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

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A mobile community as a fortress: Reinforcing the notion of belonging through ‘life crisis’

Introduction

Chapters 6 and 7 discussed migrants’ economic activities, their associational lives and how these are constructed in spatiality of place. They also considered how migrants seek to maintain their Pinyin and Mankon identities through the ties they maintain within the migrant spaces in the host country and ultimately back home through their re-enactment of cultural and ritual activities to reify their belonging to the home village.

To broaden our understanding of notions of home and belonging, this chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the ritualistic activities that migrants entertain in the host country to reinforce their notions of ‘Pinyin-ness’ and ‘Mankon-ness’. The aim is to demonstrate how rituals are connecting devices, the glue of the mobile communities across borders, as well as how they connect the migrants to the home village. Contemporary African societies are increasingly mobile but this mobility does not prevent migrants from continuously seeking to partake in ritualistic activities related to birth, marriage and death in their host and home countries as the Pinyin and Mankon communities in South Africa and the Netherland do. The variety of rituals that van Gennep (1960) termed as ‘life crisis’ and their performance as ‘rites of passage’ celebrate transitions from one phase in an individual’s or community’s life to the next. Performing these rituals enhances their connectivity and implicitly expresses their sense of belonging and, by the same token, these rituals are a form of verbal expression and a means of attaining a greater sense of identity (Davies 1997). It is this difference in perception that disconnects them from other ethnic enclaves, especially from the host community. In other words, rituals connect people of similar orientation and disconnect

them from others. Amongst the birth, marriage and death rituals that will be looked at in this chapter, the one that disconnects most is death, as the ritual varies within societies and 'outsiders' may find the performances meaningless because strands of meaning change from one culture to another. The funeral rites thus encapsulate and symbolize the society.

This chapter focuses on how mobile communities, although away from home, continue to uphold and participate in ritual practices and ceremonies in the host and home countries simultaneously. It shows how rituals are dynamic and reconfigured as a result of mobility and new communication technologies and looks at the ways in which these new technologies allow rituals to be transformed on the basis of migrants' desire to be involved.

The arrival of ICTs has made participation in these rituals and ceremonies virtual and gives them a fresh impetus because of their existing locus. In this respect, we consider what rituals mean to an ever-mobile community and why migrants seek to indulge in ritualistic or ceremonial performances or transnational/transcultural rituals. How do these rituals impact on social relations and to what extent do they form coherent patterns of internalized culture? What do the actors aim to achieve by participating in these ceremonies? And to what extent do life crises follow a society's cultural norms? How and to what extent do mobility and ICTs inform rituals or celebrations?

Understanding rituals and ceremonies

One way of answering these questions is by an ethnographic reading of the cultural practices that constitute rituals steeped in culture as a transnational habitus, as well as through an in-depth description of the various rituals. This chapter is largely informed by extended observation and participation as well as informal conversations. It equally draws from Faist's notion of 'translated people', where he perceives mobile communities as being 'continually engaged in translating language, cultures, norms, and social and symbolic ties' (Faist 1998: 239; see also van Beek & Blakely 1994: 3). It follows that rituals translate enduring messages, values and sentiments and it is through these translations that transcultural mobile communities 'forge their sense of identity and their community, not out of a loss or mere replication, but as something that is at once new and familiar. As a result of their mobility, there is the possibility of invariance' (Rappaport 1997: 36-37; Mbuy 2012). This is informed by the recognized and accepted pattern, or a '*bricolage* constructed of cultural elements from both the homeland and the receiving nation' (Kivisto 2001: 568). This is the case with birth and marriage rituals/ceremonies but is in contrast to Pleck's (2004) assertion that rituals are likely to vanish among migrants who do not live in an ethnic enclave or neighbourhood. Even though Pinyins and Mankon in the Netherlands do not live in

such ethnic enclaves, they participate in rituals within an enlarged Cameroonian one, while participation in Cape Town is often in ethnic groupings. These rituals are important as they are ordered, with death and burial being the most important and ubiquitous of all the rituals. This is underscored by the fact that rituals that go with death are elaborate and involve the designation of a successor who continues to act as the social glue. Such rituals, for example the enthronement of a successor, declare the future responsibilities of the newly crowned and invest him/her with the authority to assume the intended role. Nevertheless, these various rituals hang together closely and involve personal and social crossings whose meanings are as important to mobile communities today as they were in the past. It is by performing these rituals and ceremonies that actors assume new roles in society. They portray a basic structure of separation, transition and/or incorporation but, over and above this, they define the social reality and offer a window on social order and people's understanding of this order as well as their position within it (Turner 1967).

Reference is made in this chapter to rituals and ceremonies but it is important to make a distinction between these two concepts and the context in which they take place. The distinction is based on that made by Wilson (1957: 9), which will serve as a continuous thread throughout the argument here. Using ritual to mean a religious action, for example an action directed at the secure blessing of some mystical powers, she maintained that, 'the action may be a negative, that is, avoidance or taboo, as well as a positive one. Symbols and concepts are employed in rituals, but are subordinated to practical ends.' Conversely, 'ceremonial is an elaborate conventional form of expression of feeling and is not confined to religious occasions and a ceremony is not enforced by mystical sanctions, only by conventional ones'. As Pickering (1974: 75) concurs, a ceremony is what in the 'actor's eyes is an important occasion'. It thus celebrates the born house or wakes to coincide with those back home as the most plausible thing to do. Shedding more light on this, Wilson (1954: 240) maintains that 'a ritual is often embedded in ceremonial which is not held to be necessary to the efficacy of the ritual but which is felt to be appropriate'. She goes on to ascertain that 'both ritual and ceremonial have a function in rousing and canalizing emotions, but ritual, by relating its symbols to some suppose transcendental reality, affects people more deeply than a ceremony'. What we can take from this is that rituals reveal a society's deepest values and are a gateway to understanding it. Here ritual is equated with religious action and mystical notions, while ceremonial is a more inclusive concept and refers to any 'elaborate conventional form', with no mystical notion attached to it (Goody 1961: 159; Norbeck 1963: 1255). In this regard, ceremonial may be used to refer to those collective actions required by custom and that are performed on occasions of change in the social life. Thus a 'ceremo-

nial consists of a specific sequence of ritual acts performed in public' (Goody 1961: 159). From this perspective, I posit that, other than the death ritual that entails the presence of a corpse (as in the case of the Pinyin migrant who passed away or born house[1] where there is a representative of the family from home), most of the rites carried out in Cape Town and the Netherlands by the Cameroonian communities are more ceremonials than rituals. But by the same token, they are also informed by the nature of the rituals that go with such ceremonial. Let us now turn to the various ritual practices and how they are performed.

Birth

Birth can be viewed as the opposite of death as the two are the twin poles on which life revolves. As pointed out by Sawyerr (1974:78), 'birth is like setting up a plantation with new trees which increases the ecology of the family … Death, on the other hand, disrupts the balance of the plantation as the spirit of the deceased leaves the corpse to join the community of the ancestors in a new world.' While this metaphor is in order, I note that Sawyerr's views are informed by western norms as he omits the births of *abiku* or *obanje* (children of the spirit world who die shortly after birth and come back again). Such births call for rituals to stop the children from returning to their families again. What this suggests is that births of 'normal' children are often a blessing to the family and conversely that of *abiku*/*obanje* are unwelcome, and rituals are thus performed to stop them from returning to the family. Nonetheless, rites associated with marriage and birth (born house) could either be rituals or ceremonies depending on the significance or the objective. Quite often, born house is ceremonial but becomes a ritual in the event that it involves twins or the birth comes after a number of miscarriages and/or stillbirths as rites are performed for the child and the mother. Amongst the mobile community, this could become a ritual when a member of the family is present from home to represent the ancestors and blesses the child. Unlike the rituals surrounding death, born house has become dynamic and taken on other forms of celebration including, for example, baby showers that are celebrated before the birth of a child. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional norms and customs back home as a born house is only celebrated after a baby is born. This celebration is linked to the co-existence of cultures that have invariably influenced each other. I was fortunate to have attended both the baby shower for Jane and the born house. The ceremony shows how mobile communities have adopted other forms of ceremonials (the baby shower) but still keep the traditional form of born house. Migration has resulted in a hybridization of events. This form of ritual is seen to be dynamic and fluid, while it connects migrants to other

[1] Ceremony marking the birth of a child in the Grassfields.

societies, transgressing borders. Belonging can therefore be expressed differently. Not everyone can afford to organize a baby shower as it is characterized by wealth and affluence and, by extension, leads to the formation of hierarchies. While such celebrations call for the showering of baby gifts on the mother-to-be, it is organized more as a social event that involves wining and dining, hence the financial implications.

