Fiction and reality of mobility in Africa

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Routledge
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This article draws on rich ethnographies and ethnographic fiction depicting mobile Africans and their relationships to the places and people they encounter to argue that mobility is more appropriately studied as an emotional, relational and social phenomenon as reflected in the complexities, contradictions and messiness of the everyday realities of encounters informed by physical and social mobility. The current dominant approach to studying and relating to mobile Africans is problematic. Nationals, citizens and locals in communities targeted by African mobility are instinctively expected to close ranks and fight off the influx of barbarians who do not quite belong and must be 'exorcised' so that 'insiders' do not lose out to this particular breed of 'strangers', 'outsiders' or 'demons', perceived to bode little but inconvenience and savagery. If and when allowed in, emphasis is on the needs, priorities and convenience of their reluctant hosts, who tend to go for the wealthy, the highly professionally skilled, the culturally bleached and Hottentot Venuses of the academy, even at the risk of accusations of capital flight and brain drain. The article demonstrates how to marry ethnography and fiction to study African mobility not only as a 'collection of logical bones and flesh' but also as 'emotional beings'. It calls for conceptual flexibility and ethnographic empirical substantiation, and challenges social scientists to look beyond academic sources for ethnographies and accounts of how a deep, flexible and nuanced understanding of mobility and interconnections in Africa play out in different communities, states and regions of a world permanently on the move.

Keywords: citizenship; mobility; migration; Africa; ethnography; fiction

Introduction

The intricacies of mobilities and identities within Africa are largely ignored. Mobile Africans on the continent are, perplexingly, not often considered diasporas in their own right (Bakewell 2008, Zeleza 2011). In exploring African mobility in this article, I draw on writers such as Phaswane Mpe, a South African poet and novelist of this century; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a contemporary Nigerian novelist and short story writer; and Okot p'Bitek, a Uganda poet whose most well-known work was written in the 1960s. I also draw on my own fiction. I argue that the physical and social mobility of Africans is best understood as an emotional, relational and social phenomenon captured in the complexities, contradictions and messiness of their everyday realities. In conventional scholarly writing, even when such dimensions are recognised, the standard expectations of what constitutes a scholarly text do little justice to the multilayered, multivocal and multifocal dimensions of everyday negotiation and navigation of myriad identity margins. Complementing such scholarly texts with fictionalised accounts of the same or similar reality is what this article advocates.

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I use *Intimate Strangers* (Nyamnjoh 2010a), a novel based on an ethnographic study of mobility and relationships among Africans in Botswana, to make a case for connections of insiders and outsiders, not as essences, birthmarks or permanences, but as 'frontier realities' in terms of the accommodating, convivial, composite and cosmopolitan tendencies in most African social formations (Warnier 1984, Kopytoff 1987, Nyamnjoh 2002, 2011). Being an insider or an outsider is always work in progress, is permanently subject to renegotiation and is best understood as relational and situational. Hence, the need to understand the interconnecting global and local hierarchies – be these informed by race, place, class, culture, gender, age or otherwise – that shape connections and disconnections, and produce, reproduce and contest distinctions between insiders and outsiders as political and ideological constructs which defy empirical reality (Pelckmans 2011). A historical perspective is paramount in understanding 'the continuities with the past that make contemporary mobilities intelligible' (Cresswell 2010, p. 29).

If mobility has always been part and parcel of humanity, today, new technologies of communication and transportation allow for more frequent and multidirectional flows of people, ideas and cultural symbols (Castles 2002). Such acceleration and complexification simultaneously facilitates and impairs the formation of transnational communities, multiple identities and multilayered citizenship, and the blurring of boundaries between different categories of mobility and the mobile (Appadurai 2000, Nyamnjoh 2006, Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, Geschiere 2009). Globalisation is a process not only of accelerated flows but also of accelerated closures (Appadurai 2000), for, as James Ferguson (2006, pp. 38–41) argues, the metaphor of flows ignores the reality of global inequalities, marginalisation and disconnection, and the fact of an uneven playing field that make the process more one of global hopping than global flows.

The more borders appear threatened by or reinforced against the accelerated mobility of people with 'nostalgia for the future' (Piot 2010), the more people crave for and invest in rootedness and nostalgia for an imagined past (Geschiere 2009). Thus, we may be more nimble-footed today than ever before, while also being drawn to fixities. Obsessions with purity, authenticity, primary and often parochial identities coexist with notions of nation state and its logic of large-scale, exclusive communities. In Africa as much as elsewhere, people are busy rediscovering cultural identities as heritage and as commodity, in an 'identity economy' where, as Jean and John Comaroff (2009) argue, the sale of culture is rapidly replacing the sale of labour, and in certain cases, the very survival of particular groups depends on self-parody and self-devaluation as cultural spectacles to fee-paying strangers on 'cannibal tours'.[1] Such an economy is proving profitable to long-marginalised, impoverished populations, who increasingly realise that they can 'turn the means of their exclusion into sources of profit without alienation, estrangement, or a loss of "true" selfhood' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, p. 52). This 'traffic in difference' or in 'culture-as-commodity' is 'driven by a burgeoning desire at once to endorse difference and to transcend it' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, p. 148). It combines with political and social policing of borders to simultaneously endorse and contest dominant ideas of globalisation as a process that encourages flexible mobilitity and open-ended cosmopolitan identities (Geschiere 2009).

Mobility of humans, ideas and things entails encounters and the production or reproduction of similarities and difference, as those who move or are moved always tend to position themselves or be positioned (hierarchically) in relation to those they meet and to one another. While every cultural community is mobile within itself, technologies make possible movement between places and cultural spaces. Thanks to technologies of mobility, cultural encounters informed by 'interconnecting local and global hierarchies' are possible

(Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a), and have been so throughout the histories of local and global encounters.[2] It is also thanks to such technologies of mobility that anthropology as a discipline is possible. Even armchair anthropologists depended and still depend on accounts harnessed by some kind of mobility (diaries and travel accounts by missionaries, traders, adventurers, colonial officers, etc.) to make possible their representations of others and their local and global connections and disconnections. In many ways, anthropology could be seen as the discipline for the study of privileged and underprivileged mobility, as evidenced by documentary films such as José Padilha's 'Secrets of the Tribe'.[3]

Mobility and the study of underprivileged mobilities

Who gets to move, or whose mobility is privileged, shall determine whose version of what encounter is documented, how it is documented, and the extent of its visibility in the marketplace of ideas. As John Urry (2007, p. 9) puts it, 'Moving between places physically or virtually can be a source of status and power, an expression of the rights to movement either temporarily or permanently. And where movement is coerced it may generate social deprivation and exclusion'. The very idea of going for 'fieldwork trips', central to disciplines such as anthropology, social geography and agricultural sciences for example, entails the mobile researcher, even if only to study 'others' assumed, a priori, to be 'immobilised' by frozen traditions and customs, and confined to particular places and spaces. Privileged as our mobility as researchers is over and above the mobility of those we study, we run the risk of arrogating to ourselves the status of omniscient mediators of identities, encounters and practices, and the prerogative of freezing the subjects and objects of our study outside the local and global historical contexts that give them meaning and relevance (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a,b). We might also underplay the power dynamics that favour us and our perspectives on or interpretations of our encounters with immobilised or frozen subjects. The popular emphasis in many an anthropological circle on the 'ethnographic present' for example could result in inadequate attention to Tylor's (1871) insistence that cultures or aspects thereof must be studied in historical perspective to rightly attribute cause and effect and avoid easy associations and untenable correlations. Without a historical perspective, it might be impossible to fathom the full extent to which the very ethnographic encounters of the present are productive of cultures and cultural identities (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Representations end up engendering their own *habitus*, and as *homo academicus*, we often are far more powerful than we imagine, in the production and reproduction of social reality in our quest for cultural capital and prestige (Bourdieu 1996, 2004).

If, as researchers, our (mis)representations are endorsed by our peers or by other instances of legitimation, a new reality is born and baptised, at least in our disciplinary or scholarly 'tribe'. In anthropology, this is well illustrated by debates on the relative importance of 'nature' and 'nurture', or 'biology' and 'culture' in shaping human behaviour, best epitomised by the controversies between Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman on Samoans,[4] and between Napoleon Chagnon and Kenneth Good on Yanomami.[5] At privileged marketplaces of ideas, we (mis)represent people, places and spaces not so much by presenting how they define and relate to themselves but with what we successfully sell as their identities or realities. Sometimes a people, place or space benefits from different perspectives or personalities – those of Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman for example. Contestations among perspectives demonstrate the complexities confronting researchers trying to understand and explain the messiness of identities and everyday lives. People, places and spaces have an existence and accounts for the Who, What, Where, When, How and Why of that existence are possible, with or without an interpreter, intermediary or interlocutor from or

for the outside world. It is in this regard that we appreciate the rise and growing importance of scholarship critical of simplistic dichotomies and 'radical alterity' in general (Keesing 1994, p. 301) and concerning African mobilities and identities in particular (Mafeje 1998, Adesina 2008, Sharp 2008a). It is also reason for seeking to complement scholarly ways of knowing with more popular and other systems of knowledge (Nyamnjoh 2012a,b).

