



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

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>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/22525>

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

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/22525> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Henrietta Mambo Nyamnjoh

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

Issue Date: 2013-11-28

‘Going to the field’: Pitching and migrants’ economic activities

Introduction

Chris’s story

I sell pirated DVDs made by me and it is thanks to the Internet that I can do all of this. I have Internet at home on a USB, but I use it late at night when the rates are low. I often go to the cyber because it costs R3 an hour, where I download movies and their labels onto my USB key, and nobody sees what I am doing. Back at home, (as you can see, I have two computers and printers), I format the labels so that they will fit on the DVD, and save them onto the computers and I am ready for printing the movies. I print about 300 movies at night, so that by morning retailers will pass by and buy for their pitching sites. Others place orders and I print for them. During the day I take those left over to Parow to hustle a bit. I know what I am doing is illegal but I have no option because I have come here to make money. But what I am doing is nothing compared to the big companies who make all the monies, ‘*we di lick na oil for back bottle*’¹ (we are simply gathering the crumbs).

Chris has two phones with two service providers (MTN and Vodacom). While I was there, his phones rang constantly with customers calling to find out about particular movies, to place orders for movies or to see whether he was at home so they could drop round to collect movies. Chris’s business reflects those of his generation who arrived in Cape Town at the time of ICTs and their affordability. They are in contrast with the rudimentary businesses carried out by earlier immigrants, such as Jake, CJ and Joe that entailed a lot of physical mobility and can be traced back to when they were still in Cameroon.

Chris’s story heralds the role of ICTs in redefining contemporary migrants’ businesses, unlike those of their parents and earlier migrants that were characterized by long-distance mobility, trade and head porters. Chris’s business is thriving because of the networks that he can muster and he is known to produce better-quality movies than others in the business. And he is willing to accept

¹ Interview, Cape Town; 08/07/2012.

payment on credit, with his clients selling his products and then paying him afterwards. He has been able to circumvent the law and economic regulations on pirated DVDs. For Chris, like a host of other pitchermen, their trade activities are not in themselves marginal but the activities are carried out within the margins of the law. Accordingly, pirating movies is simply a form of business to Chris and there is nothing wrong with it. But he is aware of its illegality in the face of the law.

Following the way migrants view their form of business, I will leave out these dual categories on the dominant narratives of formal/informal and legal/illegal. Chris is very cautious about who he opens the door to. One has to phone from outside or use the local greetings (if it is a fellow Pinyin) of ‘*he-Ÿěh*’ before the door will be opened.² The phone serves as a security guard and migrants have become adept at evading the law. He has invested in computers, printers and empty DVDs, and makes about 2000 movies a week. The mobile phone and the computer are providing him with economic opportunities (de Bruijn *et al.* 2009).

Drawing from the above excerpts, this chapter focuses on migrants’ economic activities, particularly pitching and other forms of income-generating activities. It will show how, with the rapid development of information technology, migrants are now able to do business differently; and have increased opportunities and improved and reduced mobility in some cases, with the mobile phone doing the mobility aspect for them. Pitching, in other words, is hawking but this is the terminology employed by those involved in it so we will adopt it in this study. It involves buying imitation designer items (sunglasses, football jerseys and belts) and cheap Chinese goods from China Town (a mall) and Somali shops, which they then resell in busy commercial areas and in neighbourhoods far from China Town. They have an extensive network thanks to ICTs, especially the mobile phone that connects them to a multiplicity of networks that play various roles towards achieving their economic goal and independence. This chapter questions how the introduction of ICTs has changed patterns of mobility and trade. To what extent do ICTs, mobility and networks propel the economic activities of the mobile community? What is the impact of ICTs in regulating profits? And what are the social dynamics that underpin the production of the informal economy? While this chapter focuses on the experiences of various entrepreneurs, it also discusses such themes as entrepreneurship, global products, networking and the implication of ICTs in the informal sector in the flow of goods and services, and the subsequent formation of status and hierarchization that emerges in the process due to the wealth accumulated.

² Such greetings opened the door for me in The Hague after two failed attempts to meet Pinyin informants.

Photo 6.1 Chris at work, pirating DVDs



Photo 6.2 DVDs on sale at Parow flea market



Informal economy

The reason for being involved in the informal economy for most migrants is above all to have an income-generating activity that will allow them to be financially independent and avoid subordinate positions. They also want to work on their own terms and be responsible for the income that accrues from it. By informal economy, I refer here to self-employed economic activities carried out by migrants that are unmeasured/measured or unrecorded/recorded, operating without formal licensing or outside regulatory control (see also Ilhaine & Sherry 2008: 246; Spring & McDade 1998: 10-11) on the one hand, and those that have been allocated recorded stalls or run formal businesses on the other. Pitching here is used synonymously with hawking but is the preferred term adopted by the migrants involved. These terms can be used interchangeably. Pitching to the 'mobiles' is not a survivalist trade but a means of wealth accumulation. For instance, after Peter finished his studies in Cape Town, he sought employment with a company, less for the income than to gain experience that he could use to operate his own business later, while those who are salaried workers enter the job market as people with 'exceptional skills' and they receive better remuneration and benefits. Central to understanding this chapter is communication, networking, especially the use of weak and personal ties, and the ability to strategize, be opportunistic and connect supply and demand (Portes *et al.* 2002). In this regard, the 'argument of embeddedness' (Granovetter 1985; Sheller 2004) addresses the role of social networks in economic coordination. And underlying this embeddedness is the question of trust and information, given that communicational technologies enable new kinds of mobile publics; one that is 'unimagined and unpredictable' (Sheller 2004: 41) but is also that of a mobile hawker and buyer.

These mobile communities attribute their economic activities to luck and the extensive networks they have been able to build. Much as the community seeks

to maintain networks, it is a network that continually shifts to include or exclude others depending on what is at stake. In this connection, weak ties are of great significance as they act as a bridge due to their ability to connect several people to the same bridge, and they connect better than strong ties. The dominant narrative (the literature) on the informal economy tends to categorize such activities into formal/informal and legal/illegal, which are farfetched concepts for the community. To them, going to the field is seen as a battlefield where one must tread with care and each day brings its own struggle to outmanoeuvre the other, and to evade the law. The field to them is a place where all the strategizing and scheming of their economic activities is played out. Pitching is a game in which one's earnings depend on how well one plays the game, with the pitchermen doing whatever it takes to be smart. As a result of their mobility, it is difficult for the state to implement order.

The literature on the informal economy is vast (Hart 1973; Thomas 1992; Portes *et al.* 1991; Grosh & Somolekae 1996), while some authors have focused on the idea of economic dualism and marginality (Juma *et al.* 1993). And they consider the informal economy as a 'problem' sector with low productivity, seeing it as a drag on economic growth. Does this assessment reflect the informal economy? Cornia *et al.* (1992) and Hart (1973) see the potentials in this sector in terms of job provision and bringing unaffordable/cheap goods and services to the masses. To Chileshe (1992), the informal economy serves as a training ground for entrepreneurial skills development and management. MacGaffey (1987: 23, 1998) opts for the term 'second economy' to refer to the informal economy. But we differ in that she posits her study not only within the exigencies of the economy but also looks at the patrimonial state's indifference in regulating business, while I focus more on the dynamics of the informal economy, and the formation of status and hierarchization that emerges in the process. In this respect, I attempt to find out what the scale and extensiveness, organization and significance for status formation are. With any semblance of wealth accumulation comes the formation of status and hierarchy informed by success (Chapter 7). Status and hierarchy formation also echo the traditional tendencies in hierarchies in the businesses that migrants engage in, with owning shops and stalls at the top and pitching at the bottom. However, pitching is considered as a rite of passage for almost all male Pinyin migrants before moving on to stalls or owning shops. And this generates a different kind of status that is less focused on the formation of an elite through class, power and wealth accumulation than on new class and status formations informed by how wealth and profits from the vagary of businesses are used to improve the lives of relations (MacGaffey 1987: 14). This is because of the notion of 'wealth in people', wherein, the gains made have to be shared among the family (although this notion is shifting). Others invest in the acquisi-

tion of village titles through investing heavily in village development projects (Guyer 2004). Albeit and as noted by Portes (1983 cited in MacGaffey 1987: 23), 'the historical process of the ups and downs of class struggles unifies the phenomenon of "informal economy" in both advanced and peripheral economies'. This economy, I contend, thrives because migrants buy cheap imitation designer goods from China that are supposedly prohibited in Cape Town and sell them at a higher price. Such profits have been a means of capital accumulation for most migrants and this can lead to rivalry. The hallmark of the success of these migrants is their ability to contribute to the various *njangis* that are part of these communities.