What marks it a ritual are the utterances and the 'breath of men' (*ndjiẅi*), the art of breathing onto a child that is known as *fogho ndjiẅi-zo* (blessing the child with one's breath and the utterances that are made in the process) amongst the Pinyin and Mankon. This is meant to protect the child and the breath is used to impart into the child the spirit of both the dead and the living, as a form of protection and of committing the child into the care of the ancestors because they are considered as 'living dead'. It could also have a punishing effect, i.e. bad mouthing.

The birth of a child within both communities invites the family to choose a suitable ancestral name for the new-born. Before birth, the family phones home to ask for suitable names for both a boy and a girl or the message is passed on just after the baby's birth. In this connection, a name signifies an event, marks an occasion, is a prophetic insinuation or shows the striking sentiments of the father or the head of the matriarchal or patriarchal lineage by naming the child after a deceased member of the family or the father. If it is a first child, the name is given by the wife's family. Jane's case is worth highlighting.

> She is a young girl who got married in August 2010 and travelled to Cape Town the same month with her husband. In January 2011 she enrolled at the university and in September 2011 she gave birth to a son. Prior to her delivery, her friends organized a baby shower for her in August 2011 that attracted a substantial crowd with gifts for the baby. As part of the ceremony, women who had already experienced childbirth were called upon to advise her on what to expect, and motherhood. In the course of the celebrations, she and her husband were smeared with baby powder but he was immediately sent out afterwards. This is an all-women affair and the men who are invited are received in a separate room and are not allowed to join the women. This is because all the discussion is centred around labour, childbirth and motherhood and balancing this with the duties of a wife. Despite having borrowed this form of ceremony, the women have succeeded in enculturizing it by inviting men, although separating them from the women. Generally it is a women's affair and men are not invited, such as the one I attended in The Hague.
>
> Being her first child and having delivered by caesarean, the parents decided that her mother should travel to Cape Town and assist her for a few months. It was during her stay that Jane and her husband took the opportunity to organize a born house for the baby. This occasion bears the hallmark of both a ritual and a ceremonial: a ritual in the sense that ancestral blessings were adorned on the baby and a ceremonial because it involved the entire Mankon and Pinyin communities since the husband belonged to both associations. It was in the course of the celebrations that the ritual was performed.[2]

[2] Fieldnotes: baby shower and born house for Paul and Jane's baby: Cape Town; 20/08/2011 and 05/11/2011 respectively.

Men have no role in this ceremony and they come merely to socialize. During the ritual of committing the child to the ancestors, the ancestors are called upon to 'watch over a new addition into the kin, while the living are called to direct and help the child to know his/her lineage, and that anyone who looks at the child with "bad eyes" will be dealt with by the ancestors', and the visiting grandmother is called upon to bless the child with her breath (*fogho ndjẅi*), which represents those at home too.[3] The breath as such is not hers but is that of the family and the ancestors that she represents. This subsumes that the breath of men imparted on the child is capable of punishing those with evil intentions towards the child.

Photo 8.1 Jane's mother about to bless the child with her breath, flanked by Jane and her husband in traditional regalia (*ntogho*)

For the born house, Paul and Jane hired a professional photographer and a video camera and there were also people present with mobile phones and digital cameras to immortalize the event. A photo album that covers Jane's mother's stay and that of the born house was given to her to take home. The mother was moved to tears by the way the Mankon and Pinyin communities celebrated the born house, paying attention to the ritual songs (that for the parents of twins come with a plate of salt and palm oil for everyone to take a pinch), especially as Jane is a twin. This is to celebrate and acknowledge the twins in the family and those present. Such attention to detail highlights their identity and belonging. For her mother, these photos will be testament to those at home that although the

[3] See Fieldnote 1.

child-ren have ‘fallen bush’, they are still versed and entrenched in their cultural practices.

Birth in both communities is a rite of passage that calls for celebration but one that also calls on the women to maintain the habits and practices that they have internalized over the years. One such practice is when a woman gives birth and kin and/or friends take turns to visit early in the morning or spend a few days with the young mother to bathe the baby and to teach the mother what to do during the early days of motherhood. As well as being a researcher, I also participated in such practices and helped bath Henry’s baby, and also attended born house and baby-shower ceremonies. When there is a new baby in the community, women close to the mother and her *nkaŋg* (age group) visit regularly but friends too come due to the strong network ties that have developed over the years, as do village Pinyin folk in the case of Pinyin women.

Mankon women’s networks extend to their Nigerian friends who come to assist in bathing the baby. Henry’s wife talked about how her Nigerian friend came each morning to assist in this, even on the day when it was my turn to bathe the baby. It is thanks to the actualization of such internalized practices that young mothers away from home can learn how to look after their baby. Through such practices, members are able to express a shared identity distinct from that of the host community. By contrast, when Charles’s South African wife gave birth while her mother-in law was visiting from Cameroon, the latter was surprised that none of her relations came to assist the new mother. Nor would the wife allow her mother-in-law to help her because they had different cultural identities and belonging.

The residual of the umbilical cord (*nitong*) that falls off when the naval heals is regarded as a form of connection between the new-born and the ancestral land. This residual is often sent back to the village by migrants for their parents to bury under a plantain/banana grove in the compound. In extreme cases, the placenta is frozen and taken back to Cameroon by the migrant him/herself. This means that no matter where the child goes in later life, s/he will return to the place where their *nitong* is buried either in person or posthumously (see also Mebenga 1991 cited in Geschiere 2005: 53; van Gennep 1960: 51). To belong to a lineage is to be protected, and part of this protection is to send back the remainder of one’s child’s umbilical cord to Cameroon when it falls off. In the case of twins, a peace plant is equally planted behind the house. When plantain are produced by the tree(s) that it is buried under, the bunch is distributed among the members of both families. Although I am not aware of whether the plantain were given away in the case of Pinyin and Mankon children in Cape Town, the plantain that bore fruit from the *nitong* of my sister’s son, which was sent from the US, was distributed to our aunts, uncles and maternal and paternal in-laws. What is significant

here is not the quantity of the plantain but the acknowledgement that, as a family, they are able to celebrate their progeny. The eating of this plantain provides an opportunity for the ritual incantation of virtual blessings on the child by those who have shared in the plantains. This plantain grove and the fruit it produces link the child back to the homeland and the harvest are shared among family members who celebrate the health of the child, and the child, even as an adult, will be protected forever.

Marriage

The marriage ritual is similar to that surrounding birth. They have become dynamic but affluence has negatively influenced the traditional institution of marriage by substituting the bare minimum requirements with displays of extravagant consumerism (van Dijk 2012). It has resulted in migrants' marriages being known as 'bush-faller weddings' with most aspiring to marry a bush-faller in order to travel abroad (Nyamnjoh 2009). This has led to hierarchies in society due to the over-extravagance of the occasion. Others have chosen to set new standards, placing themselves apart from the rest. For example, Joe's brother was the first PIFAM member to have gone home and organized a white wedding. The marriage procedure begins with the son expressing his desire to get marry, which starts the family back home embarking on a search for a bride. Would-be Pinyin couples often rely on photos to get to know each other and some get married without ever having met each other. The groom sends his photo to his parents to show to any prospective bride, while the bride does the same. The groom coordinates the process of paying the bride price by phone and sends the money required. Most marriage arrangements are however done by parents and the bride is sent to meet her future spouse. Such arrangement and the objects involved have been described by van Dijk (2012: 146-151) as 'generational technologies of connectivity'. This refers to the 'ritual connection between the village and the city, and between the life worlds of emerging middle classes and the rural socio-economic milieu'. Similarly to this, in the Pinyin and Mankon communities, photos and the mobile phone have become the objects that connect the home village and the host country. The new age of technologies has transformed marriage rituals with regard to mobile communities as most marriage arrangements are done via the mobile phone and using wireless communication. Photos are scanned and sent electronically or are sent with folk traveling to Cape Town or Cameroon. Doris and Zoe, for instance, joined their spouses without formerly meeting them other than via the photos they exchanged. In this respect, both parents played a significant role in investigating prospective grooms before allowing their daughters to marry them. As Zoe was living in the South West Region at the time, she depended on the good judgment of her parents to check out her future spouse and

his family. In her case, Doris communicated directly with her spouse and they exchanged photos. Her parents also investigated the prospective groom and made several phone calls to relatives in South Africa and Europe to ascertain his eligibility. Once they were satisfied, both women could get married.