Anthropology has come a long way from its image as a marred discipline, marred by an excessive fixation with the mobility of the West, which underplayed and invisibilised the mobility, and facilitation of the immobilisation, of the rest. Assumptions of the immobility of the cultures and peoples early anthropologists studied meant that even when such studies were of mobility, the questions were often asked in ways that took existing borders and boundaries of purported cultural identities in the culture of the anthropologist for granted, and presented mobilities of the culture being researched as pathologies or undesired flows deserving urgent containment. For decades, scholars from within Africa and other previously colonised territories have radically challenged the authority and authenticity of the social and historical imaginings of their peoples, locations and experiences from insensitive perspectives informed by an 'epistemology of alterity' (Mafeje 1998, Depelchin 2005, Adesina 2008). With the transformation of the discipline of anthropology as a result of flexible mobility and globalisation, it is hard to reason with or justify radical notions of difference in the same way that was possible in the past. The norm today is to problematise rather than take as given the ethnographic presents of people, places and spaces, by considering them within the interconnecting local and global hierarchies that produce, configure and govern identities (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a,b, MacGaffey 1995, Pelckmans 2011).

This transformation of anthropology is all the more glaring as, unlike in the past when anthropologists were preponderantly western in origin/ancestry, training and/or identification, westerners no longer enjoy the monopoly of mobility and of interpretation, and classification of the world (domesticating or taming the wild in the manner of a hunter and his dog, with spears, guns and dog pee, so to say). The gaze of the western scholar is hardly as omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent as it used to be. So-called 'native scholars', with various degrees of mobility of their own, now have an opportunity to challenge the prejudices of western scholars with prejudices of their own (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, Ribeiro and Escobar 2006, Collins and Gallinat 2010, Hannerz 2010, MacClancy and Fuentes 2011). Together with their western counterparts, 'native' African scholars are conversing on the importance of 'objective' or 'inter-subjective' accounts of mobility and of encounters with 'imagined' or socially constructed difference, without assuming, a priori, that such objectivity necessarily resides with an outsider with etic pretensions (Ntarangwi *et al.* 2006, Devisch and Nyamnjoh 2011, Nyamnjoh 2012a).

It is much clearer today, thanks to the birth and rise of 'native' or 'alternative' scholarship critical of conventional narratives of encounters, that the opposition between 'outsider' and 'insider' is hardly of relevance, and that the challenge is how to provide for both in our quest for complex and nuanced understandings of identities complicated by flexible mobility. In a flexible and interconnected world, we need not leave London, Amsterdam, Paris or New York to study ethnic identities and cultural difference (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a,b). It is not unthinkable that one might find far more on African material cultures in these metropolitan locations than in an African city or village. Dutch social scientists such as Rijk van Dijk, Birgit Meyer and Ineke van Kessel, who have studied Ghanaians in the Netherlands, could well opt never to visit Ghana and still have something pertinent to say about Ghanaian identities. Rendering visible the myriad mobilities of a world in motion results in truly interconnected, entangled or even mangled worlds of

identities, just as each and every one of us who inhabits the world is interconnected, entangled or even mangled. If we liken mobile Africans to containers, they are containers filled up not with purities but with entangled or mangled intricacies, in the sense of the myriad identity margins they negotiate and navigate in the course of their mobilities. And these impunities sum up to their individual or collective *habitus*, from which they draw their cultural and social capital to authenticate themselves relationally. The same could be said of any other people or any region of a world where it is no longer unproblematic to assume that particular places and spaces belong to particular races, people and cultures (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a). Such a world calls for subtle, contextualised and nuanced understanding of how people, places and spaces relate and interrelate. The approach should be as curious about what is *apparently* familiar as it is about the *obviously* strange.

The mobility of cultures does not immediately translate into *mutual* cultural influence or cultural integration as such influence is often dependent on power relations that characterise each encounter of people and cultures, and that shape whose perceptions, however problematic and contested, shall carry the day. It does not help that as researchers and scholars, we, wittingly or not, are itinerant evangelists or salespersons for certain forms of rationality even when we preach cultural relativism. Thus, in what way is participant observation, that privileges slash-and-burn or sporadic encounters with those we study, *that* different from armchair anthropology which held that savages were best studied from a distance? Since the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski's personal diaries in 1967 revealing his prejudices and assumptions of superiority over the Trobriand Islanders (Malinowska 1989 [1967]),[6] we can ill afford to uncritically endorse claims of participant observation as evidence of scientific rigour or compassion. Margaret Mead, in her fieldwork among Samoans, could stand the mosquitoes and the humidity, but could not stand sharing a room with the natives, and she eventually gave up pretending to be like them, preferring to do as much as she could to be comfortable on her own terms.[7] It is not enough to argue in favour of place and space for all cultures, without making a considered effort to go native in a real way – like Tom Harrison 'The Barefoot Anthropologist',[8] without his excesses – to understand the thrills and challenges of cultural emersion and living the life of another in a context of skewed power relations. What does it mean, for example, to live without the technologies of comfort an academic takes for granted, such as processed and pre-packaged foods, running water, indoor toilets, electricity, transport, cell phones, mastery of the dominant languages of global communication, individual privacy and an abstract sense of human rights and freedoms. The test of the cultural pudding being in the practical eating, how can we overly emphasise our rhetoric of respect for other cultures when we know very little what it takes to live those cultures in an interconnected world of hierarchies, and, at the same time, are not readily open to complementing our outsider accounts with the insider representations of those who live the cultures? The reality, however, is that cultures with the power to enforce ambitions of dominance define not only themselves but also the less empowered cultures which they encounter and with which they interact. Thus, participant observation however profoundly engaging could always be complemented with especially insider accounts to ensure the multivocality and multiplicity of perspectives that come with the recognition and provision for knowledge-making as a process of co-production and co-implication (Nyamnjoh 2012a,b).

Problematic assumptions such as cultural relativism have come under increasing scrutiny with the accelerated mobility of the inhabitants of the now independent states that used to be colonies. Not only is there accelerated mobility among those previously labelled 'immobile', but there also is accelerated mobility among them, and between them and what used to be known as the metropolis. And just as the social and cultural values,

knowledge and assumptions of the colonisers moved with the colonisers, so are the sociocultural values, assumptions and knowledges of the mobile citizens/nationals of former colonies mobile with them. An additional factor in this accelerated mobility is global consumerism and its fascination with cultural tourism or the commodification of cultural identities (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). But the unequal power dynamics remain, which means that even when cross-cultural influences are evident in the lives of people in the North and South, the tendency remains to want to define and confine such influences. Such resilience of bounded notions of culture (clearly socially and politically produced) is at the service of vested interests in defining and confining. As Jean-Loup Amselle (2002, p. 220) puts it, the 'idea of the "closed society"' occupies an important place in western social thought and is part of the complex concepts by which western civilisation constructed its identity in opposition to a fictive radical alterity and rooted in colonial expansion (see also Magubane 2004). Western perceptions have a tendency to shape social reality even if the perceptions are the result of misrepresentations (Ferguson 2006, pp. 7–39). In this regard, anthropologists are notably guilty. Anthropology played easily into the hands of colonialism and imperialism, and today, in the academic marketplace, producing 'difference' seems irresistible as long as it guarantees shelf life (Keesing 1994, Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, Mafeje 1998, Tierney 2000, Harrison 2011).

If the global tendency is to be 'mobile with', as Peter Adey (2010) has argued, people on the move behave like dogs. Like dogs, we tend to mark and demarcate or signpost everywhere we go, to familiarise or domesticate the unknown and affirm our authority over particular territories. The signposts of male dogs are most imposing, almost as if female dogs were without signposts of their own, immobile, non-existent or irrelevant. Yet women are mobile as well, and their experiences, expectations and encounters are significant, as I attempt to show in *Insiders and Outsiders* (Nyamnjoh 2006) and in *Intimate Strangers* (Nyamnjoh 2010a). The marking of places and spaces by mobile men may be more imposing, compared to the mostly subtle and discrete mobility and presence of women, but men do not have the monopoly of seeking to tame and name the unfamiliar (Amadiume 1997, pp. 183–198, Blixen 1999 [1937], Magubane 2004, 2007, Nnaemeka 2005, p. 55). In place of reeking signposts by dogs, humans are mobile with their social backgrounds, positions and *habitus* – that to which they are habituated, and which they seek to reproduce even as they are open to improvisation and adaptation to varying degrees (Bourdieu 1996, Wacquant 1996, Calhoun 2000). We are mobile with the ideas, beliefs, practices, and social and material culture we are used to, and which we usually try to reproduce or adapt on our own terms. People, far from travelling in disembedded ways as isolated individuals, often and mostly travel with their cultural values and ways of life, and are very eager to re-enact, reactivate or reignite these values in their host communities, however hostile. It is in this sense that some have used the notion of 'travelling cultures' (Clifford 1988, 1992, de Bruijn *et al.* 2001a,b) or 'cultural mobility' (Greenblatt *et al.* 2010) to indicate the specific features or situations where forms of mobility are combined with a mobility of social forms and institutions. Dogs might be obedient and follow the 'leader of the pack' in the main, but they are also stubborn and could behave in unpredictable and uncontainable ways. People are not dissimilar; they might accommodate, adapt, subvert or, like the Rottweiler, savage certain tendencies, but they are seldom passive even in victimhood.