Focusing on cross-border traders, street traders and those involved in small, medium and microenterprises (SMMEs) in South Africa, Peberdy & Rogerson (2000: 21-22) show that African migrants and immigrants are connected to strong formal and informal transnational networks of trade, entrepreneurship and migration, contrary to the xenophobic notion of 'stealing jobs', while they also have access to capital. The rise of informal trade, according to Holness *et al.* (1999), is due to the government's liberal and tolerant approach towards street trading. In spite of this liberalization, sporadic checks of contraband goods (especially pirated DVDs) are common.

Three basic tenets have been used in an attempt to understand the informal economy. These include dualist, structuralist and legalistic views. The dualists view the informal economy as being significantly distinctive from the formal sector, involving the marginal poor and providing income or a safety net for the poor (ILO 1972). They maintain that the informal sector exists (or persists) because economic growth or industrial development has failed to absorb those who work in the informal sector. While this approach is primarily concerned with the employment rate of the nation state, it fails to answer the question about those with a lack of human capital, given that employment is prioritized. The educated come first before moving down the scale to the less well-educated and the uneducated. The approach also fails to understand the global effects of an increasing labour force with diminishing employment opportunities. And given the benefits in the informal economy, some people have found a niche for themselves and would rarely choose to move into the formal economy. What this suggests is that there is bound to be unemployment and these groups of persons (the unemployed) work their way into the informal economy. However, most informants involved in the informal economy are less keen to seek employment.

For their part, the structuralists see the informal economy as a subordinate to the formal economy. However much this may be the case, we should not lose sight of the fact that there are those who have found income-generating opportunities in the informal economy and are unwilling to move into the formal econo-

my. They are given tax breaks as an incentive to stay in the informal economy forever. They maintain that the formal sector is more preoccupied in its vested interests and thus minimizes costs by reducing labour (Castells & Portes 1991). Lastly, the legalists view the informal sector as a rational response by micro-entrepreneurs to over-regulation by government bureaucracies (de Soto 1990). They argue that those who run businesses informally do so to reduce their costs and increase their wealth. This partly accounts for the involvement in the informal economy but does not satisfactorily explain why most migrants start in this sector before moving into the formal sector where they stay, sometimes permanently. This is true for Pinyin and Mankon migrants. The informal economy provides migrants with easy entry into SMMEs and access to finances. While some may prefer this to the formal economy because of bureaucratic speed breaks by governments and/or have found a niche in an income-generating activity, others simply do not have the resources to start on a larger scale like the Pinyin and Mankon migrants. Alternatively, the informal economy may have developed as a result of government restructuring policies that tend to acknowledge the informal sector and make provision for them as a way of easing unemployment (Holness *et al.* 1999). For instance, a lot of concessions have been given to the informal economic sector in South Africa to ease the rising unemployment rate. Although these approaches do not wholly explain the informal economy, the focus in this chapter is on the sections that shed light on the way it is perceived.

These groups of 'mobiles' are aware of the ways of operating in the informal sector, especially those who operate from stalls in areas designated by the municipality where most navigate between formal/informal and legal/illegal. Those in formal trade often employ people to front for them, thus oscillating between the formal and the informal, while those in the informal navigate between the informal and the illegal. However, they do not see their activities as illegal unless they have been caught by law enforcement officers. Illegality here includes the sale of pirated DVDs and fake designer items. Even those with stalls are involved in selling DVDs. This makes the line between formal/informal and legal/illegal rather blurred.

Encounters

Information gathered on this chapter yields to the call of multi-sited research by Marcus (1995) and was obtained through semi-structured interviews, participant observation, life histories as well as following pitchers in their different fields in Epping, Bellville and Mitchelsplein or sitting with them at their stalls and restaurants in Parow, Maitland and Mitchelsplein on repeated visits. Often I participated by selling and sitting in for traders when they went to buy additional stock. At such moments a life-history toolkit comes in handy. Some of their stories corrob-

orated those of relations in the home country and the mobile lives they lived in the course of business. Ben, for instance, grew with his grandfather who was specialized in buying and selling goats, travelling to Wum, Nkambe and Mesaje to buy and selling in Bamenda and the West Region. Similarly when Ben first arrived in South Africa, he spent a few years in Johannesburg where he pitched before moving to Cape Town and continued to pitch and to study. Although he had a salaried job, he still supplemented it with income from trade and did TV and radio repairs. A longitudinal study helped me to focus on the different locations (Pinyin/Mankon, Cape Town and the Netherlands) and I explored not only their interconnections but their differences too. In this respect, participant observation and informal conversations were important as they focused on the functioning of their trading activities, how negotiations and multiple networks were carried out amongst migrants and how they went about their daily pitching. Following David around during his pitching activities, I saw how it worked. It was a particularly slow day and he had not made any reasonable sales so he decided to go by car to meet some of his clients at the fruit market and the filling station to supply them with goods on credit and collect money owed to him. They all admitted they had made a bumper profit during the World Cup. He lured them with free sunglasses for anyone who would take goods worth R 250 or more. The timing of this is significant as it was getting close to the end of the month and David knew it was only a matter of days and he would get his money back. And the strategy of giving away sunglasses worth R 25 paid off as he was able to move goods worth over R 1000. His actions and way of relating to clients was strategic, confirming the fact that the informal economy thrives on strategies and strategizing because 'strategies are the ongoing result of the interaction between the disposition of the habitus and the constraints and possibilities which are the reality of any given social field' (Jenkins 1992: 83). A field here, to add to the notion of Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004), would refer to 'a field of struggles, in which agents strategies are concerned with the preservation or improvement of their positions with respect to the defining capital of the field' (*Ibid.*: 85).

Collecting life histories was an integral part of the research method. This gave insight into migrants' itineraries and business dealings to ascertain the extent to which their present activities are informed by the past and their family history of mobility. For instance, Nixon and Joyce, from the accounts they gave, were involved in informal business back home for a long time so once in Cape Town it was logical for them to continue in a sector they had already mastered. In the sections below, I detail the various (trading) activities, networking and lifestyle that form part of the migrants' being with regard to the informal economy but first we will take a closer look at the gender demographics of the traders.

The role of women in the informal economy

In Pinyin and Mankon mobile communities, men tend to be engaged in pitching while the women operate stalls and are generally sedentary in their business activities.

With a few exceptions, Pinyin women in these communities study and manage their stalls, while their Mankon counterparts assist in the family business (usually a food shop) or run their own businesses (salons or restaurants). Those who have completed their studies may seek employment as sales assistants in supermarkets while continuing with their studies for a higher degree on a part-time basis. The activities in this sector are engendered in terms of the business activities engaged in, decision-making and their degree of networking. All but three Pinyin women are unmarried, while those who have stalls run their business with their spouses. The implication of this is that the major decision-making does not solely rest on the women but, nonetheless, they play an important role as their knowledge of supply and demand is vital in keeping the business afloat. It is this knowledge that spouses use to replenish stock or buy what is in demand. As a result of their sedentary business, the women's networks are more inward-looking as opposed to those of the men who have a wider network circle and maybe involved in multiple businesses. Not all the men are pitchers as some own stalls and shops and they employ saleswomen to work for them so they can maintain their mobility.

By the same token, some of the men who have well-paid jobs have focused on the education of their spouses as the way forward rather than engaging in petty trade. Joyce and Bianca were actively engaged in business back home and mobility was an integral part of the business as it entailed going to weekly village markets to buy foodstuffs to sell in the city.

There is also the cultural/ethnic enterprise business that caters for migrants who want to acquire and consume cultural goods from their home country. Similar to the study by Landolt *et al.* (1999: 296) that was carried out in an El Salvadoran migrant community in Los Angeles, ethnic enterprises are either small formal or informal retail shops that import foodstuffs from Cameroon and (mobile) restaurants that cook exclusively Cameroonian meals. These retail shops, (mobile) restaurants and pitching tend to replicate life back in Cameroon, with little attention to style.

Pitching: An overview of economic activities in Cape Town

Pinyin and Mankon migrants are involved in a variety of business activities that they have either learnt after arriving in South Africa or they continue in the same business activities they were engaged in back home. This is especially the case with Mankon migrants. As noted by Hansen (2004) in her study of the informal

economy in Lusaka, access to and control over public space is often contested by traders and is at the centre of ensuing conflicts. Such conflicts and contestations are not exclusive to Lusaka, as it is evident in Cape Town. Given the categorization of their business according to the two ethnic groups, the Pinyin are largely involved in (business) pitching and/or have stalls and shops, while Mankon migrants have continued with the trade they used to do back home such as motor mechanics, welding and building. They have equally grouped themselves in distinct neighbourhoods to allow an easy flow of information and interaction (Chapter 5).