Mobility and communication, in a way, have made it easier for migrants to bypass elaborate marriage rituals, such as *knock door* at the bride's home to introduce the idea of marriage and actually coming with palm wine to seek her hand in marriage, *muluh-me nkwenteh tsundah* and *muluh-me mbiteh maŋgie* respectively. In all of these rites, the migrant's absence is felt: he is physically absent but virtually present as he finances the project and makes regular phones call. For instance, after Mike in Cape Town let his parents know his wish to get married, all the errands related to meeting the various in-laws were done by his father, while Mike sent money to him to meet the demands of his future in-laws. After each visit, the father or mother beeped him and he called back to be updated. He also gave his mother money to enable her to prepare the food that has to be taken to the homes of the various in-laws. Due to his absence, certain customs were translated into money value and he sent the required amount. This made the process faster than it usually is. Families back home have also compromised certain processes because they want their daughters to be able to travel abroad. What underscores this ceremony is the level of networking and communication that takes place. When the migrant expresses the wish to get married, the family gets to work to find a suitable bride for him and performs the various rites that go with bride price.

Despite various compromises, migrants in the host country try to adhere to other marriage rites. Ikenga-Metuh (1985) elaborately described how, when a new bride is sent off, she does not go to stay in her husband's house immediately but instead goes to live with his mother before finally moving in with her husband. This ritual practice is still maintained among the Pinyin community in Cape Town and new brides stay with an elder kin of the husband for some time before joining him in his house. When Doris arrived in Cape Town, for instance, she did not go immediately to live with her husband but to live with his older brother for a week. It was the same for Mike's wife, who was a new bride in February 2012. She lived with Mike's maternal cousin and wife for two weeks before moving into Mike's house. This period is meant to act as initiation into the community (an educational period) and to allow her to get to know the ways of the community. It also shows respect for older kin and strengthens the kinship bonds by emphasizing that she has become a member of her husband's lineage. For Mike, this had double significance: it encouraged him to repair his strained relationship with his cousin and allowed his gradual re-integration into the PIFAM community following his earlier expulsion from it. Much as this is wide-

ly practised by the Pinyin community, not all grooms submit to such practices and their spouse moves in with them as soon as they arrive in Cape Town.

As far as the Mankon community is concerned, they are quite different from the Pinyin in this respect as the bride moves in with her husband immediately and friends of the groom may drop by to welcome her. The group performs a general welcoming reception for all the new brides and dishes were, for example, given to each of the four women who recently joined their spouses in Cape Town. Such a gift is significant. As part of the farewell (from her family) and her incorporation (into her husband's family), a bride is given a set of dishes meant for the food she prepares for her husband (*papa ee pan*). While some aspects of the above rituals have been minimized, they are fluid and dynamic, characterized by material wealth and have been transformed in such a way that they give new meanings, such as showing off affluence to prove themselves as successful 'bushfaller'. This emphasizes the importance of what is happening to the actor and to the participants as well. Seen from the perspective of bridging and bonding social relations, by choosing a bride from home and adhering to the process of bride price, having her live with a relation on Cape Town before moving in with her husband and subjecting to a consumerism-style of marriage, marriage ritual becomes transcultural (see also van Dijk 2012).

Death

Unlike birth and marriage ceremonies, the ritual of death is still sanctioned by habits that migrants have internalized over the years. By adhering to such rituals, they showcase their belonging and identity. Subscribing to the death ritual without seeking to alter it means a great deal to the mobile community. It connects them with the home village and garners respect for them (by repatriating corpses or the way they organize family funerals at home). In addition, they receive blessings from the village community and family, and the mobile community is presented as a fortress that is able to withstand adversity as the spirit of collectivism is exercised. Through this act, migrants ward off any bad luck or bad mouthing that would have come as a result of not performing the ritual. While such beliefs are widely regarded by others as witchcraft (see Geschiere 1997; Moore & Sanders 2001; Mavhungu 2012), this study distances itself from these tenets and, following the migrants, sees the performance of death ritual as a means of warding off bad luck, avoiding bad mouthing from the village and peers and creating a form of social control. According to the mobile community, people experience bad luck because of their failure to go home and organize a 'cry die' for close relatives. For example, Jerry's bad luck was attributed by the community to his failure to go home to see where his wife was buried and organize a cry die in her honour. Conversely, doing so is considered a means of gaining blessings.

People talk well about others and the power of words goes a long way as nice words pave the way for success and bad words breed ill luck. And one gains respect from one's peers and other villagers. These explanations thus have become plausible ways of comprehending and explaining the inexplicable and of perpetuating this myth. Ron's death in September 2011 and those of three Pinyin migrants who died in a car crash highlight the importance of performing the death ritual for the mobile community.

Ron's† story

> After he finished high school in Bamenda, Ron engaged in petty trade for two years until his elder sister negotiated a visa for him to travel to South Africa. He arrived there in 2002 and was received in Johannesburg by his cousin who later asked him to relocate to Cape Town where a bigger family circle lives. Here he was received by another cousin and was initiated into pitching, like the rest of the Pinyin. He married a South African, had two children and later separated. He then had a second relationship with another South African woman and had another child. During his nine-year stay in South Africa, he did not go back home once although he was planning to do so in grand style in December 2011. His pitching career ended abruptly when he was imprisoned for two years after being accused of attempting to buy goods with counterfeit money given to him by a customer. On his release he had no money to re-establish himself in pitching. An opportunity came when some tourists asked him to supply them with drugs (crack), which he did by investing his last R 50. He thus earned their trust and was asked to supply more. He supplied them with powdered 'Grand Pa' (paracetamol) and earned R 10,000. Amazed at how much he had earned on one deal and how much income one could generate from selling drugs, he settled down as a drug pusher with the aid of some Nigerian friends as his main suppliers. He also ran a small grocery shop as a façade[4] (see Chapter 4). In early September he had a car accident and died on 22 September 2011. The body was repatriated and buried in Pinyin on his land there where he had started to build a house.

PIFAM informants acknowledged that they had provided the very best casket and suit for Ron as a mark of respect. The body was handed over to an undertaker and a committee was set up to perform various tasks regarding the repatriation: liaising with the Cameroon embassy, processing emigration documents, maintaining contact with the undertaker and family back home, buying a suit for the deceased and arranging the entertainment committee. The men were charged with the logistics surrounding the repatriation, while the women attended to matters relating to food and organizing the social side of the events. Each member of the association contributed R 250 while the rest of the Cameroonian community contributed R 100 each. The aim was to supplement the sum the larger Cameroon community in charge of repatriating the body had raised and this allowed them to opt for a casket instead of a mere coffin, and a Markham's suit instead of one from a Chinese shop. Part of the money went into printing T-shirts with the photo of the deceased on it.

[4] Interview, Cape Town; 12/07/2011.