Mobilities ashift

That *habitus* travels would ordinarily not be that surprising if some, with their ambitions of dominance, did not continue to create the impression that particular cultures are tied to

particular people (ethnic or racial), particular places and particular spaces; and by extension, that the people identified with such cultures are equally immobile, or should be immobilised or quarantined until they have internalised their place in the hierarchies of the world. Although peoples of various races, ethnicities, cultures and places might travel to New York, London, Paris, Dakar or Cape Town, not everyone has had the opportunity of signposting indelibly on the landscape, because not only are we *differently* mobile (Adey 2010, p. 3) but we are also *differentially* (Fleischer 2009, Potts 2010, Alpes 2011, Nyamnjoh 2011, Owen 2011) mobile. Although we all have the capacity to define or to name, not everyone or every culture has the power or legitimacy to tame places, spaces and people in their mobility. Any casual examination of the names of places – from continents to countries, cities, villages and streets – tells one whose signposts have carried what weight where, and who, in their mobility, are confined to consume or bear the burdens of the signposts of others (Elliot and Urry 2010).

Africans are not expected to be mobile, even as mobility is celebrated. The impression is given that Africans are mobile only when things go wrong or others so desire that they would ordinarily stay grounded, were it not for rapid population growth, economic stagnation, poverty, unemployment, conflicts and ecological disasters. Nothing African moves unless provoked by forces beyond their control. The literature overly dramatises the role of external pull and push factors, for Africans daring to leave their otherwise bounded communities, frozen realities and grounded existence. When their mobility is reluctantly tolerated or recognised, this is hardly on their own terms. Those who permit African mobility do so *selectively*[9] (Hamilton 1997, Bergson and Ngnemzué 2008, Foé 2008, Peberdy 2009). States harken to dominant political and economic interests to dictate who shall move where and for how long (Findley 1989, van Dijk *et al.* 2001, Adeboju 2002a,b). This perspective contradicts the reality of long histories of flexible mobility of Africa (Kopytoff 1987, de Bruijn *et al.* 2001a,b) as a continent composed of layers of spaces 'constantly joined, displaced, and recombined through wars, conquests and the mobility of goods and persons' (Mbembe 2000, p. 263).

The notion of an isolated 'tribe' never had validity because the very act of naming and labelling in itself calls for an encounter (Mafeje 1998, Adesina 2008). MacGaffey (1995, p. 1029) demonstrates the lack of 'objectively verifiable truth conditions' within the notion of 'tribe' in light of Kongo identity. Indeed, MacGaffey not only demonstrates that no essential Kongo exists but also goes on to show how fluid Kongo identity has been since 1483, and how the BaKongo did not follow the social evolutionary trajectory implied in the tribal/civilised dichotomy, and how colonial administration shaped the very characteristics that were meant to make the BaKongo 'tribal'. Interestingly, as MacGaffey points out, the BaKongo only identified themselves as a tribal 'BaKongo' in 1910, whereas before they identified themselves in terms of clans and patrilateral affiliations (MacGaffey 1995, p. 1032). Today, in a postcolonial context of globalisation, they continue to identify themselves as 'Bakongo', but as their everyday realities are informed by values resulting from mobility and interactions with others in and outside their localities, country and continent, they are actively involved in the reproduction and contestation of their Bakongoness (MacGaffey 1995, p. 1032–1037).

MacGaffey's work points to the epistemic violence that comes with naming and labelling from outside without understanding or caring about the realities on the inside. MacGaffey seems to make a strong case for the relevance of insider perspectives in identification. It is also misleading to overemphasise pull and push factors, as there is abundant evidence that many Africans move out of their own free will, and in tune with prevalent philosophies of being and becoming that provide for flexible mobility and

flexible identities. Piot (1999, pp. 7–19) points to an idea of personhood among the Kabre of Togo, where the self is fluid, 'multiple and permeable and infused with the presence of others, both human and nonhuman', and where the visible body is connected to 'an invisible, and more mobile, "shadow"'. The cultural background of Africans and their optimistic perception of the outside world encourage many of them to move creatively, physical and socially, as evidenced by my examination of ethnographic fiction by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Okoth p'Bitek and myself below, just as some choose to stay (both physically and socially), preferring others to move on their behalf, even under supposedly difficult circumstances (Baker 2001, Sichone 2008, Piot 2010, Owen 2011, Nyamnjoh 2011). And like people everywhere (Adey 2010, Greenblatt *et al.* 2010), Africans move with their *habitus* (food habits, social relations, rituals, religious convictions and ideologies) and material culture (van Dijk *et al.* 2001), even as they are open to new experiences and to adaptation.

If there is inequality among travelling dogs, African dogs are particularly disadvantaged and detested. Not only are their signposts largely inconvenient and invisible outside their continent, their mobility even within Africa is perceived as an anomaly (Hamilton 1997, de Bruijn *et al.* 2001b, Nyamnjoh 2006, Landau 2011a). The wealthier and highly educated Africans, who are more easily tolerated elsewhere, are accused both in Africa and elsewhere of fuelling capital flight and 'brain drain', even when not every brain drain is a brain down the drain, as 'brain gain' for both the place of origin and destination at different time-frames is a well-documented reality (Davies 2007, Ratha and Shaw 2007).[10] This notwithstanding, scholarship influenced by politics of exclusion has presented intra-African migrants in search of a productive and meaningful existence as an unbearable burden on those fortunate enough to be recognised and represented as nationals, citizens, locals and subjects (Peberdy 2009, Neocosmos 2010, Potts 2010). Confronted with 'outsiders' in the form of migrant workers, undocumented migrants, nomads, frontier workers, refugees and, increasingly, professionals and highly skilled professionals (Akokpari 2000, van Dijk *et al.* 2001, Adepoju 2000, 2002), locals feel resentment towards African 'Others', whose presence is perceived as a threat, a danger or an infection in need of urgent attention (Gugler and Geschiere 1998, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, Gugler 2002). South Africa and Botswana are good examples of these dynamics, hence the closer attention I pay them below.

Mobility and belonging in South Africa

How far back one chooses to go is indicative of what role one would like history to play in one's articulation of identity in a world constantly on the move, a world where there are, in principle, few sacred places or spaces to people on the move. The making of contemporary South Africa is the story, per excellence, of visible and invisible mobilities (Peberdy 2009, Klaaren 2011). As elsewhere, unregulated and even regulated human mobility in South Africa are presented as a threat to the economic and physical well-being and achievements of insiders. To be visible for citizenship, nationality or belonging, bounded notions of geography and culture are deployed. Official and popular discourses are infused with a deep suspicion of those who move, particularly those moving to urban areas and between countries and continents. Freedom of movement, especially by people deemed to be less endowed economically, is perceived by those who consider themselves more economically gifted as potentially disastrous and thus needing to be contained at all cost. There is clamour for policies to contain foreigners, mostly those from the rest of

Africa, who continue to be seen as the source of HIV/AIDS, the primary cause of crime, and a threat to South African jobs and cultural values (Landau 2011a,b).

Like the global consumer capitalism, which it serves, and services, the South African state requires mobility and immobility simultaneously to function, but both seem to want this exclusively on their own terms. The very idea of South African citizenship has historically been shaped by preoccupations with mobility and its regulation with yardsticks such as *official status*, *lawfulness* and *residence*. Klaaren (2011) traces the current inclusive and simultaneously structurally unequal legal cultural concept of citizenship based on official residence to the regulation of the mobility of three populations (Asian, African and European) in South Africa between 1897 and 1937. He argues that the interests of economic actors in restricting the mobility of labour and the interest of political elites in establishing and safeguarding their status and identity within their communities together motivate and influence the regulation of mobility and, by extension, the South African concept of citizenship (Klaaren 2011).

The situation is compounded by elites motivated to distinguish between 'our' poor and 'other' poor (Sharp 2008b), and by the fact of unequal citizenship in terms of material possibilities and service delivery between urban-based and rural-based South Africans (Vigneswaran 2011). Although the state has tried to monopolise control over space in the interest of nationalism and elites, the May 2008 violence revealed that the population is active in its own right in determining boundaries and control (Neocosmos 2010, Landau 2011a). Within the framework of hierarchies among nationals as insiders and between nationals and non-South Africans, even where citizenship is granted to mobile outsiders, the emphasis in official documentation on 'original country of birth' means that naturalised citizens are always haunted by the potential inferiority of 'legal citizenship' to 'citizenship by birth', as claims of authentic belonging as 'sons and daughters' of the soil – autochthons – can always be invoked to exclude those who belong only by force of the law (Fauvelle-Aymar and Segatti 2011, Nieftagodien 2011). In this sense, the law facilitates violence against those seen not to be lawful or official rights-bearers. To make a case about who belongs, South Africans do not hesitate to explore and embrace the distinction between 'handheld and heartfelt nationality' and indicators of belonging (Bakewell 2007).