Although some Pinyin men operate from allocated spaces provided by the municipal council, others (pitchermen) do not and it is these groups of persons and pitchermen that are constantly evicted from selling points. As pitchermen, their lives are often precarious, given that they are at times faced with the seizure of their goods and are vulnerable to arrests when raids are made. Pitching (hawking) involves trading from one neighbourhood to another with goods stuffed in a huge backpack. Some have carved out a niche for themselves at busy business centres where they pack their cars with goods and are ready to take off if there is any danger of their goods being seized by the police.

Photo 6.3
Pitcher-man† ready to go
to the field



Photo 6.4
A pitcher-man in the
field



Photo 6.5
The car as a mobile shop



With neighbourhoods linked by rail, it is possible for traders to cover about three a day but this involves a lot of trekking around. Pinyin migrants usually move in groups, especially when they are going to areas considered unsafe or if they are hawking in a busy business centre like Epping in Cape Town. Migrants liken pitching to a game of cat-and-mouse with law enforcement officers. But it is also a game of strategy and strategizing, positioning oneself in the face of stiff competition from peers. Simplifying Bourdieu's game theory, Calhoun (2003: 14-20) explains the phenomenon of migrants by comparing social life to a game by serious, deeply committed athletes who have to reconcile the challenge of

playing by the rules while at the same time being creative and innovative enough to win or at least to avoid defeat. ‘Every field of social participation demand(s) for those who enter it a kind of preconscious adherence to its way of working’ (*Ibid.*: 20) and ‘participation in social games is not merely a conscious choice. It is something we do prereflectively’ (*Ibid.*: 19). The Pinyins are adept at this and other ethnic groups have still to match their shrewdness. Newly arrived migrants are initiated into pitching by relations or by ethnic enclave relationships, and are forewarned of raids and seizures. An older migrant is assigned to show the newly arrived the market and teach them the intricacies of business. If the new arrival has relations and friends, they contribute money to give him/her a reasonable starting capital. Edwin attests to the help he was given by his sister and fellow Pinyin pitchermen who helped him with finances, buying items and teaching him how to attract clients:

We went to Retreat, that was my first day. We got off the train and sat down and unzipped the bag, removed all the wallets, belts, everything and prepared them and he gave me some. He told me that that was his own side of the road and this was mine. I said what am I going to be doing? He said you’ll just be moving and showing these things to customers that you are selling belts. You’re selling car chargers. I say what I must say (sic), he said tell them ... their name is ‘boss’ when you see any of them you say ‘boss’. I say so I should call them boss he said yes. He said when you see them you say boss I’ve got car chargers for sale. I’ve got phone batteries for sale; I’ve got wallets and belts. I said then how would I know the prices. He told me that if you sell one of these items you will have 75% profit so from R 30 – R 70. It depends on the customer. He told me we bought this belt for R 10, chargers R 7, so you can sell the belt for R 30 – R 70. I said what about a wallet? He said the same R 30 – R 70. There are some of the customers if you even ask them R 120 they will be prepared to pay. He also told me that if they ask you, is it genuine leather, you should say yes because some of them don’t even know the difference between genuine leather and non-genuine leather. So on my first day, I sold one belt for R70 and I sold a charger for R 30. I sold a wallet for R 30 and that was R 130. The next day again we went, I came back with R 80 ... By the weekend, I had realized R 850.³

Such assistance and education from Pinyin migrants is often given only to one of their own, and this excludes non-members from their circles. Accounts by Pinyin migrants attest to this and if these migrants insist on going with the non-Pinyin hawkers, they are taken to places where they could be easily apprehended by the police. Hence with no knowledge and rules of the game, they back out after a couple of seizures. While most have come to South Africa as economic migrants, others came as students and double as students and pitchermen, as pitching is the main source of income-generating activity for them to pay for their tuition and accommodation. Through this active disengagement, the agencies of the traders come to the fore either as individual agency or collective agency (Lindell 2010), which emphasizes salient contestation and the circumventing

³ Interview with Edwin, Cape Town: 27/03/2011.

and undermining of the authority of the state through collective support and initiatives (Scot 1985).

Even though some persons seem to have branched out into the formal economy, the tendency is still one of a seesaw. Such oscillation as MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga (2000), MacGaffey (1987, 1998), Thomas (1992) and Spring & McDade (1998) have shown involves criminal activities. These traits are also visible among these groups and the nature of their business makes it hard to discern between the formal and informal or the legal and illegal because of the constant seesawing. Yet another group of skilled migrants, particularly those who have acquired education and formal employment are equally involved in business and buying property and renting it out to Pinyin folk. This partly explains the ethnic concentration of these communities in one locality. The choice of residence of the mobile community in Cape Town is not accidental. As shown in Chapter 5, they have consciously chosen to live in a concentrated area, with Pinyin mostly found in Parow and Bellville, and Mankon in Maitland. The formation of ethnic enclaves in specific localities helps circulate information faster and they can offer each other immediate assistance. In the process of fending for themselves and expanding their businesses, they are reproducing class status amongst themselves because the need to achieve status and success is the motivating factor in their entrepreneurial expression.

Conversely, the Mankon community is still conservative in trade and most have continued with the various trade activities they were engaged in back home. Before settling into these activities, they did some pitching to raise funds to set up their businesses. Their early contact with the colonizers and later the Nigerian administrators gave the Mankon advantages over their Pinyin counterparts who were mainly traders or cattle herders. Some were able to go to school and/or learn their current trade while others have entered into new fields, such as collecting and selling recycled items to factories. The Mankon are not as geographically disadvantaged as the Pinyin and, through its association, support newly arrived members with starting capital. At the time of this study, only three Mankon migrants were involved in pitching and understandably so, because one has a Pinyin wife who introduced him to her network of Pinyin pitchermen, and he in turn brought in the two others. One of them had gone back home long ago as his goal had been to make money, go home and relaunch his ailing business.

The situation is quite different in the two communities in the Netherlands where some have sought semi-skilled and unskilled jobs in firms. This could also be attributed to their relationship that is marked by a high degree of individualism. Intimate relationships are mostly formed on the basis of kin relations or friendship. However one of them is involved in informal business and ships goods from the Netherlands to Cameroon for a friend to sell. The difficulty of

establishing an informal business in the Netherlands has led some to criminal activities, with one of the Pinyin migrants resorting to extortion and money laundering. He was in fact serving a jail term between September and December 2010 when I was conducting research in the Netherlands.

The question then is what accounts for such distinctive business trends and why they manifest such diametrically opposed features. Why are the Pinyin predisposed to venturing into uncharted territories with respect to business activities while those from Mankon are not? And how do the mobile phone and ICTs affect these differences of scale?

Most migrants attest to the fact that they grew up seeing parents and family members making the rounds from one bush market to another so taking up pitching in Cape Town is not new, and going to Grahamstown for a week to sell things at the Art Festival (Indaba) as well as Sunday flea markets by the beach is seen as normal. Their adeptness at pitching stems from their Grassfields experience of bush trade. Current migrants have internalized the mental and physical agility required and have taken it to another level thanks to the new technologies that allow them to extend their network beyond the bush trade, just as in the past. The mobile phone is thus inextricably linked to the informal economy given the vagaries of the role it plays, either impacting positively by expanding networking possibilities and actual trade, or negatively when friends, due to rivalry, keep information to themselves in a bid to have a monopoly over certain goods. It should be noted that increased activities in pitching and street vending area are results of the South African government's tolerant and liberal approach to street vending (Holness *et al.* 1999: 285-86).

One correlation between the Cape Town pitchermen and their parents who practised long-distant trade is the contestation of borders and their lack of regard for institutions. Chris's remark that he is merely gathering the crumbs with regard to pirating DVDs in a way is contesting institutional and state hegemony and control that seeks to frustrate his attempts to accumulate wealth. Similarly, administrative records in Bamenda Province specifying the reason for the Pinyin trader being jailed state failure to pay tax on imported goods, while in Cape Town arrests are frequent for either selling stolen or contraband goods.

The availability of mobile technologies such as wireless/smart phones with Internet connectivity, computers and the Internet has dramatically helped to boost business and lessen mobility, while enhancing connectivity and efficiency (Ilahi-ane & Sherry 2008), and made information about market supply and demand faster. The contrast between earlier migrants (Joe, CJ & Jake) and the likes of Chris reflects the differences.