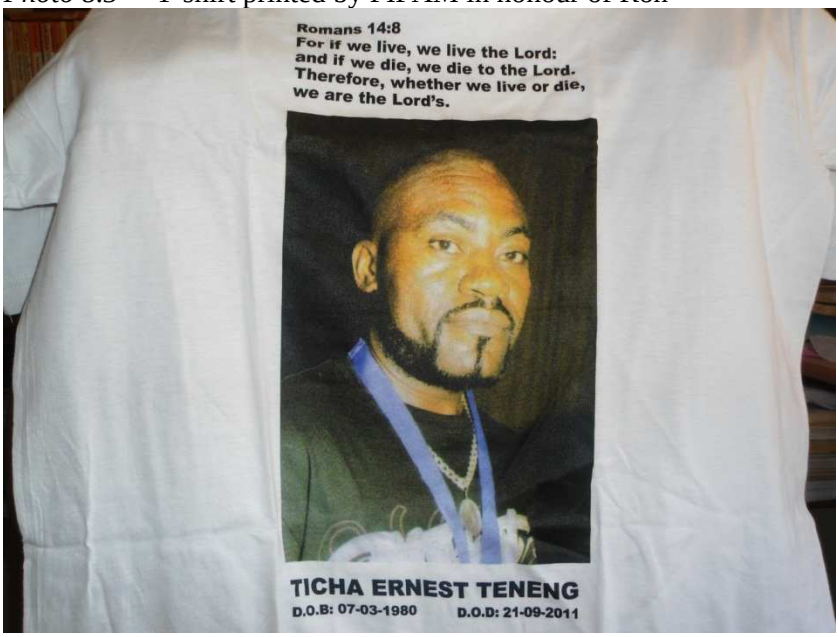
Photo 8.2 Ron in his shop attending to clients and on the phone during our interview

Photo 8.3 Ron's grave beside his uncompleted house in Pinyin

Photo 8.4 Ron's uncompleted house in Pinyin

Members would converge every evening in a rented hall for a wake until the day when the corpse was repatriated, with PIFAM members providing food and drink for all the mourners. On the eve of the removal of the corpse, a grand wake was organized with an *mbaghalum* dance. In the meantime, the family back home was kept abreast of all the developments in Cape Town by Ron's cousin and the team leader of the group processing the documents. Money from the deceased's *njangi* funds was sent to the family at home to start preparations to receive the corpse and they were updated as the procedure developed by mobile phone calls to the family that, according to Joe who was in charge, were quite frequent. Direct communication with Ron's mother was suspended in case of a mental breakdown and was established instead with his elder sister who had originally helped him to migrate to South Africa. His corpse was briefly taken to his house in Cape Town for everyone to see for one last time and for his spirit to

Photo 8.5 T-shirt printed by PIFAM in honour of Ron



rejoin the body. One person was assigned to take photos at this point and on the day it was removed for repatriation. All the photos taken during the funeral were loaded onto a USB stick and sent with his partner for the family.[5] While the body lay there, his cousin announced that his creditors and debtors should declare in the presence of the corpse what they owed the deceased or what he owed them in order to pay or be paid (see also Jindra 2005; Sawyerr 1974). Only one person stepped forward, a creditor, who was paid the amount due in the presence of the body. It is believed that the deceased can witness this transaction and any lies are considered tantamount to bad luck. Swearing over a corpse is a very serious ritual that is practised among the Pinyin and Mankon people. Similarly, when this researcher's father passed away, a mason informed us about a job he had done but had not been paid for. Not sure about his story, my mother took him to my father's grave where she placed the money on it for him to pick up, which he did. With Ron's body at his home, a pastor was found to pray for him as he set off on his last, and most important, journey home. The entire PIFAM accompanied the body to the airport for a final farewell and the corpse was accompanied to Cameroon by his new partner and son, and was received there by his sister. The eye for detail shown by the Pinyin community is similar to what takes place in the village, with a particular focus on the appearance of the body, clothes and a casket for the deceased and the related social activities. All these details are emphasized by PIFAM and they thus send a message back home to show that they are still adept at their cultural and ritual practices. But importantly, it also reiterates the

[5] Interview with Mark, Cape Town: 27/01/2012.

significance of home, as was mentioned by the deceased himself during my interview with him:

> … you know we stay here but we will never live here forever. There will come a time that you will say I've been staying in South Africa for 20 years, 30 years, now it's time for retirement, I must go stay home.[6]

And when the time came for Ron to go home, he fulfilled the promise he made to me (this researcher) on 12 July 2011, as the return of his body marked not only the final stage in his long-awaited journey back home (see also Sabar 2010) but also the very essence of internment at home (in home soil) that brings the deceased full circle to a final return to Pinyin. This is where he belongs and it confers a change of identity (Davies 1997; cf. Miller 2008). Ron's funeral was organized as a Pinyin (Grassfield) event and was a demonstration of the cultural values associated with ethnic enclaves. Mobile communities also have a moral obligation to send off one of theirs within the cultural code of conduct since '*na disgrace for bury any Bamenda pekin outside grafi land*'[7] (Grassfields), as was remarked by one informant.

1 January 2013: Three more deaths

While Ron's death may have garnered a lot of respect for PIFAM from the whole migrant community and the family back home, the death of three Pinyin migrants on 1 January 2013 in another car crash generated further admiration for PIFAM among the Cameroonian community. In local parlance, '*they wash hand for their back*', which can be loosely translated to mean 'they doff their hats to the group'. Taking financial responsibility for repatriating the bodies confirmed PIFAM's status as the most powerful Cameroonian association in Cape Town. Following the three deaths, members contributed R 800 each to cover the costs of repatriation and to support two of the sisters of one of the deceased. Usually, every Cameroonian is expected to contribute R 100, but PIFAM recognized that the bodies had to be sent home in the shortest possible time and, seeing that the Cameroon Association was not fully engaged in the process, they decided to take charge. Within ten days the bodies had been sent home. PIFAM's executive and the elders formed the committee charged with overseeing the repatriations and the work was subdivided into various committees. One person was commissioned with updating the families back home and a T-shirt was printed with the photos of all the deceased and was sold to members and friends of PIFAM.

A big wake was organized prior to the departure of the bodies and members danced to *Mbaghalum* and Christian songs. In the course of the dance, they

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6 Interview, Cape Town: 12/07/2011.

7 Statement made by Mark: 28/11/2011.

Photo 8.6 T-shirt carrying photos of the deceased

Photo 8.7 Members bidding farewell to the bodies of three young PIFAM men in front of the airport freight terminal.

shouted and shamed death for being so cruel to them and as the names of the deceased were called out, members shouted and danced with even more frenzy and vigour as if to trample on death itself. Others took to mimicking the mannerisms of the deceased. This practice could be described, following Rattray (1954 cited in Norbeck 1961: 1268), as the 'deliberate anti-thesis of funeral rites' because they are occasions for jokes and hilarity 'to counter the sense of loss felt by the close relatives'. However, this is not exclusive to those in the diaspora as it is a common occurrence in the home village too. I should note here that I took part in

similar activities when my father died: I had to wear his clothes and dance. This was also the case at Ron's funeral. Being a drug pusher, his colleagues in the trade dressed as scammers (with sunglasses, suits and hats), smoked *tik* (drugs) and puffed the fumes over the corpse, while others drank whisky directly from the bottle and invited the deceased to join them. All of this was reminiscent of their joint activities.

Drawing on Davies (1997: 4), such funerary rites are 'strategies of man against nature – words against death', whose consequence is 'human self-awareness'. Equally, they are adjustments to death through externalized, publicly accepted expression of grief, a passionate fighting of death itself, and given treatment in terms of ritual beliefs (Wilson 1954) and an 'assertion of life expressed in dancing, and feasting' (Norbeck 1963).