The May 2008 xenophobic violence suggests the potential for scapegoating mobile Africans by black South Africans who have stayed at the margins despite the end of Apartheid. Faced with citizenship without content, and having to cope with widespread poverty and the continuing struggle for dignity, such South Africans have assumed a normative vision of citizenship in their language of rights and expectations of entitlements in the form of basic shelter, services, jobs and financial stability (Vigneswaran 2011). Today urban spaces in Alexandra and Tembisa, two cosmopolitan Johannesburg townships affected by the May 2008 violence, continue to be perceived and appropriated by their respective dominant Zulu- and Xhosa-speaking residents as their exclusive preserve, while stiffly resisting foreigners and South Africans they perceive to be outsiders, with claims of greater entitlement. Despite their cosmopolitan and inclusive pretensions, urban spaces in South Africa are divided and contested by competing local communities seeking entitlements on the basis of ethnicity and nationality as dictated by constitutional provisions and socio-economic realities (Ogunyemi 2012). The controversy raised in March 2012 when Western Cape Premier and leader of the Democratic Alliance, Helen Zille, complained that her province was taking care of 'education refugees' from the Eastern Cape,[11] suggests the continued relevance to understanding post-apartheid South Africa of Mamdani's (1996) distinctions between 'citizens' and 'subjects' in terms of legal and political rights, and between 'ethnic citizens' and 'ethnic strangers' in the sphere of

cultural identities, governed by customs and traditions as colonial inventions or corruptions. It suggests as well a short memory of apartheid special history when as part of the Cape Province of those days comprising today's Western, Eastern and Northern Cape provinces, what today falls under the Western Cape was disproportionately advantaged with a large proportion of white schools and a small proportion of townships and farm schools, compared to the mainly rural and black populations of the Eastern Cape (Christie 2012, p. 10). Regimented mobility and belonging prevails, despite the enshrinement of equality of citizenship in the constitution.

In the face of their limited options to claim a legal presence and even fewer options for social acceptance, mobile Africans as non-nationals face an uphill task achieving popular or practical recognition in South Africa. Consequently, they find themselves forging 'multidimensional counter identities which both justify their presence in the country and grant them a kind of status and freedom from the weight of belonging to a society which they would not have chosen to join' (Landau 2011c). They develop a discourse and an attitude of transcience and superiority (Landau 2011b), making it clear that with less rigid regulation of their mobility, they could come and go with greater flexibility and with little inclination for permanently choosing South Africa over their other countries of origin (Sharp 2008b). Additionally, they negotiate marginality through relationships, often romantic, that might make them more accepted, and engage in spaces of popular culture and conviviality. There is an exotic element to foreigners which many love and take advantage of (Mpe 2001, Owen 2011). Hence, Landau (2011c) calls for institutional structures that provide for efforts at integration among South Africans and between South Africans and non-South Africans, as well as for managing rather than promoting hostility to difference.

Despite the commendable efforts at studying mobile Africans, few of the studies are of an ethnographic nature. The perspectives and experiences of mobile Africans themselves are absent. Studies reflecting them would require getting to know them as human beings, spending time with them in intimate circles and developing research questions not of a slash-and-burn or rapid appraisal nature common in sociological surveys but of a deep, multilayered ethnographic type of serious anthropological endeavours, with a focus on the complexities and contradictions of what it means to claim and deny belonging. The predicaments of mobile Africans are compounded, once they arrive in their host country or host community, which, of course, is far from homogeneous in its attitudes towards foreigners, as there are generational, gender, class, racial, ethnic and individual differences in whether and to what extent mobile Africans are welcome. Dimensions that may lead to difference include the age-old divisions that separate or unite people such as income and education levels, religious affiliations, political leanings, period of residence in a particular community and relationships of social integration such as marriage.

The reality of mobile Africans is not as simple and straightforward as often suggested in popular stereotypes and media representations (Adepoju 2002, Nyamnjoh 2006, 2010b, Monson and Arians 2011). Such caricature does little justice to a rich history of internal and intrastate migration. Quantitative and survey type studies proliferate, while there is a quasi-absence of ethnographic studies even of the worst type. With a handful of exceptions, few anthropologists have studied the inflow of migrants to South Africa following the end of apartheid. Indeed, as Owen (2011) remarks, the few anthropological studies of migration into South Africa from neighbouring countries during apartheid tended to be confined to the political economy of labour migration. Her ethnography of migrants in South Africa from the Democratic Republic of Congo is a significant contribution in challenging limited and limiting use of the concept 'diaspora' and broadening it beyond western migratory processes and imagination of community and belonging to encompass similar processes

and creative imagination by mobile Africans within Africa. It is also a welcome addition and invitation for more ethnographies of intra-African migration to complement the current plethora of quantitative studies with scant focus on the lived experiences and complex relationships that shape and are shaped by migrants in and beyond their host states and communities. A second ethnographic account – *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* – happens to be a novel by the late South African literary scholar Phaswane Mpe (2001). This novel explores the tensions and temptations of narrow nationalism, and simplistic homogenisation and demonisation of African migrants in the 'new' South Africa. It questions the tendency to celebrate official rhetoric uncritically internalised and reproduced by ordinary black South Africans of having graduated into citizenship, only for this to be endangered by the influx of black Africans from countries farther up beyond the Limpopo River with little but savagery and preying primitivity to offer.

Intimate connections through the marriage of ethnography and fiction

As a child of many worlds (Nyamnjoh 2002), whose idea of identity and belonging is as open-ended as being 'married but available' (Nyamnjoh 2009), I am a strong advocate, not only of the need for thick ethnographic documentation of the experiences of mobile Africans but also for the systematic exploration of the relationship between fiction and ethnography through greater investment in the ethnographic novel (Nyamnjoh 2011). To show it is possible to combine ethnography and fiction, I presented my ethnography of intra-African mobility as a scholarly book – *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa* (Nyamnjoh 2006) – and as a novel – *Intimate Strangers* (Nyamnjoh 2010a).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s when I did the ethnographic research that led to these books, Botswana was widely regarded as an island of prosperity in a continent of economic and political upheavals and uncertainty. Like neighbouring South Africa following the end of apartheid, Botswana provided place and space for mobile Africans, marginal or otherwise, who were seeking fulfilment. Such migrants compete for employers, resources and other opportunities with those on the local mobile margins who feel more entitled to them as nationals, citizens and subjects. With a burning desire to survive and succeed, border-crossing neighbours from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and other countries of the South African Development Community north of the Limpopo, and from faraway countries such as Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria and Ghana, are willing to be used and abused for much less than their local counterparts.

This situation plays into the hands of employers, whether citizen or fellow immigrant, quick to recognise the advantages of playing marginal insiders off against migrant marginal outsiders, and both of them off against the possibilities and limitations of the law and the state. These relationships are at once distant and intimate, rewarding and alienating, material and immaterial, and enhanced and contested by technologies. Connecting methodologies of fiction and ethnography enhances the possibilities for investigating, comprehending and reflecting these complex and nuanced interconnections.

The thrills and tensions, possibilities and dangers, and rewards and frustrations of social, cultural and physical boundary-making and boundary-crossing are narrated in *Intimate Strangers* through the experiences of Immaculate, an outsider, a stranger and a *makwerekwere*.[12] Immaculate follows her fiancé to Botswana only to find him off in the USA and refusing to marry her. Immaculate is, however, determined to outwit victimhood. Operating from the margins of society, through her own ingenuity and an encounter with transnational researcher Dr Winter-Bottom Nanny, she is able to earn some money as a

research assistant. She learns how maids struggle to make ends meet and how their employers wrestle to keep them as 'intimate strangers'. Resolving to turn disappointments into blessings, she perseveres until she can no longer stand the repeated efforts of others to define and confine her. Through the relationships she forges with insiders, locals and citizens, and with fellow outsiders of various backgrounds and social positions, the reader is introduced to what it means to be an intimate stranger in a foreign country, interacting and competing with nationals and citizens and with other outsiders, and compounding the predicaments of all involved. Hers is the story of the everyday, with the tensions of being, belonging and becoming that bring together different worlds, and explores the various dimensions of servitude, mobility and marginality, as well as being in transit or transition.

The following excerpts from *Intimate Strangers* illustrate, I hope, the power of the literary form to allow a degree of intimate connection with the protagonist of the story that complements traditional ethnographic writing. The way in which the reader is drawn in to the problems of Immaculate invites an emotional connection and communicates knowledge to the reader on a different level from that provided for in scholarly emphasis on argument, rationality and logic, and allows for a closer connection that nicely complements the distancing and objectifying tendencies evident in *Insiders and Outsiders: Citizenship and Xenophobia in Contemporary Southern Africa*, which drew on the same data set.