Whilst Chris & Jake's principal source of income is through the informal economy, what sets them apart is the introduction of communication technolo-

gies that determine the nature of Chris' business, and the absence of it in Jake's case. The latter's could be traced from a historical perspective characterized by physical mobility given communication technology was still in its infancy and not widely available to all. Jake sums up his business as follows:

I started business way back in my secondary school days through to university. In the holidays I would buy potatoes in bags and take them to Douala to sell at Marché Sandaga. I was constantly moving between the village and Douala because back then there were no phones to communicate back home for them to send me more bags of potatoes, so I had to go back and get some more and spices and return to Douala. Even when I moved to Cape Town, it was the logical thing to do ... pitching, but I did a lot of things in my first two years before settling on pitching full time ... working for Joe for seven months, working in a security company for about five months, doing car parking for a couple of months and then finishing the last part of my period before my studies doing pitching then while studying. I would go pitch in the afternoon and on Saturdays and sometimes on Sundays. Also, when someone was travelling to Cameroon, I would buy materials for men's trousers and suits and send it to my brother in Mutengene - Cameroon (who is now here); he would sell and send back the money. You see... this was a kind of foundation phase for me.⁴

Drawing from informants, one major characteristics of the informal economy is its diversity in activities and situations (Castells & Portes 1989).

The profits made from pitching are quite significant to migrants and families back home but migrants rarely tell the family the nature of the business they are engaged in. Often, the family knows they are in business, but what kind of business? While some have confided to particular individuals in the family, others have lied about what they do, such as Edmund who informs the family that he is a secretary in a company given that the family is aware of his limited computer knowledge. The informal economy is, however, a source of capital accumulation for these migrants.

By and large, migrants start from humble beginnings and move up into the formal economy and, as a result of financial success, gain status. For instance, Joe from Pinyin had humble beginnings but has moved from the informal economy into the formal economy, or may navigate between the formal and informal due to its blurry nature, and has employed workers who front for him. His business is transnational as he initiated his first visit to China and subsequently ordered goods from there. However, life at the start was a herculean task.

Life was very difficult when I got here, at the refugee camp I had to save up to ... start business ... it took me three weeks to save R40 and I bought my first carton of chips which took me three days to sell. From there I understood the market and within two months I was able to buy a variety of flavours. By the third month, I went to train as a security guard. Upon completion I worked for four months and was able to bring my wife just from selling chips and what I had saved from my salary. I had also employed a sissy (sales lady) to stay put

⁴ Interview, Cape Town; 11/08/2010.

while I hawk during the day and I was a guard at night. From there I moved to the parade ground where I had four stands.⁵

Accordingly, Joe left Cameroon as a 'result of frustration with the system'. As a university graduate and having completed his training as a lawyer, he was still unable to practice and get a job, and his business ran aground. Migration was the obvious thing for him as he puts it. However, being the first Pinyin migrant in Cape Town and a resident at the refugee centre meant that he had to be self-reliant. Joe's entry into the field of snack hawking was not without its repercussions. Going into this field without any prior knowledge meant that it took longer to sell his first box of chips than it would normally have had he mastered the rules of this trade. But it was a learning process and his initiation into this institution. He quickly learnt that he needed a variety in order to make meaningful sales.

Mobility and social networking in the informal economy

Historical/archival sources and studies on mobility and trade (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000) show how traders make enormous use of networks as well as kinship ties at every step of their trade. In Cape Town, ethnic and social relationships facilitate this process for newly arrived migrants. The latter rely on established migrants to help them through the informal economy trade, as seen through Edwin. Some of these relationships date from childhood, with others are recently forged due to ethnic enclaves, while others are due to interacting with migrant population or migrant cohorts (those who travelled together or came in about the same period often form strong bonds and share a room). Over and above some of these ties/networks are re-established kin and family relationship. Nonetheless, success is heavily dependent on how much social capital a person has accumulated, given one's level of social capital is informed by the level of accumulated social network (Bourdieu 1986; see also Chapter 5). In this respect and because of the context in which migrants find themselves, I will also focus on how their social network is a springboard to understanding the way migrants' businesses are premised on forging new relationships and maintaining existing ones. In line with Smith's (2001: 141) argument, these relationships are 'transgressive and affiliative, freely formed and yet socially produced', he maintains that it is by looking at networks in this light that we will understand how migrants organize their activities be they economic, or socio-cultural as this will give an insight into how they relate with others. These personal ties and social and ethnic networks operate on the unwritten ethics of the reciprocal exchange of favours/gifts that obliges receivers of favours to return them although they do not

⁵ Interview with Joe, Cape Town: 24/07/2011.

necessarily need to be returned exactly (MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 108-9). As explained by Mitchell (1969: 20), 'actors and observer in any social situation are able to understand the behaviour of those involved because it is accorded a meaning in terms of the norms, beliefs and values which they associate with this behaviour'.

Such institutional ethics lay the basis for norms and codes of conduct that impact on relationships. Part of this ethos is the shared solidarity that ethnic enclaves enjoy and, as we have seen, it is paramount to economic success (see also MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). Ben's case sheds light on this. When he arrived in Cape Town in 2002, he was robbed and a fellow Pinyin offered him accommodation and some starting capital. As he was beginning to settle in, his mother passed away and, devastated, he decided to go back home. The community rallied around him and talked him out of going permanently. They contributed money and gave him to send home to assist in the funeral. These gestures stayed with Ben forever and when he got married five years later, he asked his wife to prepare a meal so they could go and formally recognize the assistance he was given by the friend who helped him when he was robbed. Equally, he put his energies into seeing that the PIFAM became a great association under his leadership. Such measures constitute a framework for people to be continuously indebted to each other, and to an extent form the basis of social cohesion. Such long-term indebtedness and obligation has, according to Lomnitz (1971: 94), to be 'kept in a savings account of services to be reciprocated'. Personal ties are thus hinged on the expectations of reciprocity and trust, and are defined by the institutional context in which these relationships are embedded. In addition, amongst the pitchermen and those operating stalls, when a member buys an item that is in high demand they phone those in their close circle to pass on the information.

With regard to trade transactions amongst the Pinyin and the Mankon migrants, personal, ethnic and kinship ties are by far the most tapped into. Although these networks are to a large extent the oil that lubricates the circulation of such mobile trade, and trade in general, they are however constantly shifting and redefining themselves and 'mobilizing networks according to circumstances, as the trade changes direction to respond to new market opportunities' (Macgaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 16). Such ties are not limited *per se* to kinship but stretch across various frontiers such as religion, ethnicity and friendship in the diaspora community. The Pinyin community are prone to such constellations of shifting networks because of the tendency to flock to a new business each time that one of them ventures into a business and it proves successful, before thinking it through. At one point, it was to own a shop at Mitchelsplein, and most of them rushed there and opened shops. Some succeeded but others, like Mike,

failed dismally. Next was the taxi business and there were a lot of taxis on the road, and it soon became clear that it is a difficult sector to work in as some of them had their vehicles stolen and drivers went for weeks without paying in the agreed amount. Currently the new trend is either to have a tuck shop or a furniture shop in the township, and again a host of them have branched into this area. These networks thus flourish according to the needs at hand, prompting Smith (2007: 28) to conclude that they are dynamic in relation to migrants' 'priorities, obligation and change of interest' (see also de Weerd 2002). It is critical to understand that these networks are seamed and kept alive by the new communication technologies that migrants have appropriated to mitigate the challenges of mobility, thus enhancing virtual mobility over physical mobility. The case of Chris and his cousin Nelson will elucidate migrants' networks, mobility and the use of communications technology.

Photo 6.6 Phoning to inform fellow traders about the arrival of grey knitted caps at Parow



Nelson, until his brief relocation to Cape Town, was resident in Johannesburg where he owns a small computer shop. In order to focus on his education, he moved to Cape Town. Prior to his arrival, Chris phoned him and asked if he could bring printers and a CPU that duplicates 7 DVDs at a go in order to save time. Once in Cape Town, he moved in with Chris and both of them embarked on pirating. While Chris is out distributing and selling, Nelson is at home pirating more. Nelson soon realized that the business was negatively im-

pacting on his studies, he phoned a maternal cousin to find out whether he could move in with him. This he did and allowed Chris to carry on with the business.⁶

Nelson's story has touched on chain migration, kinship relationships and ethnic enclaves that together form the catalyst of migrants' insertion into the community. His story provides a case study that reflects on how migrants negotiate and navigate into the informal economy. By the same token, it shows how the enterprise is sustained and maintained through networks and the dependency on others. Similarly, Bianca and Rachael run small shops with tropical food (Cameroonian) respectively. They both independently buy their stuff from Johannesburg without necessarily travelling there. For Bianca, her cousin is resident in Johannesburg and was offered accommodation by her when arriving in South Africa before relocating to Cape Town. Hence she has a contact that is useful to her business. They communicate frequently. She phones with a list of orders and pays the money into the cousin's bank account via ATM banking, and the latter will buy the things and put them on the train or bus depending on the quantity, and phones her with details about collecting the items. In the same vein, Rachael, with no family network in Johannesburg, made a maiden trip there and all subsequent supplies have been coordinated via mobile phone and emails. On other occasions, her spouse makes the trip to Johannesburg. To Rachael, her phone is 'the one thing that she cannot be without'. All her financial transactions with regard to payments are done via the cell phone or Internet banking. They are equally called from Johannesburg with information about the arrival of goods. Besides, amongst the pitchermen and those operating stalls, when a member buys an item that is in high demand s/he phones others to pass on the information.

