way migrants are linking up with each other and with family and friends, and also how networks are forged and maintained. While face-to-face networking is still preferred, virtual networking is incontestably the norm. As a result of the new mobile culture, mobile communities have developed an octopus-like ability to spread their tentacles and create multiple networks. Whilst some are more significant than others, weak ties have the tendency to help them achieve their goals. These weak ties include the lawyers who assist migrants to fast-track the legalization of a 'convenient life partner' and bail them out of police custody. The weak ties also extend to the migration syndicate/industry and the corporate network (Home Affairs workers and agents) that assist in the renewal of refugee permits. Networking with weak ties is not permanent and links are constantly redefined, hence shifting. The purpose of weak ties is to act as a bridge, with their ability to shift constantly because these ties serve a particular purpose and if it is not met, alternative ties are sought. However it is important to note that weak ties connect better than strong ties. Such ties fuel migration and refugee processes as they depend on shortcuts that would have taken a strong tie much longer to accomplish. By the same token, earlier migrants have come to be the communication outpost, or 'gatekeepers' Williams (2006), for migrants and prospective migrants, handing out information that is of importance in either the subsequent migration of those in the home country or information that will assist newly arrived migrants to settle in. Equally, they provide information to navigate the contours of asylum seeking. The availability of communication technologies and the information that circulates leads to the formation of a network society. It is as a result of access to information and communication technology that the network society is able to constantly redefine itself 'transcending the historical limits of networks as forms of social organization and interaction' (Castells 2004: 6).

Kinship networks provide migrants with the possibility of double engagement as well as someone they can entrust their affairs to. These are usually friends but could be trusted family members. The multiplicities of networks have been described by van Hear (1998) as 'migratory cultural capital' that migrants leverage support from. But they also provide vital information about navigating the contours of asylum seeking. These networks are highly practical and lead to the formation of ethnic enclaves.

Much as the purpose of networks is to build bridges, they are not as cohesive as would appear to be the case. Given that they function in various social fields, they exclude and include, and in the process may lead to fragmented relationships.

Female migration has not changed the relationships women enjoy in their families. Rather, ICTs, especially the mobile phone, are being used to continuously maintain family networks. Although away from home, female networks and kinship relationships have followed traditional patterns and societal norms that see women primarily as care givers, and the care intensifies as a result of mobility. ICTs thus become the tool through which care is provided.

In summary, this chapter did not limit itself to cataloguing the different networks and how they are formed but went beyond a narration of network formation to show how they are intricately connected and their dynamic nature, as well as the simmering tensions that can lead to fragmented relationships.