The following day, 11 January 2013, the undertaker took the bodies for viewing and transportation to the airport. Prior to this, everything had been arranged with South African Airways (SAA) and Ethiopian Airways that would ferry the bodies from Cape Town to Johannesburg and Johannesburg to Cameroon respectively. The day began with a series of cancellations and strikes. SAA called to cancel their engagement and there was also a strike by ground staff. Some PIFAM elders and the undertaker then started to make arrangements to transport the body by land from Cape Town to Johannesburg to catch the connecting flight. Their woes were further compounded by a call from Ethiopian Airways that they could only carry one body at a time from Johannesburg. PIFAM was beset by a series of complications and soon realized that their deceased brothers were in no hurry to leave them for their journey home. At this juncture, they decided to appeal directly to the corpses and ask that they 'unblock' the obstacles that they had created. The eldest PIFAM member (as custom demands) decided to perform a 'ritual of appeal' to the bodies. Placing his hand on each of the caskets, he appealed to them to make it possible for the group to send them back home. He said:

> XX you are lying here, you loved us and we also loved you but you are now in a different form and, following our tradition, we must send you back to the village. Why are you preventing us from sending your bodies to the village? Open the road; cover all those potholes you've dug on the way that are disturbing us, close them so that we can pass smoothly. Your parents are back at home; some are not eating, some are threatening to commit suicide, I mean they are not doing anything. Why should you die and then cause others to suffer? Then with us here; since you people died, we are not doing anything, we are not going to work, nothing. Must we suffer because you've died? We love you, that's true, and that's why we are doing what we are doing now. It's because of that love, so if you actually know that you love us, open the way so that we can send your corpse back home.[8]

[8] Appeal made by an elder to the bodies to pave the way for them to be repatriated. Field notes, 11/01/2013; Cape Town and interview with the elder, Cape Town: 20/01/2013.

While still standing by the caskets, a call came. This is what the elder had to say with respect to the call. 'Immediately I made that tradition, it didn't take up to 5 minutes, a message came that they've booked a special flight from Cape Town to Johannesburg. We believe that as I spoke like that, they understood and they opened the way.'[9]

After the appeal, he called on anyone who was a creditor or debtor to any of the deceased to come forward and declare the amount or item in the presence of the deceased. Eight persons came forward, and some declared the amount that was still owed to them by the deceased but turned down offers to be reimbursed because they valued their friendship with the deceased more than the money. One person declared that she owed one of them R 15,000 and promised to make the money available. It would be sent to his family once payment could be effected. The importance and meaning of this ritual lies in the 'performance utterances' (Davies 1997) that have been carried out by the elder and those of the creditors and debtors. The utterances carry with them the power of word/communication: words that are spoken in the presence of a corpse are testament and may be punitive if shrouded in lies. Also, these utterances do not constitute their own performances, but follow punctiliously orders that have been established by others (Rappaport 1997: 32). The ritualized elaboration of communication with each deceased highlighted the effectiveness of this performance and distinguished it from ordinary technical acts (*Ibid*.: 50).

At the end of these declarations, phone calls came through that SAA has made a special dispensation to transport all three bodies to Johannesburg, and Ethiopian Airways confirmed that they would carry the first two that day and the third one the following day. Members heaved a sigh of relief and attributed this to the appeal they had made to the deceased. Such an appeal finds expression in the idea that the departed soul is potentially malevolent and socially uncontrolled (Parry & Bloch 1982) and has to be reunited with the body for effective transcendentalism and avoidance of the ghost haunting and/or eventually visiting. It was believed that the spirits of the deceased were still wandering around in Cape Town and were not willing to go home which was why the group was faced with so many challenges. But equally it is believed that the dead are present amongst the living and hear all that they are told: they thus heeded the pleas being made.

Although the rituals associated with death have been standardized, they are dynamic in form and performance. Such occasions give mobile communities the opportunity to express dormant internalized ritual practices and showcase their connectivity and cultural knowledge. They can also show those in the home country their savvy and their adeptness at rituals. Transcultural participation in death rituals and intensified communication help to reinforce the community's

[9] See Footnote 7.

identity and belonging to the home village. Besides, the tendency for the group to help one another is because 'rain does not fall only on one person's roof; it falls on all of our roofs. When it is my turn everyone gathers to wish me well, and when it is the next person, we all gather there.'[10] Having side-lined the Cameroonian Association of Cape Town other groups organized collective donations that they gave directly to PIFAM. MACUDA, for instance, supported them to the sum of R5000 and attended the wake with their *Mbaghalum* instruments where they led the first half of the dance session during the cry die.

These deaths helped to reintegrate the community based in Cape Town back into that in Pinyin. In the process, social links were reproduced and places symbolically tied across space, as they revealed intense issues regarding 'identity and perception of place' (Gardener 2002: 198-199). The importance of the place of burial is emphasized to the deceased and the latter are directly appealed to, to make it possible for them to be sent home. Home to the mobile community is where they are buried and where their *nitoŋg* is buried, as was mentioned earlier. The host country is considered a temporary home ('bush') to which migrants are connected for financial reasons only.

Cry die in Cape Town

A cry die is a way in which members of mobile communities abroad choose to mourn a departed relative among their peers in the host country, especially if going home to attend the funeral is not possible. It is organized prior to the migrant's departure for the home village to assist in the funeral rites. These are moments of crisis for the bereaved and the community is expected to help them overcome this. For those for whom traveling home is not possible, a cry die is organized on the same day as the corpse is taken from the morgue in the home village and is buried.

When Paul's[11] father passed away, he could not travel back for the funeral because he had just returned from Cameroon a few months earlier. Having sent money for the funeral, he decided to organize a cry die in Cape Town to coincide with the day of burial. This saw a huge gathering as he belongs to PIFAM and MACUDA, and both groups came with their *Mbaghalum* dance and livened up the occasion. The event was given the widest publicity thanks to the incredible speed of the new communication technologies (calls, SMSs and emails). The bereaved communicate with any member of the executive, but preferably with the secretary who has the task of spreading the news by SMS. Members are also requested to give it additional publicity by forwarding it to others. A date is chosen by the bereaved when the entire group will come for the cry die but, prior to this,

[10] Interview with John, The Hague: 24/10/2010.
[11] He hails from Mankon and lives in Cape Town.

members go round to offer their condolences. The men take drinks while the women offer food or assist the bereaved by cooking at her home.

From the traditional Bamenda Grassfields perspective, the activities expected of women have gone unchallenged for too long and this has enabled the men to exert subtle control and ascribe roles to women and promulgate social taboos. The women are usually entrusted with the planning, preparing, cooking and serving of meals. Reiterating this notion, Pleck (2004; see also Mand 2002) holds that the domestication of rituals thrusts women into the role of 'queen of the home' or what Wilson (1939) refers to as 'owners of the death' in the case of death rituals.

In PIFAM, the bereaved are given R 3000 when a member loses a parent and the money is handed over during the cry die, while a bereaved member of MACUDA gives the name of a relative back home who will receive the money and it is sent via Western Union or MoneyGram. The idea is for the money to help pay for the funeral itself and this ensures that it is sent home and used there. The association wants family at home to know that the bereaved belonged to a group and this is the statutory contribution that is due to a member at such a time. The following SMS from PIFAM sheds light on this: 'PIFAM regrets to announce the death of Xxxx Xxxx's father. Wake keeping starts today at Xxxx Xxxx's place beginning from 7pm. Contribution is R36 and attendance is obligatory. Thanks.'