While others do well in pitching, some have sought an alternative business, like Ron†⁷ who ran a small grocery shop (see Chapter 7). Although his business was very community oriented as he was in close touch with the community in the area, it was also one of those that was more than meets the eye. He explained how he ran his business:

I have a shop next to the road; I meet so many people here a day ... I've been here for years and I've been surviving mainly because of this shop and having some capital that you can buy certain goods and sell; someone could just come and is selling a phone, I'll buy it for say R 300 and sell it for R 600 and I get another R 300 on it, or somebody can come with a laptop. I've been buying things like laptops also, that's how I've been surviving day in, day out. I've sat here, and some children come (sic) here with dollars, they don't know what money is that, they tell me, 'hey brother do you know this money'. I say yeah I know we use it in my country, they say we need something for this money, and what can you give us for this mon-

⁶ I followed their activities for three successive days: 8-10/07/2011, and other days when I visited Parow. It was Chris that I accompanied to the refugee centre on 08//7/2011. See Chapter 3.

⁷ Ron died in a ghastly accident in Cape Town in September 2011, ten weeks after I interviewed him.

ey? Then me too I look at it and say OK this money I can give you like R 2000, but I went to the bank to have R 15,000 for that dollar (sic). So that's how one has been surviving.⁸

Ron's shop, we could ascertain, was a façade of an informal economy. This sheds light on similar businesses run by his peers that oscillate between the legal and the illegal, but the line between them is blurred. His networks extended beyond ethnic enclaves to that of the host society. And it is host-society networks that make his business thrive.

The significance of communication with regard to business transactions has been well articulated by Mallard (2004) while hawking in South Africa in the past with all the hurdles involved has also been well documented by Holness *et al.* (1999) and Rogerson (1989, 1990), but they stopped short of showing how a personal network weaves together this form of business; something Mitchel (1969 cited in MacGaffey & Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000: 12) has usefully expounded on. Mitchel sees a personal network as a 'set of linkages which exist simultaneously on the basis of specific interests and persist beyond the duration of a particular transaction' (*Ibid.*: 12). Similarly Castells & Portes (1991: 11) refer to such networks as 'horizontal networks'. Networks as I have shown above resonate with Mitchel and Castells & Portes's descriptions. Underpinning this relationship is one of indebtedness, obligation and mutual dependency that is guided by information flows, one that is linked by solidarity and/or jealousy and in-house fighting. These similarities and differences, however, still manage to keep the group together and may be the fundamentals needed in the smooth running of such an informal business that most operate in Cape Town. Trade networks are individually constructed but not exclusively limited to individuals and are activated to a specific end, although they involve individuals from a common ethnic background.

Much as the availability and affordability of communication technological gadgets have opened business avenues for migrants, it has led to new forms of circumventing hegemony and control of the rules that have increased sales of particular goods. Often, the ability to circumnavigate the law rests on the networks that have been set up in these sales areas. Following Scot's (1985) portrayal of non-violent resistance amongst the peasants and the poor through their use of 'weapons of the weak', we can see how pitchermen are able to resist the long arm of the law. Their resistance is re-enforced by their use of mobile phones that send information faster and alerts others, especially when the law enforcement team has come to raid those selling pirated DVDs. Such extensive reliance on networks is inherently present in the bush trade practised by Pinyin traders during and after the colonial period and shows how bush traders would travel in

⁸ Interview, Cape Town; 12/07/2011, Ron died ten weeks after this interview.

groups using scouts,⁹ and also making use of kinship relations and ethnic enclaves on the journey. Today communication technologies have changed all that the current migrants experience good communication patterns and can alert each other when necessary.

The success of being a pitcherman depends by and large on the hawkers' mobility and their dependence on trains for mobility, which can at times slow down their business. At the start of this research (2010), very few of my informants had cars but all acknowledged the importance of owning one for their business. By August 2011, almost all the pitchermen in Epping had them and they could therefore supply customers with goods immediately, depending on the amount of profit there was to be made. Alternatively, they are able to get scarce goods once they receive word of their availability in the market. As seen in the photo, their cars have become mobile shops and this allows them to store the bulk of their goods while carrying only a few with them in case of police seizures. They still have the bulk of their goods, unlike in the past when they carried items in backpacks that were easily confiscated.

Friedman (1990: 327) argues that 'goods constitute self-hood: and the practice of identity encompasses the practice of consumption' and this study concurs with this statement. While DVDs are generally aimed at the South African community, the migrant population is more interested in Nigerian movies. Imported food and restaurants catering primarily for the Cameroonian public, and West Africans in general, attest to the fact that consumption is cultural in character, as can be seen by the goods and services provided by the Pinyin and Mankon migrants in large part. Having seen the need to import food from home, Paul is now established as an importer of local food from Cameroon. Bianca and Rachael buy in Johannesburg and sell it in Cape Town where they have established networks so they do not need to travel themselves. Others have taken to operating small mobile restaurants. Prisca from Mankon moved from Gabon to Cape Town and continued with the same business she was in in Gabon and Cameroon prior to migrating to Gabon, namely a restaurant; where she prepares Cameroonian dishes. At weekends she serves special meals, such as *eru*, *koki* (black-eyed-bean pudding) and *achu* (the Pinyin and Mankon staple meal made of mashed cocoyam and yellow sauce). When business is slow, she phones her customers to tell them about the menu of the day. Similarly, Patricia from Pinyin is involved in multiple businesses as a seamstress and does most of the sewing for her community. She also operates a weekend restaurant; selling *achu* on Sundays to the Pinyin community in Parow and during the week, people call to make reservations for the weekend.

⁹ File no: cb, 1955. Annual Report Bamenda Division: Customs, (1955: 4).

However, not all the goods and services provided reflect this cultural dimension. Those involved in selling drugs, according to one of my informants, are drawn into it due to their circumstances. He claimed to have become involved as a result of financial hardship and the huge profits involved he is now finding it hard to extricate himself.

In spite of all the diverse businesses, one thing is certain: the ultimate goal in these communities is to be successful and to be seen back home and among their peers as the ‘authentic bush faller’ who has accumulated material wealth and readily shares it with kin and kith as the notion of sharing is very important.

The notion of success and material wealth

While the notion of success is measured in a multitude of ways by migrants, material wealth and accumulation are the most defining forms of success (Rowlands 1988). The entities that define wealth are in themselves meaningless if looked at in isolation, but instead we should view them in relation to society or in relation to other things (Rowlands 2005; Miller 2010). Expanding on this point further, Miller (2010: 53) notes that ‘by learning to interact with a whole slew of different material cultures, an individual grows up assuming the norms that we call culture’. The societal norms that dictate what could be regarded as success are in turn the things that the migrant community live and work for in order to be part of the category of successful migrants. It is from this premise that this section seeks to understand success and its significance in relation to material wealth accumulation. Human capital (knowledge wealth) is often considered in relationship to material wealth and seen as a prerequisite to material wealth given that most of those in Cape Town are engaged in the informal economy as a means of generating income to pay for their studies. Informed by social ranking, success is equally defined by the need for persons to continually demonstrate, cogently so, who they are in relation to others (Weiner 1985), thus the constant quest to accumulate to prove oneself or to spend to prove oneself. By the same token, they inform the system of order intrinsic to the inculcation of habitus (Bourdieu 1977) and, quite often, there is a link between migrants and flashy and huge houses built in the home village.