Making ends meet as a research assistant and the unbearable comforts of love

As Gupta and Ferguson (1997b, pp. 35–40) have argued, doing ethnography in a 'deterritorialized world' calls for an idea of fieldwork that focuses more on shifting locations than on bounded fields. It also means cultivating an intellectual predisposition to see the familiar in unlikely places and the strange in familiar circles, for, as Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe's (1974 [1964], p. 46) novel *Arrow of God* advises, 'The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place'. In *Intimate Strangers* (Nyamnjoh 2010a), Immaculate and Dr Winter-Bottom Nanny – two women whose mobility substantiates our earlier claim that men do not have the monopoly of seeking to tame and name the unfamiliar – are permanently on the move, and no ethnography can do justice to their complex and nuanced identities by defining and confining them a priori. Every identity label is like a window inviting the ethnographer into deeper layers of being human in ways that defy categorisation. The fact that Africans, like people elsewhere, are mobile with their *habitus* and that they seek to cultivate, maintain and enhance relationships across countries, places and spaces makes it possible for Dr Winter-Bottom (an African-American researcher) and Immaculate (a Mimbolander) to become part of a network of Mimbolanders abroad in the USA and in Botswana simultaneously to encounter each other and to get entangled or mangled up as 'strangers' made 'intimate' by research. This is one of the senses in which the novel *Intimate Strangers* complements the enthography *Insiders and Outsiders*. It is that complementarity that the following excerpt from Chapters 36 and 38 of the novel hopefully illustrates. The excerpt also indicates, from the layered experiences of Immaculate as an 'outsider' in Botswana, the richness of life which formal academic writing often conceals through labels such as 'my informants' or 'participants in the study'. The freedom to explore life in its multifaceted nature creates less room for dichotomy, making it possible to see Noway, for example, as a man who is both good and bad, attractive and repulsive, manipulative and loving. Like mobile Africans in South Africa discussed above (Landau 2011b), Immaculate develops a discourse and an attitude of transcience and superiority *vis-à-vis* some of her Batswana hosts such as Philip who torments her in the name of love, and of respect and a common humanity towards others such as the reassuring and

accommodating Angel. And just like fellow African immigrants in South Africa (Sharp 2008b), it is clear that with less rigid regulation of her mobility, Immaculate could come and go with greater flexibility and with little inclination for permanently choosing Botswana over her Mimboland of birth.

> Dr Winter-Bottom Nanny was away for a long time. I had fulfilled my contract with her, by transcribing and sending via email the interviews, just as I had promised before she left. Satisfied with the work, she had paid me handsomely via the Western Union electronic money transfer service. It was the biggest amount of money I had ever handled. I proceeded to see how best I could invest it, only to run into difficulties, with my Zimbabwean boyfriend, Noway, and with a Motswana guy. I'm too scared to mention his name.
>
> Exactly four years and six months after she left, I got a surprise phone call from Dr Nanny, saying she was in Gaborone on a restitution visit. She had an autographed copy of her book for me, and could I meet her at the Gaborone Cactus Hotel at 6 pm? 'Of course', I screamed with excitement. I wanted to see her new baby, the one I had helped to midwife.
>
> Indeed, I was overjoyed to receive a signed copy of *Burdens of Womanhood: Being an Underling at the Margins*, which I couldn't wait to read, curious as I was, to see what she had made of my and the other accounts I had dutifully helped her gather and painfully transcribed verbatim. Although Dr Nanny had told me that repetitive questioning was 'the soul of ethnography', I was dying to know what she had been able to make of material collected through the boring practice of having everybody reply to the same set of questions.
>
> Dr Nanny could see excitement inscribed on my face when she handed me 2000 USD as my share of what she termed 'the generous royalties' she had been paid in advance for her book by her publishers. I didn't understand much about royalties, but I was pleased with the doors of possibilities that the money instantly opened up for me.
>
> 'With this money, I'm heading straight for Mimboland', I told her, amid hugs of appreciation.
>
> 'With Noway, I hope', said Dr Nanny, hungry for news.
>
> 'Noway is history'.
>
> She took a seat. 'Tell', she said, like a master gossip.
>
> 'Story long, and time short', I tried to wriggle out.
>
> But Dr Nanny was her old stubborn self. 'I'm in a hurry to go nowhere', she said, with a concrete look of you-seem-to-have-forgotten-the-patient-researcher-that-I-am on her face.
>
> I gave in. 'Then be ready to stay up all night', I told her.
>
> She asked me to come with her to the poolside, where she ordered drinks, switched off her cell phone, and asked me to do the same.
>
> 'Now tell', she said, switching on her tape recorder.
>
> 'No taping this one', I warned.
>
> She switched off the recorder.
>
> And I began ...
>
> As I remember telling you several years ago, I met Noway on my way to Zambia. And the reason I was going to Zambia was to look for second-hand clothes to sell in Gaborone. But I didn't know that in Botswana, foreigners are not allowed to do that line of business. On going to Zambia, I forgot my residence permit, and at the border I had problems with the immigration authorities. I tried to phone some of my friends to copy my permit and fax it to me, but I couldn't reach them in time to continue my journey. One of the Immigration Officers took me to a lodge where I could stay the night. I hadn't a budget for that, so I had to use the money I brought for buying things from Zambia.

I was looking for somebody to phone back to Gaborone, when I met Noway. I asked him where I could phone, and he offered to take me there. I phoned Paul who faxed me the papers.

I was supposed to report to the Immigration Office in the morning at 8 o'clock. But Noway said, 'No, don't go back because those people there are going to give you hell, better just avoid them'. And I followed his advice.

The next day Noway came with a young boy, and they invited me for braai, but I said I was too tired to eat. They came again the following day. He asked me to sleep to be in a state to return to Gaborone, having advised me against continuing to Zambia, and against going back to the Immigration Office.

Anyway, that's how I came to know Noway. We travelled back to Gaborone together, in the company car they were using, and they dropped me off and we exchanged phone numbers.

From time to time he was coming to check on me, and eventually this led to a relationship.

In the beginning, he was a nice person, but he was staying with another lady I didn't know about, but we will come to that. He would come and check on me. I was staying with Christians, and they would not allow me to see him, so we usually talked over the fence where I was staying.

After some time, Paul advised, 'Why can't you just talk to him and just try to see?'

So I tried to see, and from the beginning he was fine. Relationship-wise he was ok, but his problem was financial management. He was also married, which he didn't disclose to me. Instead, he told me, 'I was married but I am divorced'. He let me know about his kids. We used to visit them in Zimbabwe. And I didn't know he was communicating with the wife all the time, although they were not living together.

…

Then I said, 'Papers or no papers, if you want to be with me, divorce and marry me. If you want to be with your wife, then go out of my life'.

He kept on saying, 'I will, I will, I will'.

One day he told me, all of a sudden, 'I am quitting my job'.

I said, 'Why quit your job? That job is so secure. Why do you want to leave the job?'

What he said did not make sense to me. But he didn't listen. He went ahead and put in a resignation letter and resigned and they gave him a package of twenty three thousand Pula. The cheque came to me and we went and cashed it together.

I told him, 'You keep this money because houses are cheap in Zimbabwe. You can buy a house for five thousand and then with the rest of the money you can do business, since you don't want to work'.

So I left him with the money, but it didn't take long before the money was finished. He didn't buy the house when he went home to Zimbabwe. All he returned with was a van of mangoes.

I asked him, 'You bought mangoes for twenty three thousand Pula?'

He was tongue tied. 'I don't know what happened to the money,', he said, expecting me to believe him.

I let it go.

He kept saying we were still together, but there was nothing in his behaviour to show it. I would go to an auction and buy things, and he would take the things and sell them. I told him I didn't like the lifestyle where he sells house things. 'It's not my way'.

He did little to change.

…

I told him I was moving out. Everything we had in the house – two fridges, beds, wardrobes, a stove, and you name it. I said, 'Ok, I don't mind, I will give you all those things. I will start life afresh'. And I just took my clothes and my shoes, and left.

'Good riddance', interrupted Dr Nanny.

It's not finished. My O and A Level certificates, he took them and threw them away and I didn't realise it until much later.

I went to the house where I was going to stay on my own, feeling bitter but relieved. After a week, one girl from near where Noway lived saw me and said, 'Eh Miss, ah how come you throw your certificates away? I saw them in pieces'.

I couldn't believe it. Certificates are not things to handle carelessly – even mad people know that.

The girl said Noway was seen throwing my certificates, and some kids took the plastic paper and were playing with it, and she only saw them after they had been torn.

I had taken time to laminate my certificates as the best way of protecting them, having grown up where it was all too common for one to lose years of hard earned qualifications to rats and white ants. I went there and everything was in pieces, all gone. No problem, I told myself, there is nothing I can do about it. I phoned Noway and said, 'Noway, you decided to destroy my certificates. Why?' 'To hell with you', was what I got in reply, and he hung up on me.

. . .

And that is the end of my story with Noway.

There is no doubt he wanted me, but he was somebody who suffered from indecision. He didn't know how to put things together. He was a genuine person, though his financial management was not good. He was somebody who can really assist you well, but I couldn't forgive him for hiding from me the fact that he was married, and for not deciding whether he wanted a future with me or with his wife.

I told myself, 'I am not going to have another man. I am not going to have a relationship because it is too depressing'.

. . .

My money was disappearing. My will was weakened. Yet I grew in determination.

One day, I realised I slept but without sleeping. All my heart was about this guy. But it wasn't at all natural infatuation. No, it was not like that.

. . .

I still have the message on my cell phone, and it still gives me goose pimples when I read it. I store every SMS he sends me. I value my cell phone. I appreciate it, I love it, and I want to have it nearby at all times. I don't want to stay for one hour away from my cell phone. Even in church where we are forced to switch off, I will put my phone on vibration mode and place it somewhere sensitive enough to feel it.