Cry die in The Netherlands

As mentioned in the previous chapters, there are no associations within the Pinyin and Mankon communities in the Netherlands so they belong to the wider Cameroonian community and have friends to support them at such times. One person in the Netherlands has opted to create a mailing list and assumed responsibility for sending out information by email to all members in the event of joyous or sad news. The email below elucidates this point:

> Dear All
>
> It is with deep regrets that Ms Xxxxx Xxxx announces the death of her Father
>
> Pa Xxxxx Xxxx.
>
> … Let us join the family to pray for soul (sic) of their father and souls of all faithfuls who have departed this world. She can be visited at the following address:
>
> Brueghelstraat XXX
>
> XXXXRG Den Haag

The first email sent out informs members of the community about the death, and a few weeks later, a second mail is sent informing members about the cry die:

Dear All,

The Funeral Program of the late father of Ms Xxxxx Xxxx (Pa Xxxxx Xxxx)
Program
Date: Saturday 20th October 2012

Phase I
Church Service
Catholic Church
Hoofdkade
The Hague
Time: 3.30 pm Prompt
Tram 12/11 near street market

Phase II
Wakekeeping
Brueghelstraat XXX
XXXXRG Den Haag[12]

Rituals are not limited to traditional and cultural practices but are coordinated with religious rituals and with respect to cry dies in the Netherlands. Most often, those who can invite an African priest (preferably a Cameroonian studying in Europe) to officiate at the Memorial Mass do not hesitate to do so (Jindra 2005). The bereaved in this case decided to invite a Cameroonian priest from Belgium as the celebrant. In Amsterdam, Marie,[13] a Pentecostal Christian, invited her Ghanaian pastor to her home to pray with them when she organized a cry die for her father who passed away in Cameroon. To those in the Netherlands, the church community becomes an extension of their social reality and this underscores the fact that the absence of village associations has resulted in the formation of a close Christian community known as the African community, with Cameroonians making up the majority of the congregation (see also van Dijk 2002). Olwig (2005) noted that such funerals can be seen to be a shared ritual in a religious fellowship of people who want to give the deceased a Christian burial. This is eased by their belief that the deceased was 'given to them on loan by God'[14] and the religious rituals are meant to thank God for his/her life and 'commit the deceased back to his/her creator'. In the same vein, Nieswand (2005: 246) holds that this also creates a 'public space for everyday relevance, which is a scarce resource for marginalized migrant groups'.

[12] Email received on 08/10/2012.
[13] I attended the wake held in Amsterdam on 16/10/2010 for Marie's father who passed away in Cameroon just before she left for Cameroon.
[14] Excerpt from the eulogy when the bereaved organized a Catholic Mass for their mother in The Hague: 06/10/2012.

Burials and succession rites

The rituals performed after death in Mankon and Pinyin are the most elaborate of all their rituals and the themes, which are recurrent and implicit in others, are expressed most clearly. For the mortuary rituals to the burial, the family is expected to come from far and wide, especially those who are out of the country as they are seen to command the economic capital that the rest of the family will leverage to make the occasion a success. And every member of an association is expected to show up and make the stipulated contribution. Failure to do so is met with hefty fines and/or expulsion.

Social capital is an overriding factor that determines the success of the ceremony as well as the importance of the actors concerned. In other words, how well people can transform this capital into economic and cultural capital depends largely on the actors' social capital. Given the inequalities that exist in societies, acquisition of social capital is unequal too, with some migrants being able to command more important social capital than others. In addition to articulating the community's values, belief systems and customs, it is possible for ceremonials and funeral to have varying degrees of importance, which leads to hierarchies (see also Gardener 2002: 199; Olwig 2009; Brand 2000). As in the case of the Grassfields in Bamenda, some deaths have been labelled 'bush-faller die' as most or all of the deceased's children are living abroad and their economic capital draws in a great deal of social capital too. The death of this researcher's father is a case in point. Funerals are not as socially liberating because of the hierarchical formations they bring to bear on mobile communities, but funerals serve as outlets to extend inequalities across borders and thus reproduce the social class structures brought from the home country.

Death amongst the migrant community, as has been shown, is treated with deep reverence and the corpse has to be sent back home because burial in a foreign land signals social and cultural failure[15] on the part of the migrant community and they will be stigmatized by other communities (Geschiere 2005; Geschiere & Nyanmjoh 2000, 2001). But it is additionally an outward expression to those back at home that they (the migrants) still know the community's norms and values surrounding death. Self-gratification also plays a role here. Reverence is additionally guided by the notion of fear: fear of the dead, fear of bad mouthing and fear of ill luck that might befall them as a result of not performing the necessary rituals or of not performing them well (see also Wilson 1954; Wilson 1939). As such, attention is paid to dressing the corpse properly and taking it back into his/her house to reunite it with his/her spirit before the funeral rites. This begs the question as to why death can be so frightening and why a person commands

[15] The Congolese (DRC) are socially stigmatized by the Cameroonian community for burying their dead in Cape Town.

more respect in death than when they are alive. In a way, it could be inferred that the agency of the dead is stronger than that of the living. However, and as is argued by Jindra (2005: 358), 'it is not foreordained who lives on and who does not as ancestor, given it is posthumous ritual acts that establish this'. It is dependent on the type of burial accorded to the deceased and this marks the transition to being one of the ancestors. This is the case in most parts of the Grassfields and it is widely believed that death rituals in Pinyin and Mankon pave the way for the deceased to join the ancestors and become one of them. In the days after the burial in Mankon when the rest of the mourners have left, the immediate family decides on the successor to the deceased, hires the services of a diviner who says exactly what happened and who/what killed the deceased and prescribes sacrifices to ward off any eminent death or bad luck. This marks closure after the death and all the ceremonies. When Paul lost his first wife and took her body home from Cape Town, his parents-in-law requested that he move on and remarry as soon as possible in order to help him attain closure, especially as they did not have any children. In Pinyin, one of the last rituals is marked by sweeping the compound, as was the case when Ron's body was repatriated from Cape Town at the end of the funerary rites.

Succession is an important ritual for both Pinyin and Mankon, and is usually the last ritual. This is done immediately before the family disperses, or a year later. With the increasing financial and material accumulation of migrants today, the tendency is now to make a migrant the successor even though they recognize their long periods of absence. This has ceased to be a problem given the interconnectivity between migrants' host countries and their home country. The successor appoints an assistant and is constantly in touch with the home village and visits if important ceremonies demand his physical presence. In the absence of such ceremonies, his presence is felt virtually. In contrast to the past when migrants did not actively participate in family affairs, being a successor now connects them with kin back home. For instance, it was five years after Joe's father passed away that he and all his siblings travelled home and he was crowned as his father's successor. Although Joe goes home once a year, being his father's successor means that he has to be more attentive to what happens in the compound. He is also contemplating going back home permanently.

Transnational funerals

Migrants participate in these rituals be they at home or in the host country and seek to give one of theirs a 'decent farewell', which usually involves ritual practices. Others take over the role of the deceased as his successor. In this respect and as pointed out by Chesson (2001: 1), death is a 'sensuous arena in which the dead are mourned, social memories are created and, reasserted, social bonds are

renewed, forged or broken, and individuals make claims for individual identities and group memberships'. As such, the death of a migrant explicitly reveals a great deal about the notion of place, in this case where the body is taken for burial. It also provides a context for reflection on the meaning of identity and belonging among the migrant community (Jackson 2005: 3; Geschiere 2005; Olwig 2009). By returning the body home for burial, the notion of transnationalism among migrants is rearticulated. Such journeys represent the final stage in many migrants' mobile lives (Gardener 2002; Geschiere & Nyamnjoh 2000, 2001). Funerals in Cape Town involve the entire migrant community but particularly the ethnic enclave from which the deceased hailed and this ensures the correct funerary rites and the eventual repatriation of the body. In this respect, sending the body home enables the migrant to be reinserted with the ancestors through all the rituals that will be carried out in his/her honour both in the host country and in the home country. They also help ensure closure for the family back home.

This notwithstanding, not everyone participates or readily avails themself for these rituals. Some choose what to perform and not perform or how to perform it, while others may readily join in out of fear of witchcraft, ill luck or bad mouthing. For many, performing these rituals satisfies a hidden need. What this presupposes is that participation in rituals is dependent on psychological needs, but do we not, by saying this, take a reductionist stance?

Although the power dynamics may not be evident, ritual performance is marked by subtle power and hierarchical formation that lends itself to how much social and economic capital can be harnessed and transformed into cultural capital (prestige), with the end result being the creation of a hierarchical society. This assumes that rituals find expression in a society that is endowed with networks.

By choosing to create overlapping networks and actively participating in home associations in the host country as well as maintaining a virtual and/or corporeal presence back home, mobile communities indulge in rituals and ceremonials to reaffirm their double engagement, to reminisce about what they have left behind and/or to invent new ways of performing that suit their current abode and are of equal significance and meaning.