Successful migrants among both communities in Cape Town are considered to have succeeded in business, own houses in Cape Town and back home and have human capital. The pitchermen are rated according to how much they contribute towards *njangi* and how disciplined they are with respect to being frugal and savings. While success is attributed to having *ifinti* (Rowlands 1992: 128) or the consumption of western goods and technologies (Rowlands 1988), migrants strongly believe their success is the result of blessings from parents prior to departure or from ancestral shrines and tombs by those representing death (Rowlands 1992:

122-123). Parents or successors often smear would-be migrants with camwood and drink from ancestral cups made from cow horns. In the process, the performer invokes the ancestors through incantation to look after his/her child and ensure that whatever s/he sets out to do will meet with success. In conjunction with this, libation and the transmission of breath (the breath of men) to the migrant is known in Mankon as *fogho-njzwi*. Their success is accentuated by hard work and the self-abnegation of worldly pleasures for fear of failure. Mike, for instance, attributes his success to the blessings he received from his father prior to his departure (Pelican *et al.* 2008: 121).

Mike's story

Mike arrived in Cape Town in 2003, and has not been back to Cameroon since, but has regular communication with his family. Prior to his departure for South Africa, his father called him into his bedroom to give him his blessings and advice. Camwood was rubbed into his feet, hands and forehead; all signifying that the road will be opened for him as he sets out into the unknown, whatever he does to earn a living will do well and he will succeed in his studies and in whatever he plans to do. His father added that 'those who have been there have succeeded, you too have to succeed. Know that you are going to the farm and whatever it takes to earn clean money like the others, you have to do as well, and know that the rest of the family is counting on you and do not let us down'. True to this blessing, nine months after arriving in Cape Town he was able to bring his brother as well, and in September 2012 he brought in his spouse and younger brother, and plans to bring in two more siblings before the end of the year. His father's blessings have accompanied him. Upon completion of his undergraduate course in electrical engineering, he got a job and is now pursuing an MA programme as well.¹⁰

Ron† prided himself on having received many blessings from parents and extended family because of his generosity. Until his death, he sent money to his mother every year to buy two boxes of soap, two bags of salt and two gallons of palm oil and distribute it to her maternal and paternal aunts and the spouses of uncles. It is by such small gestures of giving that Ron believed he would be rewarded with success because money is not only regarded as a goal for securing wealth but also as a medium for pursuing a relational life (MacGaffey 2005). Going home in December, he believed would bring him more blessings.

Maybe that year when I come back here (from Cameroon) things will happen just like that because they will give me a lot of blessings. They always say your parents are your God on Earth. So if I go home and spend that New Year with them, the blessing that they will give me when I come back here that year will make it a year of success; things will happen.¹¹

Although Ron prided himself of receiving blessings from home due to his generosity, amongst his people, there was a lot of discord with regard to his form of business (he was a drug pusher) and this constantly provoked negative com-

¹⁰ Interview with Mike, Cape Town: 22/08/2010 and a conversation with his father; Pa Joshua in Pinyin: 10/10/2011.

¹¹ See Footnote 7 of this chapter.

ments from them. And some of them deliberately refused to have his phone number and the only thing they have in common with him is the PIFAM. Similarly, Joe has brought most of his siblings to Cape Town and pays for the education of the others at home. He has houses in Cape Town and recently bought a house back in Cameroon. The duty of looking after his siblings is what he believes his mother would have wanted him to do and he does it for her and she in turn watches over him. If migrants are unsuccessful, it is believed that '*kontri fashion don catch them*' and they are advised by peers to go '*kontri make they wash you*' (go home and perform certain rites to get an ancestral blessing).¹² The case of John in the Netherlands is worth mentioning.

John came to the Netherlands in 1999 to study. When he finished his studies in 2003, he decided to stay on in the hope of getting a job. In May 2013 he had still not managed to find any work at the level he hoped for (MBA). He still earned the minimum wage working in a linen factory. Although he has a Dutch passport, it has not helped him in any way. For 14 years he has not been able to bring any family member into the Netherlands and is barely able to assist the family back home. He was widowed in 2008 and remains single in his late forties. He has not started any development project back home. John acknowledges that the decision to stay on after his studies has cost him a lot and he has not been as successful as his contemporaries. In June 2013 he finally went back home to start anew. In the eyes of his friends he is an example of a failed bushfaller that has ignored repeated calls to go home and perform *kontri fashion*.¹³

However successful or unsuccessful migrants may be, their origins can be traced back the home village. Increasingly, with the notion of bushfaller (Nyamnjoh 2005, 2011; Pelican *et al.* 2008; Alpes 2011), migrants' success is measured by the level of investments and goods (cars and containers with second-hand goods) that they are able to ship home. Building houses and the acquisition of building plots and/or business investments back home are their top priority, as is participating in village development. Joe from Pinyin epitomizes this success and within the PIFAM and back home he is regarded as a member of the elite. Summing up, Alpes (2011: 12) posits that 'bush has become an important site of economic accumulation and socio-economic mobility'. The quest for success, it can be concluded, is a leitmotif of the avaricious desire for accumulation.

Success, however, when limited to the individual is not success enough because it has to be distributed to the wider kin. Thus we could metaphorically view success as the inlet and outlet of a lake where water comes in and is distributed to the various outlets. Being successful is linked to one's ability to share one's wealth with kin.

The importance of such investments is the value attached to them by both the migrants and those back home as it is believed that 'houses and land do not rot'

¹² This is the case of two informants in Cape Town and one in the Netherlands respectively whose peers have suggested that they go home because they are considered to have failed.

¹³ Interview with John, The Hague: 29/10/2010 & 22/11/2010.

and they are seen to be the best way of saving money given low levels of trust in the banking system (Niger-Thomas 1995). But contributing substantial amounts to *njangis* and having this money wired in Cameroon for investment as well as investing in business back home is a benchmark for measuring success in the migrant community in Cape Town. By contrast, success in the Netherlands is not as obvious as in Cape Town given the level of individuality, but it is known by close friends and family.

Success in the home country is equally measured in terms of the investments made by migrants. Papa Muluh proudly showed me around his house that is under construction and is largely being funded by his son in Johannesburg. By contrast, Papa Khan commented that his neighbour's children had built a nice house for their father and bought cows to increase his livestock, while lamenting that his son had severed links with the family. Apart from such concrete material investment, going home on a regular basis is viewed by most as a sign of accomplishment and the ability to navigate between home and host country to bring the spoils of hunting is also seen as a sign of success. Ron† summed it up as follows:

Am going to Cameroon and the first thing I am going to do is to buy a house ... if I succeed in going to Cameroon at the end of the year because I am planning to be in Cameroon by New Year and to celebrate New Year with my parents. Then I will know that's an achievement of a lifetime.¹⁴

Going home is proof of having graduated from being an asylum seeker (*chop adoro* or *ngunda*) to a documented migrant. Those who have gone hunting and failed to come back are referred to as *nyam mu-mba* (has become an animal in the bush) or 'ee don loss for bush' (has severed links with the home country). Such persons are regarded as failures. The bush thus has a dual meaning, as a place one can come back from with hunted game or a place where one gets lost and is difficult to trace. Bushfallers often go for the first option, namely they bring back game.

Olsen (2003: 87) calls on us to 'remember things' because understanding consumption patterns that account for success require that we 'ascribe action, goals and power to many more agent than the human actor' (see also Rowlands 2005). It is by so doing that we, I contend, can understand and appreciate the value attached to certain actions whose end result leads to success. One is to marry a wife from home and bring her to Cape Town, i.e. importing a woman, or spousal reunion. The following SMS substantiates this fact. 'Hi makon members, the wife of Pa Xxxx Xxxx is expected to arrive cpt (airport) Saturday the 27th and will be welcome at Pa Xxxx resident at 6:30pm. Pay ur contribution to the chief wipe (sic), attendance is compulsory'. Amongst the Pinyin community, there was a period when they had a boom of reunions with men bringing in wives from

¹⁴ See Footnote 7 of this chapter.

home. This act of getting married is viewed not only as a coming of age but as the ability to move beyond fending for oneself and the readiness to start a family and be responsible. And this is a great moment of pride and success for a man, as sub-association members and friends converge on the airport to welcome the wife. In this regard, men are unwilling to marry a woman already based in Cape Town because they want to be seen as ‘responsible’, having to prepare her documents to travel, spend money on her ticket and have a welcoming reception in her honour.

The accumulation and consumption of goods, as noted by Rowlands (1995), is essential in establishing the creditworthiness of the entrepreneur¹⁵ amongst his peers especially for those who are documented and legal migrants in Cape Town and are thus eligible for bank loans. Charles prides himself on being a successful migrant and, to back up his claim, he lists the achievements that would be expected of him a successful bushfaller according to societal norms. Charles hails from Mankon, is married to a South African and has children. His eldest daughter is in Cameroon with his mother. He is a mechanic (a panel beater), owns a garage and works with his younger brother and another Mankon migrant who he trained while in Cameroon. He tells his story:

Photo 6.7 Charles’ house in the Mankon village



¹⁵ There are others who seek loans from the credit unions back home and whose guarantor is their savings.