My cell phone is my greatest companion, but it is also my greatest terror. The pain, the bad words, they come through my cell phone. When somebody feels like saying something and he can't face me, he will say it through the cell phone. It has made me experience too much abuse. Without my cell phone, I think I would have suffered less. All the messages, all those things he has been telling me, they are there in that place, in that phone.

When he said that, I told myself, 'This is where my life is going to end. If I take this thing hot, hot, I'm a dead person. I will go to Mimboland as a corpse'.

I said I must change my attitude. So I changed to save my life.

His anger was very abnormal.

I don't think he can stay with a woman, and I remember there was a day the sister said, 'Immaculate, I don't know how your relationship with my brother is, but I have come to realise you are the bravest woman I have ever seen, because even we cannot stay with him'.

Even in their house he stays in the room most of the time. If you see him going inside the mother's house, he is going to bathe or to take food from the kitchen.

There are times he will come to my house and tell me, 'The day you misbehave you are a finished'.

I went to talk to Evodia Skatta. I told her what I was going through, and how I needed to protect myself. 'I don't want to die here. I don't have a boyfriend. I don't eat anybody's money. I don't see somebody's husband. But this is what I am going through'. Evodia Skatta said, 'What?'

As long as he kept using whatever he was using to charm me, he got my money if he wanted it. I never refused. If I didn't have any, I looked for it. I could even borrow and give to him. He was always saying he was borrowing the money, but he would never pay me back.

He doesn't take me around in his car, but when he took the car to the garage and it cost two thousand and thirty nine Pula, he took the money from me, and I don't think I'll ever get it refunded. He drives from work to check on me and see whether I am working with a person, but he never picks me up after work. He is there only to make sure I am not with somebody.

He uses that charm when he wants something from me. If he wants something with me, he can use it the whole night before he comes the next day to ask for it. And I won't refuse. He owes me nearly six thousand Pula.

…

When he came the first time to have sex with me, I said, 'I want a condom. If you don't use a condom, I'm going to shout and make so much noise. We are really going to fight'.

I think he used that condom because he was scared of the mother. He doesn't come to me when the sisters or the mother can see him. He is so scared of the mother. If it wasn't the fear of his mother, he could have raped me and slept with me without a condom.

If I haven't moved from where I am staying, it is because I know that if I go and stay on my own, he is going to come there and do anything. Even now, I will be sleeping and I won't know that this guy is coming. He has never come to my house me knowing. If he says I want to come there he is already at the door, making me startle.

…

After we have sex, he can go for three months without talking to me. If we meet, if I meet him face to face, he will just say, 'Dumela'. Now I understand what it means to say Botswana men can use women. How can he sleep with me yet treat me like shit?

Not once would he give me a lift in his car. He wouldn't even buy me Fanta or give me water to drink, yet he borrows all my money and refuses to pay back, and gets drunk on Chibuku every day.

I have never eaten anything from him for almost two years. The only thing he sent to me was one day at work when he most surprisingly sent me units for P100, only to turn around and say it was a mistake, and that I should pay him back.

Botswana men can really make a woman feel cheap.

When the mother discovered that Philip was interested in me, she started with her own medicine, but I didn't know.

…

I decided to talk to Angel, the generous friend of mine we used to visit, whom you interviewed at length.

Angel was pleased to see me after so many years. I had lots of explaining to do, about why I had kept away for so many years. How I could have been in Gaborone all this while and not passed by to say hello. I was a wicked person, she said, half jokingly, refusing to accept what she termed my 'flimsy excuse' that I had dumped my problems enough on her doorstep.

When I accepted my mistake and apologised, she opened the door of her generous heart to the problem that had brought me back to her.

I told her everything, from A to Z, from Noway to Philip. 'I don't know what to do', I concluded.

She said she didn't know anyone who could help. She used to know a Sangoma from Malawi, but that was years ago, and the man had since moved on.

I had come full circle, to be contemplating visiting the very Sangomas I used to reject when I first came to Botswana.

…

Angel and the herbalist have been a great support. Last week I told them I would love to go home for a while to renew communion with family, friends and the land of my birth.

I told them I needed a breath of fresh air, a sign of life from this strange and stifling condition of living like a dead girl walking.

They encouraged me and prayed for the means to come my way to make this journey possible. 'Greet your parents and eat lots of herbs from the tropical rainforest', the herbalist told me, smiling her satisfaction with knowledge of the charming natural environment of my country. 'You'll need all the energy you can muster to overcome the forces that hinder the good life for you'.

Now that you've surprised me so delightfully when I least expected, I am going right after this to book a flight and buy a ticket to Mimboland.

After thirteen years of a life tortured by worries, I want to rediscover what it means to socialise without having to look behind my back. I want to be able to talk freely and feel like a human being again. At 33, I feel the joys of womanhood passing me by.

Ordinarily, I wouldn't be wishing this, given the brutal pride of power gone wild back home, but my traumas here have drained me. I have gone through too much. As my mother would say, if you see a rat running towards fire, know it is being chased by something even more terrifying.

I need time to regain my dignity, even if it means my hands and legs are going to be broken by the blows of excited rifles and batons. I need family, friends. I need people and places I knew. I need to reconnect to feel human again.

Migration is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon involving various dimensions of human mobility in claiming and negotiating inclusion and belonging. It challenges rigid and bounded distinctions between insiders and outsiders in favour of a more flexible understanding of belonging in tune with the frontier and composite reality of Africans as bridging intimacy and distance, parochialism and cosmopolitanism (Sichone 2008). Immaculate's story highlights the thrills and challenges of forging relationships in host communities in the pursuit of success and self-fulfilment. Her story addresses the perplexing question of what it means to be a person of African descent living as a 'stranger' in another African country. Life away from a place called home is informed by memories of home and by social networks and relationships at home and elsewhere. While a single perspective is neither desired nor sufficient, Immaculate's story emphasises the

significance of sociality and relationships in how being and belonging are translated from abstract claims into everyday practice. Mobility, connections and interconnections are emotional, relational and social phenomena best understood as complex, contradictory and messy realities that defy prescriptiveness, predictability, insensitivities and caricature. Through Immaculate, we are introduced to the predicaments of being mobile and also to the inadequacy of the legal mechanisms elaborated and employed by states to regulate inclusion and exclusion in a world of accelerated and flexible mobility. Hers is a complex story that calls for complex approaches.

Immaculate and her story invite us to focus on the lived experiences and web of relationships that shape and are shaped by intra-African mobilities in and beyond host states and host communities. Personal and collective aspirations and pursuits are critical to the mobile, as are their social networks and cultures of interdependence and conviviality. Choice and chance are good bedfellows in the construction and management of social networks and relationships (Owen 2011). This is hardly surprising in a world where agency and contingency are like Siamese twins. By choice or chance, Immaculate successfully draws on her relationships with others and on the cultures or *habitus* of interdependence and conviviality that have shaped her from childhood to maximise her opportunities as a young, mobile African woman. Her story takes us through the relationships she forges in her efforts to navigate, negotiate and contest various constraints and practices of belonging imposed by the logics, histories and politics of hierarchies, dichotomies, boundaries and exclusions, practised by states, internalised and reproduced in varying degrees by nationals, citizens and subjects of host communities, and also by mobile outsiders. The story stresses the need for conceptual flexibility and ethnographic empirical substantiation. It equally challenges social scientists to seek to complement academic sources with ethnographies or accounts of how such deep, flexible and nuanced understanding of mobility and interconnections in Africa play out in different communities, states and regions.

Hierarchies in Immaculate's world are not that dissimilar to hierarchies in the world of knowledge (Bourdieu 2004, pp. 18–24, Connell 2007), a situation which calls for greater accommodation and conviviality among competing perspectives and ways of knowing. In this regard, it is less a question of choosing between ethnography and fiction, and more a question of exploring the extent to which both are mutually enriching and complementary. Thus, if our interest is to establish observable and measurable causation, make generalisations, explore processes of change and detect regularities in human life, a science that explains is needed much more than one which simply interprets. Many a social science are seldom able to establish direct causal relationships, often settling for correlations and representations informed by interpretations that are open to conversations with competing and complementary perspectives (Hall 1997). This is especially true of anthropology where the scientificity of ethnography is often more claimed than authenticated (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1988, pp. 21–54; Nyamnjoh 2012a). If ethnography is less an explanatory than an interpretive science, it stands to benefit from being open to dialogue with other interpretations of the reality it seeks to represent (Collins and Gallinat 2010). Ethnography, as a way of recording human cultures and as a research method within anthropology, by its very nature draws on fiction (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, pp. 29–32), and has much in common with fiction in that it is fashioned from already fashioned accounts (Geertz 1973, p. 15, Clifford 1988, 2003, Nyamnjoh 2011). In light of the ease with which ideology colludes with science in the production of ethnographies, anthropologists have been preoccupied with what ethnography and fiction have in common, and how fiction could be summoned to complement ethnography in the interest of a more rounded understanding of social reality. Even Malinowski, the founding father of ethnography (participant observation or deep hanging