ICTs as evidence of ritual autopsy

Performing these rituals is a statement in itself because of the significant way in which people use the new technology to access events. This might be as a result of anxiety, mistrust and/or concern about the way the funeral is organized, as well as anxiety about the cause of death. All of this is channelled through the use of ICTs, videos and photos. Proof or evidence is reminiscent of the past with regard to the death ritual when an autopsy, as an important death ritual, was performed on the body to establish the cause of death and to determine if there were

any missing internal body parts as a result of witchcraft (Warnier 2012). Autopsy, where practiced, focuses on the passage from (the) throat to the belly and the body will be slit along this line to examine substances located around the liver for signs of poisoning or witchcraft substance' (Warnier 2012; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands forthcoming).

Today, among mobile communities, such rituals are no longer about performing physical autopsies but using film and technology (DVD and photos) as a form of autopsy provides evidence that the funeral ritual was done well. Such an autopsy is particularly important to the absent migrant to assure him/her that the money sent home has been well spent. Doing a ritual well informs harmony in the family and wards off bad luck.

It was for these reasons that PIFAM engaged people to take photos to send home with Ron's body as testament to those at home that the funeral they organized in Cape Town to send Ron's body home (Pinyin) was done according to the norms. The tendency is for the home village to send videos to relations abroad as evidence of this too. The aim is to reduce any anxiety amongst relations who could not attend and as proof that a befitting funeral was given to the deceased. News of the arrival of a DVD is always welcomed by friends and family abroad and their home will be full of friends who come to watch it. A running commentary will be given with regard to the form, content and performance of the various rituals (the mortuary and traditional rites). Conversely, the video is implicitly meant as evidence of proper financial management of the resources sent for the funeral. I watched the funeral videos of John's mother and father with him in The Hague and that of Ben's father and Joyce's mother in Cape Town and it was interesting to note the satisfaction they derived from it, judging by their comments. These were mostly about how well organized it was, from the mortuary to the internment and the feeding of the mourners as well as the cry die. For instance, Joyce talked of how she spent R 17,000 (approx. € 1600) on the funeral but she was satisfied with the quality of the casket, the hearse that was hired and the food provided for those present, and she told me how she had allocated the money. The video was sent via DHL by her sister is to allay her fears of any impropriety. Prior to watching the video with Joyce, I had gone to offer my condolences at their home.[16] Most of time I was with her she was crying and recalling all the things that she had discussed with her mother just a few days beforehand. But the most upsetting she felt was the fact that her sisters had let their mother die without talking to her (bidding her farewell), and thus deprived her of the chance to give them her blessings. Again, the importance of breath (*ndjiẅi*) is mentioned, as Joyce considered the last breath of her dying mother to have been

[16] Condolence visit at Joyce's, Cape Town: 17/11/2011.

full of blessings and there is no doubt that her mother would have *fogho ndjiẅi* on Joyce. Communication with her mother was thus seen as a form of verbal autopsy whereby she would have been able to assess the gravity of her health. By contrast, John in The Hague was fortunate to have spoken with his mother a day before she passed away. Through this verbal autopsy, he assessed the gravity of her illness and was psychologically prepared for any eventuality. Unable to travel home, he had to rely on his cousin's smart phone for a virtual presence. On the day of internment, he asked this cousin to put the phone on speaker so that he could follow and 'participate' in the burial rites. He also recorded what was said and the song that was sung became his new ring tone until he went home to perform a cry die for his mother (see Chapter 4). Through the various forms of ICTs, John, Ben and Joyce were able to assist in the funeral rites of parents back home and, more importantly could give their stamp of approval to the entire ritual performance and the organization of the funeral.

In summary, ICTs are transforming mobile communities' participation in rituals by making them accessible to all and they can offer proof to migrants that the ritual was performed properly.

Such reminiscences and the portrayal of vivid memories by Joyce could be seen as a way of channelling her sentiments of social bonding but, conversely, this made it difficult for her to come to terms with her mother's death. For Joyce to find closure following her mother's death, she had to go home and perform her own funeral rituals on the grave and symbolically bury her mother, despite the huge sums of money she had already sent. As part of the ritual, Joyce completely shaved her hair off. This act is seen as a way of self-cleansing and removing any bad luck that a death in the family is believed to bring. Joyce also felt it was the best way for her to mourn her mother given that she could not be in her home village like the rest of the family. Although shaving one's head is an age-old ritual, most families still adhere to it although a significant number today abstain from doing so.

Rituals as communication and the embodiment of society

Whether they are rituals or ceremonials, increased participation in them is due to the huge success of ICTs and increased connectedness among community members and kin back home that has provided a base for frequent communication and possibilities of more frequent visits. In addition, ICTs offers migrants the possibility to be virtually present in the home village and/or draw on the social capital that they have accumulated to make the occasion grand. The corollary is that social capital is thus transformed into economic and cultural capital.

Being away from home, life-crisis events such as marriage, born house, deaths and cry die (wakes) by mobile communities are contingent on language as 'lan-

guage is the foundation of human life' (Rappaport 1997: 7; see also Davies 1997: 7). This is because 'human systems are cultural-organic systems constituted by linguistic information' (Rappaport 1997: 10). In this respect I concur with Rappaport (1997: 29) that in 'human rituals the utterances are usually predominantly verbal, and are symbolically signifying, and the acts, in being formalized, are *ipso facto*, invested with meaning'. It also follows that utterances are exuberant elaboration of identity as the form, content and performance of the actors 'generate a sense of identity, while others confer identity' (Davies 1997: 4). This is the desired effect of performing rituals, i.e. by defining ones' identity in relation to others. As attested by a Pinyin informant, performing the death ritual 'is part of our culture, it is who we are, and differentiates us from the Congolese (DRC) for whom sending the body home holds no meaning to them, hence they bury their dead in Cape Town and disperse immediately after'.[17] In this connection, the appeal made by the elder to the three corpses mentioned above to pave the way for them to be sent back home in conjunction with placing his hand on each of the caskets was quite meaningful. The utterances in this case were complemented by the action of placing his hand on the caskets to create direct communication with each of the deceased. This confirms the punctiliousness and repetitive nature of rituals that serve to bring out the power and efficacy embedded in the utterances. Migrants want to be seen to be doing the right thing and doing it correctly. Therefore any deviation may be regarded as neglecting traditional religious aspects and the corollary may be bad mouthing or bad luck. The defining intention is the response of the receiver (the deceased) who is expected to act on the statement. The language or ritual utterances used here are not 'mere words' but 'possess special effect' (Bloch 1973 in Rappaport 1997: 49) and the performance is intended to elicit a particular response from the receiver, for example in this case that the deceased would unblock all the obstacles that were inhibiting their repatriation.

Inasmuch as rituals are contingent upon language, it is important to note that rituals are internalized habits that migrants have learnt over the years and are able to re-enact in the home and the host countries. In this respect, the notion of transnational habitus (Guarnizo 1973; Vuerola 2002) provides a clue as to why mobile communities continue to observe these rituals in their host countries. (See Chapter 9 for an in-depth discussion on this subject.) While this concept illuminates the bifocal circuits and the scale of simultaneity of being home away from home, mobile communities seek to integrate cosmopolitan values while defending and maintaining particularistic values within the context of being both 'here' and 'there'. Away from home, mobile communities do not see themselves as having severed links, they have simply extended the locus of home. The host country is

[17] Conversation with Mark, Cape Town: 28/11/2012.

temporal and the home village is considered their permanent abode. These rituals retain their meaning within specific social fields, defined by the language that distinguishes them from other rituals as the language used is diametrically opposing. The notion of field represents the external structure of relations between historically defined positions and its structure is one that mobile communities seek to replicate by performing internalized habits during various birth, marriage and death rituals to affirm their belonging to their ancestral land. For instance, the blessings of the 'breath of men' in the born house are different to those given to a prospective migrant about to leave home by his/her parents. While they may both pass for blessings, they take place within different social fields and contexts.

Employing these concepts has provided a roadmap to understanding the practices and adaptations made to the various ritual activities by mobile societies. It also provides some leeway for me to navigate between the various ritualistic activities.