I am happy with what I've got. First, I believe that what I've had in this country, most of those who go to that Japan has (sic) not even achieved up to half of what I've achieved here; only the house that I've built in Cameroon, I have age mates and even my elders who don't have that kind of house in Cameroon. So at the end of the day what I've I done in life? I've built my house, and completely furnished it. Also, I have two houses here financed by the banks. They send messages (SMS) that I can take a loan that I am doing well ... they (the banks) say I am doing well, I am not a debtor, I pay my debts, fulfil all my promises, if not I would not have been able to get properties in this country, and their approval because the first house that I bought was R 410,000. I deposited R 100,000 physical cash (sic). And then I spent R 50,000 to transfer sales and renovate etc. so that time I spent about R 150,000 physical cash (sic). The garage is directly in my name, all documentation carries my name. So I've already had a lot of achievements. If I go somewhere and I want this or that, it'll be given to me. They won't judge.¹⁶

Charles's story illustrates how the acquisition and building of houses has a double meaning. It shows wealth but also a degree of power as houses 'do things on people' (Miller 2010). While they bring status and fame to the owners, they equally open doors for further bank loans.

Successful Pinyin migrants, like Joe, Jake and CJ, are often called upon in meetings to advise members on the need to aspire to grow from humble beginnings (through pitching), given that they were once pitchers too. Jake and CJ started off as pitcher men and now have white-collar jobs. In other words, the lives of the majority are sustained by hopes of this kind and most are ready to involve themselves in petty trade or the informal economy ranging in scale from the most trivial activities to major business deals. In the midst of all this, what sustains migrants' enterprises and economic activities are the new relationships they forge as well as their existing ones, and the role played by ICTs in facilitating communication and diffusing knowledge and vital information. Such relationships are usually used as leverage for economic gain.

This is by no means to suggest that there are no unsuccessful members within these communities. Of course there are and they are subjected to constant bad mouthing and ridicule by other members. They are often considered not to be creditworthy and cannot be given a loan from the *njangi* and, if they are, the criteria are stiffer than for others. And those who migrate and still expect financial assistance from home do not represent the image of a bushfaller. Like John in The Hague, Nsoh, who migrated to South Africa in 2010, has never sent any remittances home and his father was forced to sell a pig to send him money. They are weary of his excuses and would rather he came home. Unable to hide his disappointment, he retorts that '*pekin them di go bush di send money back and do*

¹⁶ Interview, Cape Town: 23/08/2010.

things them for their parents, ma own go na me di send money, dat ye own bush na which kana one” He goes on to say *‘if na so ee go dey make ee come back’*.¹⁷

Unable to find work and having taken to drinking, his brother in Moscow sent him US\$ 1000 to buy a ticket and return home for them to meet and plan another migration exit. Unfortunately, he failed to buy the ticket and did not go home. According to their mother, *‘ee take the money chopam, fool we say ticket dear’*,¹⁸ (he squandered the money and deceived us by saying that the tickets are expensive). Ndoh earns R 500 a week as a cybercafé assistant, can barely eke out a living and is unable to offer any assistance back home. He is ashamed to go back empty-handed.

Within the PIFAM, there are also those who the community has little regard for, as described here. ‘He’s (Jones) a good person. He’s really good, he’s appreciative. He works extremely hard but throws his money away; by having multiple relationship with sissy. And we’ve all spoken to him until we’ve given up. Even the family back home I’m sure would have given up by now.’ The family back home are deeply disappointed in him. And this led his sister to be critical of the photos he sent back home and remark that ‘people are out there toiling and making sense of their lives, all he does is take photos by the beach and send them back home, what time does he have for such work?’¹⁹ This has led some of the elite to distance themselves from him and not have telephone contact with him. A good character is not all that counts in this community. Above all, it is the ability to be frugal and to be seen to be saving a good proportion of one’s money. These are the traits that are equated with a good character.

Commodification of relationship

Many authors have documented the economic, social and kin relationships amongst Cameroonian migrants in the host communities and home countries (Nyamnjoh 2005, 2011; Alpes 2011; Ngwa & Ngwa 2006; Fleischer 2007, 2009; Pelican 2008). This section focuses instead on relationships amongst migrants and host communities in the host country to examine the extent to which they are used as leverage for economic and social gain. We should guard against the overglorification of personal and kinship ties as well as social capital that boosts migrants’ business opportunities. Although we have seen how effective these ties can be for business purposes, it does not negate the fact that they may come with strings attached. Both permanent and temporary relationship with others are nowadays crocheted by the wide availability of modern communication technol-

¹⁷ Interview with Papa Che, Bamenda: 03/01/2011.

¹⁸ Conversation with Jessica (Ndoh’s mother), Mankon; 17/06/2012.

¹⁹ Interview with Jones’s brother-in-law, Buea; 28/06/2010.

ogies that have made it possible for migrants to maintain relationships either at a superficial or a more profound level, i.e. weak and strong ties.

Relations are forged at times according to migrants' needs and momentary gains, as mentioned earlier. But multiple relationships are also forged, sustained and nurtured or deactivated at different periods for economic and social gain. Such commodification does not imply a reduction or a way of cheapening the relationship, as has been pointed out by Comaroff & Comaroff (2009). Instead, according to most migrants, it is the reassurance they want that comes from knowing they have someone to turn to at any given moment or that they have numbers stored in their phones to call if the need arises (Horst & Miller 2006). Nonetheless, some relationships appear to be sustained by monetary values and migrants often view relationships from a vantage point depending on what they stand to gain from them. Usually, it is based on priorities, obligation and a change of interest. This, it would appear, has affected relationships and the way they are used to display wealth could deface the meaning of such a relationship (Nyamnjoh 2011).

To focus on his drug business, Ron† brought in a fellow Pinyin to work at his shop in exchange for him (Ron) contributing to the latter's weekly *njangi*. Money became the interface in their relationship. Bringing in this person to assist in the shop while he was away did not mean they were best friends, but as Ron put it, 'I realized he is unable to contribute his *njangi* and I asked him to assist me in the shop so I could be more mobile and distribute the "stuff" (drugs) to those who call asking for it'.²⁰

Migrants and families in the home country have developed ways of reaching one another and following up on relations in the host country, which has prompted these to be reduced to extractive ones. By having Joyce's children with them in the village, her parents-in-law have used this as a bridge, often calling to ask for financial support for the children. Sometimes the children are put on the phone to inform their parents of their needs to the point that it becomes difficult not to yield to their demands.

Having a relationship with South African women is frowned on because of the perceived notion of their extravagant taste and their reckless consumption, like the Beti people in Cameroon. Some Pinyin and Mankon migrants do, however, marry or enter into contractual relationships with South African women. Whatever their reasons for this, it would appear that economic gain seems to be the motivating factor and also their desire to acquire valid residence documents. For instance, when earlier migrants like CJ learnt that by marrying they would be eligible for permanent residence, a lot of them chose this option, not necessarily

²⁰ Interview with Ron, Cape Town; 12/07/2011.

out of love but as a means of legalizing their position in South Africa. As Jake explained:

... there are people who are married to South African women, perhaps in most cases not out of love but simply because they want to acquire documents and the women are aware of this ... So they put them through hell because your continued existence in South Africa is dependent on them. So there's no level of mutual respect or whatever because they know you are trapped and they put you through all kinds of emotional, physical and financial traumas. I know people who at this stage cannot even qualify for any kind of credit ... But because the women know that you have a right of entitlement, they will go and take credit and in most cases people sign these marriages in community of property and once a woman takes credit of R 100,000 and she cannot pay, you're compelled to because if she cannot pay and she's blacklisted, it directly affects you and you have to pay or you cannot get any credit. So it's really a terrible thing ... And truly I also have friends who have gotten married to South African women legitimately, out of love, and it's working out very well because it seems it's something that women actually pick up that this person got married to me because of this; and they really try to pay you back.²¹

The commodification of relationships is not exclusive to migrants but both migrants and hosts (women in terms of marriage) exploit the relationship for mutual gain. Clovis's case ties in with Jake's story. Clovis lived on a refugee permit in Cape Town for five years until it was revoked and he was issued with a 'you must go' deportation order. In the middle of this, he made frantic calls to seek advice and was linked up with a Cameroonian who lived in the township. Together they arranged for a lady to stand in as a life partner for him. She was paid R 1500, and was given a cell phone. She was also assisted with air time and her groceries will be paid for if necessary. The importance of the cell phone is two-fold: she could reach him whenever the Home Affairs officials conducted random checks to verify whether they were actually cohabiting and he could also reach her to reassure her she had not been forgotten. She could also call for assistance in the event of a major crisis. Thanks to this arrangement, Clovis was given a two-year residence permit. The corollary is that he can focus on his business and even engage in long-term projects as well as the possibility of going home on a visit. Encouraged by the outcome, Clovis and his spouse have agreed to look for another male partner who could sign a similar life-partnership agreement with her.