out), saw himself as a possible 'Joseph Conrad of anthropology' (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b, pp. 30–31). In the twenty-first century, ethnographic fiction or 'anthropological novels' may have a role in revealing the 'fiction' behind multiple forms of discourses of dominance and equality, and in giving voice to 'others' in ways that complement anthropological representations. And if undertaken by anthropologists, ethnographic fiction can provide them opportunities for greater involvement in 'Thick Description' (Geertz 1973), and for getting away from touches of superiority that often slip into scholarly publications. Writers of fiction can communicate in metaphors, implying things rather than spelling them out, leaving the reader to fill in the gaps using assumptions drawn from a shared humanity. In ethnography, use of metaphors is limited as ethnographers are required to lead their audience logical step by logical step, leaving little to the imagination, not even the indescribably human (Jacobson 1991). Additionally, ethnographic novels may provide more space and scope to tackle ethical concerns with greater complexity and nuance, given that 'moral judgement in the field is less a simple minded application of ethical verities than a constant, evolving negotiation of responsibility with all those involved' (MacClancy and Fuentes 2011, p. 10). Understanding mobility and identities in Africa requires not an investment in the elusive and illusive quest of purity and authenticity (disciplinary and otherwise), but rather an enrichment of conversations and perspectives in recognition of the creativity and innovativeness that come with the entanglements, messiness and manglements[13] provoked by social encounters in a world *differently* (Adey 2010) and *differentially* (Alpes 2011, Nyamnjoh 2011, Owen 2011) mobile. Difference and similarity are not mutually exclusive (Piot 1999, p. 20), as it is possible to reconcile them in the same places, spaces and bodies. As Clifford reminds us, 'authenticity is relational', and any attempt to present it as an 'essence' can only be understood as 'a political, cultural invention, a local tactic' (1988, p. 12).

Understanding and providing for the negotiation and navigation of myriad identity margins by physically and socially mobile Africans is not the monopoly of social scientists. Musicians, artists and writers are just as involved, and often, are pacesetters on new ways of conceptualising identities. Dibango (1994, p. 88–130), for example, who has lived between France and Cameroon since his teens, uses the concept of '*Négropolitain*' – adopted and adapted to '*Afropolitain*' by Achille Mbembe (2006, p. 4) – to depict his music and himself as straddling 'two cultures, two environments', and to argue that both him and his music cannot be confined to either of the two cultures or environments, without losing their complexity and richness as the fruit of creative navigation, negotiation and appropriation of diverse influences. African writers and popular cultures (Barber 1997) have contributed significantly in collapsing dichotomies in thinking, researching and relating to mobilities and identities in and out of Africa. The Cameroonian music scene is peopled significantly by songs on mobility, emigration and the predicaments of immigrants in France in particular (Nyamnjoh and Fokwang 2005, Alpes 2011).

The creative and highly political literary works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – especially her talk, 'Danger of a Single Story' (TED Conferences 2009), and short story, *The Headstrong Historian* (Adichie 2009) – are excellent examples of the nuanced multivocality needed in representing the complexity of identities forged from the navigation and negotiation of myriad encounters by Africans in and out of the continent. Adichie has described her writing as 'realist fiction' which seeks to 'make connections with emotive significance', in a 'process of turning fact into truth' through 'human stories' that make her readers alive in bodies not their own because of the common and equal humanity they share with her characters, regardless of their differences. Through her realist fiction, readers are reminded that humans 'are not a collection of logical bones and flesh', but 'emotional beings'.[14]

As realist fiction, *The Headstrong Historian* is an apt example of coming to a sense of identity as identification through emotive representations and encounters. It cautions against single and overly simplified narratives of origin, authenticity and belonging. As an 'exhausting . . . sharp-tongued, headstrong daughter who had once wrestled her brother to the ground', Nwamgba defies her mother to marry Obierika, a man whose family is known to harbour infertility (Adichie 2009, p. 199). They withstood years of childlessness from repeated miscarriages and of public insults, until the birth of their son Anikwenwa, after the sacrifice of 'a whole cow' to Obierika's 'greedy ancestors' (Adichie 2009, p. 202). After Obierika's death, Nwamgba reluctantly sends her son to the Catholic mission school to learn English not because she is thrilled by the foreign ways of the white men but because she would like Anikwenwa to master the white men's language 'well enough to go to the white men's court with Obierika's cousins and defeat them and take control of what was his' – the land they had seized when his father died (Adichie 2009, pp. 206–207).

Anikwenwa, who is later baptised as Michael and given a singlet and a pair of shorts by Father Shanahan of the Holy Ghost Congregation, and who is thoroughly disciplined and punished by the likes of Father Lutz, embodies the British colonial education system through Christianity as branded and exported by Catholicism. He initially dislikes his new clothes and schooling, until he discovers how much of cultural capital these could be when he interacted with and spoke English to those who did not understand him (Adichie 2009, pp. 208–210). His relationship with the British school system juxtaposed with his Igbo village life disrupts the familiarity he has with his mother, his community and the values he has grown to cherish and reproduce with pride, until he joins the white men's church, which declares them 'heathen'. Both mother and son began to recognise themselves through the radical difference that grew between them. Self-consciousness surfaced within Nwamgba as her son became critical of the ways in which she organised her life: 'She looked at him, amused by his earnestness, but worried nonetheless, and asked why he had only just begun to notice her nakedness' (Adichie 2009, p. 210). Nwamgba 'felt her son slipping away from her, and yet she was proud that he was learning so much, that he could become a court interpreter or a letter writer, and that with Father Lutz's help he had brought home some papers that showed that their lands belonged to him and his mother' (Adichie 2009, p. 2011).

The land had been won back at a great price. 'Nwamgba knew that her son now inhabited a mental space that was foreign to her'. He disappeared and became a catechist at a new mission, and when he resurfaced, it was to announce he would marry in church, and not in accordance with the traditions and practices of his homeland. Determined though, Nwamgba was to dislike his son's wife, Agnes Mgbeke 'was difficult to dislike', so she pitied her instead (Adichie 2009, pp. 211–212).

> Nwamgba was ashamed of her son, irritated with his wife, upset by their rarefied life in which they treated non-Christians as if they had smallpox, but she held out her hope for a grandchild; she prayed and sacrificed for Mgbeke to have a boy, because it would be Obierika come back and would bring a semblance of sense back into her world. (Adichie 2009, pp. 213–214)

The spirit of Obierika did eventually return in a grandchild, but not in a boy, as she had hoped and longed for. It came in a girl baptised Grace, but whom Nwamgba called Afamefuna, 'My Name Will Not Be Lost' (Adichie 2009, p. 214). Grace eventually uses the very same British education 'to make a clear link between education and dignity, between the hard, obvious things that are printed in books and the soft, subtle things that lodge themselves into the soul' (p. 216) and, 'feeling an odd rootlessness in the later years of her life, surrounded by her awards, her friends, her garden of peerless roses, would go to the courthouse in Lagos and officially change her first name from Grace to Afamefuna' (p. 218). The story challenges the assumption that a person native to a culture or a place is

also necessarily native to its values or identifies themselves with those values, cultures or places to the same unproblematic degree as others. This demonstrates that there is no essentialised Igbo identity as social and political encounters and transformations fashion different ways of knowing and being Igbo in Nigeria, Africa and the world. Being Igbo, far from being a hardback book with a definite introduction, body and conclusion, is always a process of becoming, best understood as flexible, fluid and full of ellipses – an unfinished and unfinishable story.

Similarly, *Song of Lawino*, an epic poem by Okot p'Bitek (1989 [1966]), which I have discussed extensively elsewhere (Nyamnjoh 2012b, pp. 4–8), addresses the very same colonial encounter through education in Uganda. In it p'Bitek confronts the common problem of social and physical mobility occasioned by such colonial encounters, usually entailing the movement of husbands away from their homesteads in search of education and employment in urban areas and abroad. When the men return to their wives and villages, they react to them with contempt. Ocol, the husband of Lawino, sees his wife with disgust, sacrifices her standards of beauty in favour of Clementine's – his 'educated' girlfriend who models herself after and wears the hair of a dead white woman, and despises the reflection of himself she produces for him: 'smash all these mirrors that I may not see the blackness of the past from which I came reflected in them' (p'Bitek 1966, p. 129). The wife, in turn, compares her husband to the white man's wife and dog, and to a man whose manhood has been crushed by the white man's books, books neither relevant nor worthy of respect. The domestic negations between husband and wife symbolise the tension that exists for the future of Africa and African identities, tensions best resolved not by choosing sides, but rather by seeking conviviality between warring ideas of what it means to be African and between colonial and popular endogenous forms of cultural and social capitals that privilege relationships over the hollowness of abstractions on what it means to be human with rights and dignity (Nyamnjoh 2012b).