The concept of capital is intrinsic and complements the notions of transnational habitus and social fields in understanding ritualized or ceremonial practices and how they are embedded in social networks. I will not dwell on this in detail here as it was discussed in detail in Chapter 3 but what it is essential to note is the notion of strong ties that underpin ritualized practices. As was seen in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, neither the individual nor society can stand independently of each other. A complex web of networks comes into play at different intervals in accordance with the needs and demands being faced.

For rituals or ceremonies to occur, capital accumulation and the active engagement of social capital are required because what gives the distinctiveness of any of the above rituals is the crowd that a particular activity is able to generate. In other words 'the size of relations that can be effectively mobilized and the amount of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital of the members of that network determine the volume of social capital of a specific actor' (Brand 2000: 26). This is because the family and kin are the institution that initiates the socialization process. It is important to bear in mind that capital accumulation is often used or offers particular resources and may be transformed into economic capital. This presupposes that, amongst these mobile communities, people are investing in relationships in order to achieve capital and these have to be continuously maintained and lubricated 'by means of material and symbolic exchange' (*Ibid.*: 26). In this respect, even after withdrawing from the Cameroonian Association and taking full charge of repatriating their members' corpses, PIFAM was able to receive financial support from other sister associations because of the support it had given them over the years. The concept of 'rain on a person's roof' captures this reciprocity. By extension, this may also mean that the celebration and performance of rituals could be associated with social ranking (hierarchy) because

of the economic, social and cultural capitals accumulated. The amalgamation of these capitals project people to higher positions or rankings and they use rituals (with those of migrants nicknamed bush-faller wedding or bush-faller die) as a way of distinguishing themselves from everyone else. For instance, when Emile[18] went home to Pinyin to organize a memorial service (cry die) for his father, the ceremony bore the hallmarks of a bush-faller cry die. Prior to his departure, he had shipped over drinks, disposable cups and plates that are not easy to find in the village. Relatives and the entire neighbourhood (quarter) and the church group that his father was a member of were invited for *alah* (celebrations with abundant food and drinks). These celebrations helped to catapult his social standing in the village and he received blessings from ancestors and relatives. This gesture is still a reference point for most in the neighbourhood and people continue to speak well of him in the village. It could however be argued that overspending on the ceremony was a way for him to compensate for his absence at the funeral.

Pleck's post-sentimental approach to rituals can enlighten us here. This approach reinvigorates rituals and ceremonials and is both a 'way of talking about ritual and a style of practicing it' (Pleck 2004: 52). She argues that post-sentimentality uses 'sentimentality as foil and it requires the persistence, not the total disappearance, of sentimental occasions'. This approach provides a rationale for overindulging in ceremonial events because such an event is therapeutic for the organizer and may also be a creative solution to a personal crisis as in the case of cry die in the mobile communities in both Cape Town and the Netherlands. This ceremony, as mentioned earlier, is derived from an existing ritual or better still can be seen as an authentic traditional ritual that the individual finds personally meaningful. In these communities, it is an anomaly when such standard practices are not adhered to and the repercussion is bad mouthing by the community. Concurring with the therapeutic value of rituals, Imber-Black & Roberts (1992: xvi-xvii) posit that it is a way to 'maintain and alter important relationships, to facilitate complicated life-cycle changes, to heal losses, to express (their) deepest beliefs, and to celebrate life' (see also Metcalf & Huntington 1991).

Post-sentimentalism is borne out of nostalgia and the growth of ethnic identity as a result of marginalization and exclusion from mainstream society. Pinyin and Mankon migrants, like most migrant communities, are often reduced to the margins of society, which leads to ethnic enclaves and identities. In a bid to retain what they have left behind, they develop a sense of communitarianism and new ways of celebrating traditional events, sometimes by adopting western-style celebrations (such as baby showers) but also by giving them a local twist to fit their

[18] He hails from Pinyin and lives in The Hague.

new locus and to create a sense of ritual. Importantly, these ceremonies become cathartic and act as insulation against their societal exclusion, but they also reify their absent presence in society. Drawn together, these remembrance-communities find in these symbolic rituals and ceremonies what they do not find in daily life and, in so doing, the community reinforces a certain 'public identity (of Pin-yin-ness and Mankon-ness) that is ultimately communicated to both local citizens and the external publics' (Procter 2004: 132).

Bloch & Parry (1982) also see rituals as a form of social control and argue that the prescribed occasions of ritual function call for appropriate emotions by the participants, and can be seen as a technique in the acquisition and control of life (see Chapter 9). Similarly, fear of bad mouthing, especially in the mobile community, becomes an unspoken control that hangs over defaulters. While they may have a valid argument, the question that emerges concerns those who show no emotions or are indifferent, or those who have opted not to be controlled and pay little or no attention to rituals. We could also look at it from a reciprocated deterministic point of view, given that rituals and emotions mutually shape each other. It is not a given that rituals elicit the same emotions in everyone and they can range from no emotion to overwhelming emotion. Nevertheless, rituals of death elicit emotions and the 'power of words embedded in them to trigger and direct emotions are great' (Davies 1997: 8).

Conclusion

Rituals play an important role in the lives of migrants in the host country. However, of the life-crisis rituals related to death, birth and marriage, those concerning death constitute those that best define mobile communities and connect migrants most closely to the home country.

Born house and marriages, unlike death, are rituals that have become dynamic and have adopted new identities in conjunction with existing ceremonies. They are fluid and have incorporated aspects of western practices, such as interlinking utterances and performance with traditional ceremonies. The dynamic nature of these ceremonies can be attributed to mobility, with mobile communities seeking new ways of making a living in the host society. While these ceremonies are also premised on the notion of belonging, they are informed by the idea of wealth and success, which invariably results in a hierarchization in society. Capital accumulation gives these ceremonies a new twist as migrants have the tendency to spend heavily to prove themselves and it is then wealth and success that inform belonging, earning them the nickname 'bush-faller wedding' or 'bush-faller die'. Although the ritual of death is still tied to traditional forms, it is increasingly being defined by wealth too. How much economic and social capital accumulation one has managed to amass translates into a successful funeral and a cry die earns one

cultural capital. As mentioned earlier, not everyone in the community has a baby shower or born house, just as not all are able to arrange a big group of people to welcome their bride to Cape Town.

Although many migrants make a conscious decision to leave home, it is a difficult one to sustain because home always travels with people through the various rituals and ceremonials that they maintain and reconfigure to suit their current locus, but also because these rituals are a form of social control and are, paradoxically, liberating. Being excluded from mainstream society as they tend to be, these communities develop ethnic enclaves that act or shield them from society. Part of this defence mechanism is nostalgic reminiscence of the rituals they have left behind and consequently want to uphold or reinvent to fit their present society. An active engagement in rituals thus lies in the post-sentimental present informed by the sentimental past (Pleck 2000), especially given the fact that mobile communities find them cathartic.

The ability of mobile communities to engage in the form and performance of rituals has been significantly aided by the appropriation of ICTs that make it possible for them to coordinate rituals between home and the host country, and amongst themselves in the host country. These are also periods of intense communication between the community and other groups. ICTs have become a new form of autopsy for migrants to assess and ensure that the funeral and rituals have been done well. Autopsies today are in sharp contrast to those of the past. SMSs have become the fastest mode of communication if one needs to reach a target audience, such as these messages from PIFAM and MACUDA respectively. 'The final wake keeping for our brothers will be on Thursday 10 at the Belleville hall from 7pm.' 'MACUDA. Program for born house today starts at 4pm. Be on time please. 9 aveneu Kensigten. (sic) Thanks.'[19]

Despite the grim Weberian forecast that modernization, industrialization and the pursuit of material comfort will result in a decline in rituals and a loss of value, interest in rituals has increased because rituals are what set communities apart from each other and highlight their collectiveness. By the same token, rituals connect mobile communities to the home village and serve as a platform for them to participate in rituals both in the home and the host countries concurrently, a phenomenon that was not possible in the past when the host countries' policies required total integration. Mobilities have consequently been enhanced by new communication technologies and the obituary of assimilationist policies has been written. The corollary has been increased participation in rituals in both the home and host countries.

[19] Message sent on 05/11/2011.