Joe and Charles from Pinyin and Mankon respectively are legally married to South African women, both of whom have travelled to Cameroon. Charles has chosen for his children to have South African nationality because of the advantages they will have when they enrol at university. But he has rejected it for himself because he feels that, according to African custom, he married his wife and she should be the one to eventually change her nationality.

²¹ Interview with Jake, Cape Town: 11/08/2010.

Although the commodification of relationships has been given another twist with the arrival of new technologies, the same cannot be said for earlier migrants for who, back then, mobile phones, the Internet and cell-phone banking were non-existent. Whilst such relationships were favoured, people were required to move to access services, such as the transfer of money from the home country to the host country. Migrants thus formed a network of monetary transaction syndicates similar to those set up by the Mouride Muslim Brotherhood in New York (Babou 2002) to send money through business persons travelling to and from the home country, or via other means. For example, parents who had to pay fees for their children studying in Cape Town were asked to pay the money to a designated relation in Cameroon by Jake and the equivalent was paid out in Rand, thus avoiding formal banking charges.

By the same token, calls and SMSs from those who run shops and restaurants are geared towards inviting clients to come whenever new stocks of food arrive from home. It is in the owners' interests to have as many telephone numbers as possible in their phones. These numbers are also useful at times of sales and for announcing the arrival of the latest consignments of foodstuffs. Succinct SMS are sent out to customers in such cases and restaurant owner phone customers when business is slow and they can come and collect food on credit. One such message read as follows: 'Dear costumers (sic), this is to inform you that there is green plantain (*unripe*) at cybella African delicacies. 17 essex st maitland (sic). R 35/kg'.²²

Discussion and conclusion

Although most of the literature contends that the informal sector is disadvantaged due to a lack of capital to expand businesses, evidence from this study attests that migrants are supported either by ethnic, kinship and/or personal networks with loans to begin or grow their business. Migrants have found a thriving niche in the informal economy and some have chosen to stay in this area because of the profits that can be made. The dominant narrative on the informal economy is one of duality: formal/informal and legal/illegal. While it is easy in some cases to track the graduation from the informal to the formal economy (Castells & Portes 1989), it is difficult to give precise details about such changes regarding the Cape Town community. Having followed some migrants and been a part of their respective communities, it became apparent that this is not a survivalist business but one that they master in the informal sector where the 'current-account balance' is measured by how much one contributes to one's *njangi*. This is in sharp contrast with the premise put forward by Hart (1973: 86) that favours the formal

²² Message sent on 23/08/2012.

sector over the informal economy in terms of a 'current-account balance of payment' with respect to the Frafras rural-urban migrants in Ghana. While this may be the case for the Frafras, such conceptualization obscures our understanding of the gains that are accrued from the informal economy. Activities seesaw making it difficult to distinguish between the legal and the illegal and to analyze them within the framework of dualism. This is also because even those involved in trade activities consider their actions as a means to material wealth accumulation. Illegality to them is only an issue when they come into contact with the police; otherwise it is business as usual. The issue of duality as such does not fit in the context of these communities because of the blurring of their businesses. This chapter posits migrants as a self-determined group that shrewdly and wittingly circumvent the legal authorities (Nieswand 2011) to further their business activities. In the same vein, it shows the complexities of agency and the determination needed to succeed. Migrants have become astute and adept at games of cat-and-mouse that they play with law enforcement agencies. But also, through these narrations, the theme of 'life as a struggle' crops up as well. Recounting all the challenges that informants go through is more, in my view, to portray them as self-made people rather than as villains. They have 'succeeded' despite all the odds. As Powles (2004: 13) insightfully put it, 'such elaborate emphasis placed on suffering and challenges was not meant to provoke pity but respect, for sacrifice and suffering are morally ennobling for migrants', especially those considered to be successful. Success is partly measured by the migrants' endurance and achievements, but also by the social and cultural things that define this society, such as material wealth accumulation (houses, land) and huge savings from contributing to *njangis*.

From historical analysis of mobility patterns (Chapter 3) and due to their proximity to the Bamileke from the West Region of Cameroon whose entrepreneurial prowess is widely acknowledged²³ (Spring & McDade 1998), it would appear that the Pinyin have acquired some business skills from their Bamileke neighbours.²⁴ The way Pinyin migrants do business in Cape Town seems to be informed by the skills they have inherited and internalized from the past and a long history of mercantile trading. The ethnic clustering of national groups around particular activities, on the one hand, illustrates the essential characteristics of the people from the ethnic group (especially the Pinyin) but, on the other, reflects the 'skills, knowledge base, education, capitalization and awareness of new market opportunities, as well as the transnational networks of these migrant entrepreneurs' (Peberdy & Rogerson 2000: 28-29).

²³ Discussion and interview with Papa Nkeng, Bamenda; 11/01/2011 & 07/10/2011 respectively.

²⁴ The Pinyin people are commonly referred to as the Bamilekes of the North West.

As I set out to show for Pinyin and Mankon migrants, their involvement in the informal economy in Cape Town has to a large extent been informed by historical factors, particularly by those who witnessed or accompanied parents to weekly village markets as well as the stories told by parents. Enhanced by the velocity and efficiency of new communication technologies and no longer shackled by the weight of conservative trade, current migrants are able to better organize their affairs, and mobility has become targeted or they are mobile while sitting in the same spot. The informal economy and all the actors involved are, in a way, a melting pot of 'unauthentic' designer goods as well as a point of convergence for the global and local with marketing insights and discovery. Looking more closely, the informal sector is used to support various levels of activities (Hart 1973), with legality and illegality at variance. Conscious of what is at stake in pitching, migrants strategically position themselves to evade the police at every stage in their daily business activities. But in their social interaction too, they strategically place themselves in a position where they can vie for different forms of capital.

While the informal and formal economy is, by and large, a way for migrants to adapt in the host country, profit heralds their success both at home and in the host country, with most striving to own a house in one place or the other. Houses, the 'elephant of all things', signify wealth and power. Although owning a car is seen to offer increased mobility of transaction, having a car for most hawkers increases the speed with which they can operate and their mobility as they can pick up goods that are in demand and deliver them within a stipulated timeframe. In addition, it ascribes a new status of wealth and social mobility. In line with the societal norms and pressure from peers to be a successful migrant, migrants are guided by hard work and the fear of failure, and want to be counted among those worthy of the name 'successful bushfallers'. This does not presuppose, however, that all migrants are successful. Some have performed dismally and are encouraged to go home for traditional cleansing.

While personal networks and ethnic enclaves play an important role in relation to migrants' success, they are dynamic and graded in the scale of their importance, reachability and availability. But equally, networks are created with respect to the circumstances and changes in the direction of trade in order to maximize opportunities. These networks are interlinked by new communication technologies that facilitate the transmission of information and knowledge about economic activities and, especially the weak ties, play a vital role in linking and informing migrants about the state of the market. As a result of their connections and the network society that has emerged, they are able to contest and evade state control and the rules of trade regulations. Through these networks, they become each other's keeper by alerting others when necessary, for example at times of

raids. By the same token, these networks have been commodified and some relations are maintained because of the benefits to members.

Conversely, this cannot be said of the migrants in the Netherlands who do not have similar opportunities to operate in the informal economy because of the strict rules regarding the setting up of businesses. Those with educational qualifications tend, therefore, to seek formal employment.

Subsistence in the informal economy in South Africa is due to the government's creation of enabling policies that support this sector and allow room for self-employment. The stringent policies in the Netherlands constitute what Foucault described as state power (Faubion 1984). The state is thus able to assume its powers through state bureaucracy that controls what happens within the confines of its border. As such, migrants who cannot find a place in the legal formal/informal economy go underground into the illegal economy. By contrast, the increase of unregulated and informal activities in South Africa could suggest the state is unable to exercise its authority over certain forms of trade. In a bid to exercise control, the South African government has resorted to violent means, such as seizing goods and arrests, as a legitimate means of state control. Nevertheless, the migrant community in Cape Town is able to thrive because of the social embeddedness in which they have recreated a home-away-from-home. Associations in this regard play a vital role in the lives of migrants and have come to be recognized as their 'parents' in the host country, as will be seen in the next chapter.