Conclusion

In this article I have restated the obvious that 'Westerners are not the only ones going places in the modern world', and that as 'victims of progress and empire' Africans may be weak, but they are seldom passive (Clifford 1988, pp. 16–17). I have also demonstrated that when using limited and limiting perspectives, conceptualisation and methods of investigating and relating to African mobilities, mobile Africans are perceived as epitomising backwardness and as being on the limits of humanity. I have drawn on rich ethnographies and ethnographic fiction depicting mobile Africans and their relationships to the places and people they encounter to argue that mobility, be it African or otherwise, is more appropriately studied as an emotional, relational and social phenomenon as reflected in the complexities, contradictions and messiness of the everyday realities of encounters informed by physical and social mobility. The current dominant approach to studying and relating to mobile Africans is problematic. Nationals, citizens and locals in communities targeted by African mobility are instinctively expected to close ranks and fight off the influx of barbarians who do not quite belong and must be 'exorcised' so 'insiders' do not lose out to this particular breed of 'strangers', 'outsiders' or 'demons', perceived to have little but inconvenience and savagery to contribute. If and when allowed in, emphasis is on the needs, priorities and convenience of their reluctant hosts, who tend to go for the wealthy, the highly professionally skilled, the culturally bleached and Hottentot Venuses of the academy, even at the risk of accusations of capital flight and brain drain (Bergson and Ngnemzué 2008, Foé 2008, Peberdy 2009). Such mobile others – usually whites and/

or frequent flyer black international professionals, from within and outside the continent – are believed to be higher up the hierarchy of 'purity' of humanity, which is often constructed in terms of belonging to racial, cultural, geographical, class, gender and generational categories (Gupta and Ferguson 1992, 1997a, Stolcke 1995, Geschiere 2009).

Africans are up against a limited and limiting logic that guides practices of inclusion and measures of belonging, regardless of the fact that they are and have always been mobile or implicated in mobility. Today, they experience globalisation from above, as part of the global conglomerates of frequent flyer movers and shakers, and from below, as those immobilised by the mobility of others. Even Africans who may never be mobile beyond their place of birth connect with the rest of the world through encounters with the mobile among them. This is especially the case with the proliferation of new information and communications technologies – such as the Internet, cell phones and social media – as flexible enablers (Appadurai 2000, Castles 2002, Urry 2004, Nyamnjoh 2005, de Bruijn *et al.* 2009, Powell 2012, Tazanu 2012). Conviviality between mobility and immobility makes possible otherwise unlikely cultural and economic conversations, just as it makes possible the playing out at local levels of global tensions and power struggles.

In the light of the shifting tensions between mobility and immobility as fluid and flexible realities, conceptualisation of studies on the theme are bound to be particularly challenging. How does one represent a world objectively always in motion? How does a discipline of mobile persons and ideas stabilise the objects of its contemplation? How does one fix something that is never fixed, always fluid? Does not any attempt at fixing amount to deadening a life in flow? In this article I have attempted to understand how factoring mobility or immobility into our thinking on cultural identities helps us understand the rise and fall of certain currents in social scientific thought. It is fascinating the extent to which mobility is very much at the heart of anthropology, for example, discipline, par excellence, for the study of privileged and underprivileged mobility.

Our worlds, big or small, would not work the way they do, were it not for mobility. Peter Adey, a social geographer, invites us to conceptualise mobility as the vital relationship through which we live, understand and engage with a world increasingly on the move (Adey 2010, pp. xvii–xviii). Our very sociality, humanity and survival depend on mobility, which is seldom a singular process, as we always tend to carry our worlds along, and are confronted with the mobilities of our and other worlds (Adey 2010, p. 18). As he puts it, 'Our life-worlds are mobile for us, with us, and sometimes they are against us' (Adey 2010, p. 4). To facilitate our mobility to the extent we are able, we mobilise and immobilise things and others as we see fit. Our mobilities make waves and embed themselves on landscapes. Fixities, argues Adey, are physically, socially, politically and economically engineered as 'enablers' to make possible particular forms of mobility and thus provide 'a sort of backdrop for us to distinguish mobility against'. The process is similar to the chicken and egg conundrum, for 'As mobilities are enabled by fixities, mobilities construct and create further fixities' (Adey 2010, pp. 18–23).

How we make sense of the world and of one another depends on how we mediate mobility. People who are seemingly 'immobile' also form relationships and make sense of the world based on interactions with mobile others (Adey 2010, pp. 18–23). Mobility generates encounters, and encounters shape relationships. Mobility is 'almost always meaningful, political, practised and mediated' (Adey 2010, p. 14), as it occasions various degrees of transformation and meaning-making of the contexts, places and spaces where it occurs (Adey 2010, p. 12). We are always *differently* (Adey 2010, p. 3) and *differentially* (Nyamnjoh 2011, Alpes 2011, Owen 2011) mobile. Mobility, whatever its form, is not a monopoly of any particular place, race, class, gender or generation (Clifford 1988).

Any one's mobility can only be accommodated to the extent it is accommodating. From an anthropological view point, this entails not just participant observation or deep hanging out with people constantly on the move, but also a particular sensitivity to how we deploy our very own mobility, assumptions and background, and how we position ourselves and relate to those with whom we interact with 'Thick Description' (Geertz 1973) in mind. It is also about the sort of questions we bring into conversations about being and becoming in particular places and spaces, as well as how we creatively harness what we learn about the shaping of relationships in those places and spaces by particular encounters at different historical junctures. Do we deploy our mobility in a manner that accounts for the identities of places and people as complex, dynamic and relational, or do we live and move in ways that freeze, inhibit, suppress and oppress the creativity of the very places and people that justify our stock in trade as *homo academicus* (Nyamnjoh 2012a,b)?

Through my ethnography and fiction, the article has demonstrated how to marry ethnography and fiction to study Africans in mobility not only as a collection of logical bones and flesh but also as emotional beings. The examples of *Intimate Strangers*, *The Headstrong Historian* and *Song of Lawino* are illustrative of the relationships physical and socially mobile Africans forge in their efforts to navigate, negotiate and contest various constraints and practices of belonging imposed by the logics, histories and politics of hierarchies, dichotomies, boundaries and exclusions, practised by states, internalised and reproduced in varying degrees by nationals, citizens and subjects of host communities, and also by mobile outsiders and researchers. These stories stress the need for conceptual flexibility and ethnographic empirical substantiation. They equally challenge social scientists to look beyond academic sources for complementary sources to ethnographies or accounts of how such deep, flexible and nuanced understanding of mobility and interconnections in Africa play out in different communities, states and regions of a world permanently on the move.

Notes

1. A 1988 documentary film by Dennis O'Rourke.
2. See 'First Contact', a 1983 'classic film of cultural confrontation' by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson.
3. Released in 2010.
4. See 'Tales from the jungle: Margaret Mead and the Samoans', BBC FOUR Autumn 2006, available from: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOa3ftAKnzo [accessed 10 June 2012].
5. See 'Secrets of the Tribe', by José Padilha (2010) – a documentary film critical of unethical practices and abuses of research the Yanomami Indians in the 1960s and 1970s by anthropologists.
6. "Tales from the Jungle: Malinowski and the Trobriand Islanders," BBC FOUR Autumn 2006, available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/09_september/12/four_anthropology.shtml#malinowski [accessed 18 April 2012].
7. 'Tales from the Jungle: Margaret Mead and the Samoans', BBC FOUR Autumn 2006., available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/09_september/12/four_anthropology.shtml#margaret [accessed 19 April 2012].
8. 'Tom Harrison: The Barefoot Anthropologist, BBC FOUR Autumn 2006 documentary narrated by Sir David Attenborough, available from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2006/09_september/12/four_anthropology.shtml#harrisson [accessed 18 April 2012].
9. See French President Nicolas Sarkozy's provocative speech in Dakar on 26 July 2007 for his idea of 'immigration choisie' – 'chosen and not endured immigration' – and the reactions it elicited from African and Africanist intellectuals, the first of which by Achille Mbembe can be accessed from the following link: http://www.ldh-toulon.net/spip.php?article2057 [accessed 20 April 2012].

10. See 'From brain drain to brain gain', in *Education Today* (the newsletter of UNESCO's Education Sector), No. 18, October 2006–January 2007, pp. 4–7; see also 'Drain or gain? Poor countries can end up benefiting when their brightest citizens emigrate', in *The Economist*, available from: http://www.economist.com/node/18741763 [accessed 17 July 2012].

11. See http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/incoming/2012/03/28/of-refugee-and-migrant-premiers [accessed 19 April 2012]; see also 'The Tweet that Caused a Storm', *Sunday Independent*, 25 March 2012, p. 18.

12. This is a commonly used term in South Africa and Botswana. In the Botswana context, the term *makwerekwere* is generally used in a derogatory manner to refer to African immigrants from countries suffering an economic downturn. Stereotypically, the more dark-skinned a local is, the more likely she/he is to pass for a *makwerekwere*, especially if s/he speaks Setswana. BaKalanga, who tend to be more dark-skinned, are also more at risk of being labelled *makwerekwere*. In general, the le-/ma- (sing./pl.) prefix in Setswana designates someone as foreign, different or from outside the community. It is not used just for ethnic groups but for any group or profession that seems to be a bit different from the average.

13. While entanglement suggests the possibility of disentanglement, manglement points to a more intricate process of osmotic interconnection in which disentanglements are not easy options.

14. See http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=CVtkREuw1Vk%3d&tabid=245 [accessed 16 April 2012].

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